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Background

On December 20, 2021, The Board of Trustees of the Aspen View Public School Division (AVPS) passed a motion to “begin the process of conducting a viability study of Rochester School, in accordance with Policy 15 – School and Program Viability”. Focus 10 Educational Consulting Group was awarded the contract to conduct the study and began working with the Division on January 14, 2022. Associates from Focus 10 met with the principal of Rochester School on January 26, 2022, to discuss operations and programming within the school, recent work completed, partnerships between the school and the broader community, history of the program and plans for the future. An in-person site visit was completed on February 2, 2022, to further observe the condition of the facility and document how the space in the school is being used. Focus 10 associates also met with the Tourism, Economic and Development Officer with Athabasca County to assess the impact of past and future development in the Rochester area. The discussion included the possible impact of broader projects being implemented in Athabasca County, which may have the potential to attract families to the Rochester area.

The goal of this viability study is to provide the Board of Trustees with relevant information pertaining to the long-term viability of Rochester School including, but not limited to:

- Enrolment data – current and forecasted
- Facility condition – collected from the Division and the Province of Alberta
- Financials
- Transportation
- Economic, demographic, and historical development trends

The data may be used to inform considerations to close Rochester School in accordance with AVPS Policy 15 – School and Program Viability and section 62 of the provincial Education Act.

Mission, Vision and Commitments

This viability study provides information that is required for the Board of Trustees to make a decision, as identified in section 62 Closure of Schools in the Province of Alberta Education Act:

62(1) A board may, only by resolution, permanently or temporarily
(a) close a school, or
(b) transfer students from one school building to another school building.

(2) A board shall establish, implement and make publicly available policies respecting the actions referred to in subsection (1).

The process for collecting, analyzing and reporting information regarding the viability of Rochester School aligns with the Division’s Mission, Vision, and Commitments, which state:


Vision: Aspen View Public Schools is committed to preparing our students to achieve success and reach their unique potential through the provision of diverse learning opportunities.
Commitments

**Student Learning: Inspire** to engage in relevant learning experiences in an inclusive environment that leads to academic student success
- The study will assess the ability of Rochester School to provide relevant learning experiences for all their students and examine the school’s ability to provide an inclusive environment where all have access to multiple activities within and outside the school setting.

**Staff Learning: Support** staff members to be reflective, life-long learners, continually striving to improve their practice.
- The study will comment on the quality and quantity of opportunities for staff professional development; offered through formal settings, collaboration, sharing of lesson plans/strategies, and/or debriefing with peers.

**Communication: Engage** in open, active, ongoing and honest communication with students, staff, parents and community.
- This viability study aims to provide the appropriate amount and type of information required for the Board of Trustees to engage with the community and evaluate Rochester School’s learning and teaching environment, while balancing the funding realities of the Division.

**Culture and Climate: Promote** teamwork and model welcoming, caring respectful, safe and inclusive schools that demonstrate diversity.
- This viability study evaluates the ability of Rochester School to deliver these elements and identifies opportunities and challenges.

**Social Emotional Needs: Encourage** all students to develop self-awareness and decision-making skills to achieve personal and interpersonal fulfillment.
- This viability study evaluates the components of the educational experience that contribute to a student achieving personal and interpersonal fulfillment.

**Physical Needs: Promote and model** active and healthy lifestyle choices.
- This viability study evaluates all the opportunities available for students to enable or model healthy lifestyle choices.

**Entrepreneurial Spirit:** Equip students with skills in areas of innovation, technology, literacy and numeracy enabling them to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing world.
- This viability study assesses the opportunities provided to students to allow them to display and grow these skills.

Division Policies for School Viability

This viability study will provide specific information with respect to Aspen View Public Schools’ Policy 15, section 6. The criteria required to trigger a school viability study are identified in Policy 15, Section 3. Specifically, Rochester School meets the following criteria:
3.6 The student enrolment at the particular school or portion thereof has declined below the following levels:

3.6.1 Elementary -- 40 students in grades 1 to 6, or 20 students in any three consecutive grades
- Enrolment for the 2021/22 school year is 23 students for grades 1 to 6.

3.6.2 Junior high -- 30 students in grades 7 to 9, or 20 students in schools with two grades in junior high school
- Enrolment for the 2021/22 school year is 14 students for grades 7 to 9.

Assuming the definition for “programming that is effective and efficient” follows from section 3.6, Rochester School also meets the following criteria:

3.1 Student enrolment numbers in a school do not allow for programming which is effective and efficient
- Enrolment does not meet the benchmarks identified in sections 3.6.1 and 3.6.2.

3.2 Enrolment projections indicate the possibility that future enrolment numbers in the school may not allow for programming which is effective, efficient, and viable
- Projected enrolment for the next 10 years does not meet the benchmarks identified in sections 3.6.1 and 3.6.2; grades 1 to 6 range from 19 to 24 students and grades 7 to 9 range from 6 to 13 students.

Demographic, Economic and Development Profile for Athabasca County

This study includes a scan of the area’s economic, demographic, and development trends; provided as contextual information to ensure all relevant information is included. The scan includes current or planned development, employment opportunities and trends, community patterns, and potential investment in the area. As the hamlet of Rochester is part of Athabasca County, trends are noted for both Rochester and Athabasca County.

Athabasca County is a municipal district located in north-central Alberta, Canada. For the last five years, 2016 to 2021, the population has declined by 11.6% to 6,959 people according to the 2021 federal census. The highest recorded county population, since 2000, was in 2016 at 8,044 people. This decline in population is partially due to the decline in Alberta’s oil and gas industry.

The County recently experienced an increase in the value of development permits being issued, from $14 million in 2020 to $22 million in 2021. This increase includes 83 new residential dwellings, most of them being recreational properties distributed amongst the six Summer Villages located in the county and the rural areas. Recreational properties do not draw permanent population to the County and do not contribute students to local schools.

In terms of development and employment, the major industry providing employment in the region is processing plants for sand and gravel. There is a new processing plant proposed for just outside of the town of Athabasca, which would be commutable from Rochester. The development will create 80 jobs to build the plant and 50 jobs required for post-build operations. Athabasca County is also home to farming, forestry, oil, and gas development activities; reporting close to 100 farm enterprises in the region. Many of the farms are cattle ranching and grow alfalfa/alfalfa mixtures, oats, barley, canola, and wheat.
Rochester, a northern Alberta hamlet situated in Athabasca County, is located 3 kilometres east of Highway 2, approximately 50 kilometres south of the Town of Athabasca. The population within the hamlet has declined over the last five years, 2016 to 2021. The current population is 72 people in 2021 down from 79 people in 2016, according to the 2021 federal census. Located within Rochester is a community hall, fairgrounds, fire hall, general store, restaurant, and school with a sports field. Residents of Rochester consider themselves to be a quiet, small farming community. No new business applications have been recently filed in the hamlet. Any new development in the Rochester area has been, to the most extent, recreational. It is typically a second home for recreation or land purchase to accommodate RV trailers. These sites are being used by part-time residents looking to escape the city for short periods of time.

In 2018, the County engaged with the residents of Rochester regarding the extension of a water line to serve the hamlet. Half of the residents did not support the extension of the waterline at the time (12 for and 12 against). Council decided to not proceed without majority support from the residents. The decision to not extend the waterline may be negatively contributing to the limited development in the Rochester region.

There is a Rochester Flood Study currently being completed under the provincial Flood Hazard Identification Program, the goals of which include enhancement of public safety and reduction of future flood damages through the identification of river and flood hazards.

The current economic trend in the region is growth in home-based businesses over traditional businesses that create employment opportunities. The Rochester region is also seeing an increase in agriculture tourism and greenhouses, which is leading to the area becoming more of an agricultural and recreation hub.

In addition to delivering educational programming, the Rochester School contributes to the community in a variety of ways. The community library is located in the school and hosts community events throughout the year, in addition to providing library services. The school is also a beneficiary of community support from a variety of sources including: the Rochester Agricultural Society, a community hot lunch program, and pre-pandemic, a pre-school program leased space in the school. The agricultural society partnership with the school also benefits the school as the agricultural fairgrounds are attached to the school playing fields, which the students are able to access. Pre-pandemic, there were multiple community groups accessing the facility after hours, including but not limited to, adult volleyball, piano lessons, church group, church youth group, karate club, and highland dance group. The parent council continues to explore future playground options, fundraising options, and additional avenues to enhance the new science, technology, engineering, and math (STEAM) program.

### Enrolment Analysis

This section contains five years of historical enrolment, census, demographic, economic, and community contextual information for Rochester School and other school communities, as students may be redesignated to these communities if the Rochester School were to close:

- Thorhild Central School (Thorhild)
- Whispering Hills Primary School (Athabasca)
- Landing Trail Intermediate School (Athabasca)
- Edwin Parr Composite School (Athabasca)
This information is used to create a 10-year enrolment projection, up to the 2031/2032 school year, for the selected schools. The amount and use of space in Rochester School and the potential re-designation schools is also assessed to ensure that, if a re-designation occurs, there would be sufficient available space in the receiving school into the future to accommodate the Rochester School students.

**Rochester School**

Currently, there are 40 students enrolled at the school in 5 class groupings:

- Kindergarten/Grade 1/Grade 2 (7 students total)
- Grade 3/Grade 4 (10 students total)
- Grade 5/Grade 6 (9 students total)
- Grade 7/Grade 8 (6 students total)
- Grade 9 (8 students total)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Kinder.</th>
<th>Gr. 1</th>
<th>Gr. 2</th>
<th>Gr. 3</th>
<th>Gr. 4</th>
<th>Gr. 5</th>
<th>Gr. 6</th>
<th>Gr. 7</th>
<th>Gr. 8</th>
<th>Gr. 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grade</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If current trends persist and no new development/employment opportunities are realized within the Rochester area, enrolment projections indicate a steady enrolment trend for the next decade at between 33 and 37 students. If kindergarten enrolment continues to draw 3 to 4 students each year, elementary grades (K–6) are projected to remain stable, ranging from 25 to 27 students; at just over half the viability threshold of 40 students. Junior high students are projected to remain at approximately one-third of the viability threshold of 30 students for the next ten years, ranging between 6 and 13 students.

The school maintains a mutually beneficial relationship with the community. Some of the community activities that the school supports and some community activities that support the Rochester School students are:

- Rochester Agricultural Society:
Rochester School has a total capacity of 205 student spaces and a net capacity of 167 student spaces (non-profit leased space is exempt from the total capacity). Based on the 2021/2022 Area, Capacity and Utilization report from Alberta Education, utilization for the facility is calculated at 26%. Based on the enrolment projections and the net capacity of the school (167 students), the school will continue to have a surplus of student spaces ranging between 123 and 132 over the next ten years. Underused facilities will continue to incur utility and operating expenses at a rate that will not be equal to the funding rate for Plant Operations and Maintenance (PO&M) funds, as well as Infrastructure Maintenance Renewal (IMR) capital funding, as these funding streams have an enrolment component. They will require the Division to continue subsidizing them, at the cost of other facilities, to maintain operation.

Should Rochester School close, available space should be considered at potential receiving school(s) located adjacent for the Rochester School attendance area. Currently, in the Rochester attendance area, there are almost the same number of students choosing not to attend Rochester School (39 students) as there are enrolled at Rochester School (40 students):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Number of Students (K to 9)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whispering Hills Primary School</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landing Trail Intermediate School</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edwin Parr Composite School</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorhild Central School</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembina Hills School Division</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Students Leaving Rochester Attendance Area</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on proximity and current attendance patterns, potential receiving school(s) could be: Thorhild Central School or schools in Athabasca (Whispering Hills Primary School, Landing Trail Intermediate School, and Edwin Parr Composite School).

**Thorhild Central School**

Thorhild Central School is located 46 km (31 minutes) southeast of Rochester School. On September 30, 2021, this school had an enrolment of 298 students.

According to Alberta Education, Thorhild Central School had an adjusted enrolment of 316 students in a facility that can accommodate 555 students, for a utilization of 57%. If both Thorhild Central School and Rochester School students were currently accommodated in the Thorhild Central facility, the utilization would increase to approximately 65%. The enrolment projections for Thorhild Central School indicate a decrease in enrolment over the next 10 years, which ensures that available space would not be a concern in the future, should the schools be combined.

*Adjusted enrolment counts students as Full-Time Equivalent (ex. kindergarten students count as 0.5 students) and severe special needs students (i.e., students with special needs codes 41 to 47 count as 3 students).

**Net capacity excludes space/area that is leased, where the lessee is the public sector or a non-profit group, decentralized administration, another school jurisdiction, private or charter school.

![Thorhild Central School Enrolment and Projections](image-url)
Athabasca Schools: Whispering Hills Primary School, Landing Trail Intermediate School and Edwin Parr Composite School

Athabasca is located 48 km (32 minutes) north of Rochester School. In Athabasca, the schools that could potentially accommodate students from Rochester are Whispering Hills Primary School (Kindergarten to Grade 3), Landing Trail Intermediate School (Grade 4 to Grade 6), and Edwin Parr Composite School (Grade 7 to Grade 12). The schools currently have an adjusted enrolment of 1,332 students in facilities with a total net capacity of 2,096 students for an average utilization of 61%.

If Rochester students were accommodated in the Athabasca schools, the utilization would increase to approximately 63%. The enrolment projections for the Athabasca schools indicate a decrease/stable enrolment pattern over the next 10 years, which ensures that available space would not be a concern in the future, should Rochester School students be accommodated in Athabasca.

The enrolment information in this section serves as the background for the responses required in section 6 of Policy 15 - School and Program Viability. Specifically:

6.1 How the closure would affect the attendance area defined for that school

The Rochester school attendance area consists of the communities of Rochester, Perryvale and smaller communities along with the surrounding rural farmland. It borders on the attendance areas for Athabasca to the North and East, Thorhild Central to the East and the Pembina Hills School Division to the South and West. If Rochester school were to close, the Aspen View Public School Division would need to re-designate students to either Athabasca and/or Thorhild Central School. The closure would re-designate the entire attendance area either to another school or split between multiple schools as determined by Administration.
6.2 How the closure would affect the attendance at other schools;

If Rochester School students were re-designated to Thorhild Central School, the utilization of the facility will increase from 57% to 65%. The enrolment projections for both schools indicate a decreasing to stable enrolment. That trend indicates that the facility will be able to accommodate the students for the next 10 years and into the future.

If Rochester School students were re-designated to Athabasca schools (Whispering Hills Primary, Landing Trail Intermediate, and Edwin Parr Composite schools), the average utilization would increase from 61% to 63%. The additional enrolment would not require any of the facilities to expand. The enrolment projections for all schools indicate a decreasing or stable enrolment. That trend indicates that the facilities will be able to accommodate the students for the next 10 years and into the future.

Families that don’t require transportation may choose to attend a school in the Pembina Hills School Division (PHSD), as the schools are similar in size and distance, or closer, to Rochester:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Distance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Westlock Elementary/Richard F Staples schools (Westlock) - PHSD</td>
<td>44 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pembina North School (Dapp) - PHSD</td>
<td>34 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eleanor Hall School (Clyde) - PHSD</td>
<td>32 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thorhild Central School (Thorhild) - AVPS</td>
<td>46 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whispering Hills Primary/Landing Trail Intermediate/Edwin Parr Composite schools (Athabasca) - AVPS</td>
<td>48 km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All distances are from Rochester School; families living north or east of Rochester School would have longer ride times to Pembina Hills School Division schools and shorter ride times to Aspen View School Division schools.

6.3 The number of students who would need to be relocated as a result of the closure;
Currently, there are 40 students attending Rochester School. The projection for the 2022/23 school year is 35 students. If the potential closure was in place for the 2022/23 school year, 35 students would need to be relocated.

6.4 The need for, and extent of, busing;
Transportation is a key consideration in the determination of a potential receiving school for the Rochester area. Currently, high school students residing in the Rochester area are transported to Athabasca for programming. No transportation currently exists to Thorhild Central School from the Rochester area. Another option to consider is to utilize all potential receiving schools and split the attendance area into a north/south option to minimize ride times. Additional feedback, solicited through school-community engagement, would inform the selection of an appropriate receiving school.

For the students who currently attend Rochester School, there are three designated bus routes. The earliest pickup time is approximately 7:40 am, with a one-way trip time of 50 minutes. If these students are re-designated to Thorhild Central School, there would be an additional 40 minutes, making the total trip approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes one way. If these students are re-designated to Athabasca schools, there would need to be a reassessment of the routes that serve Rochester School to determine the most efficient routes for families. This review would also include routes serving the Rochester attendance area that are already going to Athabasca.

6.5 Program implications for other schools and for the students when they are attending other schools;
If Rochester School were to close and students were designated to Thorhild Central School the students would have access to kindergarten to grade 12 programming. Thorhild Central School offers single-graded classrooms, Great Beginnings (pre-kindergarten program), a daily breakfast program, and access to a cafeteria. The students would also have expanded opportunities including outdoor education, drama, skating, skiing, CTS (Foods, Metal Fabrication, Cosmetology), extra-curricular sports (volleyball, basketball, track and field, badminton, archery), clubs (music and art), and integrated school services (counselling).

If Rochester School were to close and the students were designated to Athabasca Schools:
- The kindergarten to grade 3 students would have access to a dual-track school offering French Immersion and English, the APPLE School program (Family lunch days, milk program, healthy snack program, monthly test tastes), and active living activities (cross country skiing, Cheerleading, Happy Feet Running Club, intramurals, swimming, Dance
parties, partnering with community organizations to promote curling, gymnastics, and golf) at Whispering Hills Primary School.

- The grade 4 to grade 6 students would have access to two gyms, large library, French Immersion, the Apple School program: Grab n Go program and Nutrition program, various school sports, music program, and a First Nations Metis Inuit program at Landing Trail Intermediate School.

- The grade 7 to grade 9 students would have access to French Immersion, art, drama, pairing classes for peer mentoring, blended programs (virtual, outreach, classroom), CTS (Foods, Mechanics, Welding, Industrial Arts, Cosmetology), extracurricular sports (football, cheer, volleyball, basketball, athletics, cross country running, Nordic skiing, badminton, archery), clubs (Interact, student council, boys’ group, girls’ group, driver training, and study group), integrated school services (counselling) and the Food for Thought breakfast program at Edwin Parr Composite School.

6.8 The capital needs of the schools that may have increased enrolment as a result of the closure:

The addition of 35-40 students from Rochester School into the vacant space in any of the potential receiving schools will not require additional capital to accommodate the increased enrolment. Any students with specialized needs will need to be reviewed with the receiving school to ensure the appropriate infrastructure supports are available to the student (i.e., ramp, accessible washrooms, etc.,). The addition of the Rochester students at a facility may help build a case to modernize or improve space at the receiving school, as it would improve the utilization rate.

Facility Use and Condition

Rochester School is a single-storey, multiple addition building first built in 1952 with the final addition completed in 1981, consisting of a total floor area of 2,309 m².

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building/Addition</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Construction Type</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original Building</td>
<td>1952</td>
<td>Single-storey, wood-framed, partial basement</td>
<td>595 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1st Addition</td>
<td>1955</td>
<td>Single-storey, wood-framed, partial basement</td>
<td>329 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Addition</td>
<td>1958</td>
<td>Single-storey, wood-framed, partial basement</td>
<td>509 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Addition</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>Single-storey, wood-framed</td>
<td>316 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Addition</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>Steel-frame and concrete masonry</td>
<td>560 m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Building Area</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2,309 m²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Alberta Infrastructure VFA system, the building requires approximately $3 million in repairs that are categorized as: mandatory, lifecycle, reliability, accessibility, or operating efficiency. This total may or may not reflect currently reported work on the building including: new plumbing, repair of a portion of the roof, new gym floor finish/stage upgrades, boiler upgrades, front entryway concrete replacement as well as concrete replacement at the south entrance.
The mandatory requirements total $15,150 and include items such as:
- installation of external and internal handrails
- repair of floor construction fire stopping and interior partition fire stopping

The lifecycle requirements total $2,741,283 and include items such as:
- replacement of electrical branch circuit panel boards, air handling units and switchboard
- renew unit heaters, chimneys, exhaust fans, electric and electric controls
- renew fixed casework and acoustical wall treatment
- replace resilient stair finishes, resilient flooring and carpeting
- replace sinks, showers, washroom fixtures, hot water distribution system and domestic water pumps
- replace curtains, blinds, and drapes
- replace visual display boards
- paint exterior walls and repair gutters/downspouts
- replace windows, doors and caulking on exterior walls
- replace room partitions and bathroom partitions
- upgrade public address, fire alarm, and intrusion detection
- Replace lockers, drinking water fountains/coolers and upgrade lift(s)
- Replace roof and interior T-bar suspended ceiling
- Renewal of athletic recreational surfaces
- Repair sidewalks and resurface asphalt parking lot

The reliability requirements total $131,225 and include items such as:
- Renew painted floor finish
- Repair damaged brick exterior cladding, damaged stucco cladding and canopy structure
- Repair damaged soffits
- Replace men’s lockers
- Replace door hardware
- Supply additional insulation in the attic
- Replace interior plywood finishes

The accessibility, operating efficiency, and study requirements total $40,905 and include items such as:
- Install electronic door actuator
- Heat tracing in gutters and downspouts
- Hazardous Building Materials Assessment
- Investigate attic insulation

According to a Facility Condition Review, conducted by FCAPX Ltd., for Alberta Infrastructure on February 25, 2019, the overall school building and site were found to be in “acceptable” condition. The Facility Condition Index (FCI) is 19.46%. A building with an FCI of 15% to 40% is considered to be in fair/acceptable condition.

The building is currently used for kindergarten to grade 9 education during the day. Pre-pandemic the building was used by the community and the agricultural society in the evenings and on weekends and a classroom was also leased to a preschool program (Tawatinaw Valley Preschool Society). Some of the community uses of the school included:
• Adult volleyball, dance classes, piano lessons, and karate
• A church uses the gym for youth group and church service
• Library is open to the community after school hours, 3 days/week

A few of the users are charged a fee such as the church group; the adult volleyball and highland dance groups make a donation most years. In general, there is no charge for most uses as the goal is to encourage community use and provide additional programming for the students. Most charges for school events are just enough to recuperate costs associated with the event.

The facility condition information in this section serves as the background for the response required in section 6.9 of Policy 15 - School and Program Viability: The proposed use of the school building, if the entire school is to be closed:

If Rochester School is to be closed for student instruction, the school building could be used in a number of ways including, but not limited to
• Expanded opportunity to rent the gymnasium out for sports or community events, not being limited to after-school hours and weekends.
• The classrooms could be rented out to local groups and used for a number of different uses in a more expanded, permanent manner.
• The library could expand its program offerings inside the building.
• The building could be transferred to the County of Athabasca/Hamlet of Rochester or the agricultural society to promote and support agricultural tourism in the area.

Closed schools in other rural areas of Alberta are most frequently used as community centres, (Boundary Creek, Lampburg, Boian Marea, and Sich) or churches (Morgan School).

Financial Considerations

The funding received for Rochester School and the money spent to operate the facility are summarized in this table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>2019/20*</th>
<th>2020/21**</th>
<th>2021/22**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-Based Costs</td>
<td>$784,670.93</td>
<td>$774,891.71</td>
<td>$693,203.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance Costs</td>
<td>$179,732.46</td>
<td>$174,636.11</td>
<td>$147,248.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Expenses</td>
<td>$964,403.39</td>
<td>$949,527.82</td>
<td>$840,451.82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Funding</th>
<th>2019/20*</th>
<th>2020/21**</th>
<th>2021/22**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operational Funding</td>
<td>$397,487.41</td>
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<td>$450,000.00</td>
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*2019/20 was the previous funding model; red text indicates an estimate, not an actual amount
**2020/21, 2021/22 budget years include all expenses and funding including extraordinary amounts for COVID support
Aspen View Public Schools is spending more money on operating and maintaining Rochester School than the Division receives in funding for Rochester School. Over the last 5 years, the amount spent by the Division per student at Rochester School has increased as the enrolment is decreasing. Funding is primarily driven by student enrolment with some support for small schools through additional grants. Maintaining an appropriate staffing level becomes more costly as staff members have fewer students in their class groupings. This deficit means that the Division has to subsidize Rochester school with funds received for other schools’ maintenance and operation.

As enrolment drops in Rochester School, the level of deficit grows, as shown in the table. The deficit per student in 2021/22 versus 2020/21 is over 80% higher, with a decline of 9 students. As enrolment declines further and/or additional repairs on the building are required, this gap will continue to widen. Even if enrolment is sustained at this low level, the school will remain underfunded by approximately one-third to maintain operations.

Currently, the weighted moving average (WMA) is 47.8 students and is continuing to decline. Once a school drops below 35 students, the small rural school is no longer block-funded. The enrolment projections for Rochester School indicate that the enrolment will stabilize at approximately 35 students. However, if the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolment declines below 35 students, the operational funding for the school changes from a block fund of $450,000 to $25,000 plus the WMA multiplied by the base funding rate which is currently $6,064. If Rochester School’s WMA drops to 34.5 students, the operational funding would drop to $234,208, from $450,000, for a decline of $215,792 at minimum. If the enrolment is less than 34.5 students, the amount of operational funding would decrease.

This financial information in this section and the enrolment information in the previous section serve as the background for the responses required in section 6 of Policy 15 - School and Program Viability. Specifically:

6.6 The educational and financial impact of closing the school, including the effect on operational costs and capital implications;

Educational Impact
Program choice is an important component in an educational experience. By closing Rochester School and re-designating students to either schools in Athabasca or Thorhild Central School, the students would have access to a wider variety of programming and extracurricular activities, as outlined in more detail in the response for section 6.5. In addition, staff would be able to collaborate more closely with cohort teachers and students would have more opportunities to participate socially with students of similar grades.

Financial Impact
Based on Alberta Infrastructure’s Facility Condition Audit conducted on February 25, 2019, the 5-Year Maintenance needs total $2,464,325. Closure of the school would mean that these repairs and upgrades would no longer be required and plant operations, in the form of utilities would decrease.
In the 2021/22 school year, Aspen View Public Schools will spend an estimated total of $840,452 to operate Rochester School. If Rochester School were to close, the estimated operational funding of $693,203 would be available to be re-directed to other schools. A significant amount of the estimated $147,249 total in maintenance funding could be re-directed to other schools (reduced by the amount required to sustain/operate the building if the Division opted to retain the facility).

6.7 The educational and financial impact if the school were to remain open;

Educational Impact
If Rochester School were to remain open, educational programming would remain the same. Students would continue to learn in significantly smaller class sizes. Programming and extracurricular choices would remain limited to more individual options. Programs such as group athletics and clubs would be difficult to offer, given the small enrolment. Enrolment projections indicate that enrolment will likely remain stable with 3-4 students enrolling in kindergarten each year.

Financial Impact
If Rochester School were to remain open, the Division would continue to re-direct additional funds toward the operation and maintenance of Rochester School from other schools in the Division. If the enrolment declines further, the cost per student to keep Rochester School operational will continue to increase. Operational funding would become significantly impacted if the weighted moving average (WMA) for Rochester School decreases to less than 35 students, as that is the provincial funding trigger to remove block funding.
Summary

This report provides factual evidence regarding Rochester School’s viability, assessed from an educational, community, financial, and facility perspective; guided and directed by the Division’s policies and regulations and, the Education Act of Alberta. It is evident that Rochester School is staffed by highly professional and caring teachers and, considered to be a valuable community asset. Yet, its declining enrolment, current and projected, is of significant concern to the Division when viewed from the lens of programming availability and financial viability.

As articulated in the data, there are extra costs associated with providing education programming in small school settings under these conditions. In that regard, the report examined the impact of maintaining the status quo, and provided information and analysis of alternative options, should Rochester School be selected for closure. Given the financial realities of current education funding, the Division’s mandate to ensure excellent delivery of programming for all students, and the outcome of this review, it is recommended that Rochester School be considered for closure and the students be redirected to another school or schools in the Division.
Appendix:

Rochester Floor Plan Walkthrough

- **Soccer Field/Agriplex**
  - Includes skating rink, rink building, and agricultural fair grounds
  - Literacy/Numeracy/Resource Room
  - Counselling/Storage
  - Previously support for special needs students
  - Includes skating rink, rink building, and agricultural fair grounds

- **Grade 9**
  - New gym floor and lines in 2020

- **Gr 5/Gr 6**
  - Server Room
  - Washrooms/Locker rooms
  - Stage and Storage
  - Recently Renovated
  - Vestibule

- **Exit**
  - Gr 7/8 Mon, Wed
  - Hot Lunch, Foods
  - Gr 7/8 Tues, Thurs, Fri.
  - Kila, Science Storage
  - New front entryway
  - Concrete including ramp 2019

- **New Gym**
  - Admin/Staff offices
  - Staffroom/work room/washrooms

- **Playground**
  - New main play structure in 2019;
  - Remainder of equipment has been replaced over the past 10 years

- **Empty**
  - Used for literacy/breakouts;
  - Pre-COVID – used for preschool lease

Future plans for the site include expansion of the agriculture program – current CTS students are building a chicken coop.

This wing is raised and contains a basement beneath
- Basement contains former classrooms, no longer fit for instruction as well as Mechanical (boilers were replaced in 2020)
Map of Rochester Attendance Area and Student Residency (January 2022)
### Rochester School 10 Year Enrolment Projections by Grade

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### Whispering Hills Primary School 10 Year Enrolment Projections by Grade

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## Thorhild Central School 10 Year Enrolment Projections by Grade

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*Note: The projections are based on historical data and do not account for future educational changes or external factors.*