

St. Joseph School feels the pinch



Yellowknife Catholic School board trustees Amy Simpson, left, Tina Schauerte, John Dalton, Erin Currie and acting chair Miles Welsh discussed the need for additional space at St. Joseph School in order to accommodate junior kindergarten students next year.

With building at 90 per cent capacity, YCS wants N.J. MacPherson's portables

by Kirsten Fenn
Northern News Services

The Yellowknife Catholic school board says it cannot wait any longer to find out whether it will have additional space for students at St. Joseph School next year when junior kindergarten is implemented across the territory.

"With junior kindergarten coming into place, we will not have enough space," said board assistant superintendent for business Janet Toner following the board's Oct. 19 meeting.

There are currently 522 students enrolled at St. Joseph for the 2016-17 school year. That's about 90 per cent of the school's capacity, which is 583 students.

The board has met with the Department of Education,

Culture and Employment several times over the past two years to discuss capacity issues at Yellowknife schools, Toner said, but a solution has not been found to the most recent predicament.

The school board was initially directed to come up with an internal solution to its bursting enrolment numbers by moving some students to another school, she said.

"Two years ago, we moved our Grade 8 population from St. Joe's and from Weledeh — what we call our feeder schools — into (St. Patrick High School)," Toner said.

The move freed up spots for 100 students at the two schools in the first year and another 90 this year, Toner said.

But the move hasn't been enough to ease capacity pressures for the long term.

"Even with junior kindergarten not coming into place, we were anticipating ... that we were going to grow. We're growing from the bottom grades up to the top grades," Toner said.

The board wants to acquire three portables from the Yk1 education district in order to solve its problem.

After a fire destroyed part of St. Joseph School in 2006, Toner said the Catholic School Board and the GNWT purchased a handful of portables to house students while the school was being repaired.

"After our renovation, the portables were moved from St. Joe's campus to N.J. MacPherson," Toner said.

"So one of the requests that we've made is that we have those portables brought back to St. Joe's."

According to Yk1's 2015-16 annual report, N. J. MacPherson School had an enrolment of 282 students. The school has a capacity of 615 students with the portables, and 585 without.

Toner said the board does not have extra funding in its budget for large capital projects such as purchasing new portables.

The school board plans to write to Education Minister Alfred Moses to ask if the department will allow St. Joseph to use three of the portables currently at N.J. MacPherson.

"We're trying to look at

the big picture for the population of Yellowknife," Toner said. "Does it make sense for us to buy additional space when there could potentially be space somewhere else in Yellowknife?"

Although Toner said the portables are currently being used by the other school, she doesn't believe that school is under as much capacity pressure.

"It's something for the benefit of the whole population," said the board's acting chair Miles Welsh. "The space exists in Yellowknife and to purchase new portables is not really, in our opinion, a practical solution."

The school board plans to send a letter to the department of education in the next month

to find out if the government will allow the board to bring the portables to St. Joseph.

The board would have to pay for the moving expenses, Toner said.

She said board members are hoping they can work with the minister to find a solution that's best for all students in Yellowknife.

"It's a great wonderful school, but it's going to be challenging moving forward with junior kindergarten," Toner said about St. Joseph. "We want to make sure that we're providing the best resources and the best school for our kids."

Yellowknife was unable to reach Yk1 superintendent Metro Huculak for comment by press time.


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