

Questions and Answers About School Closure

1. How much are the central repairs that they are referencing? Do they have a quote?

No, it's based on Ministry estimates and costs are expected to increase over time. Right now, the estimated costs are \$4 million.

2. When will the public consultations begin?

October 2025

3. Has the population been projected over the next few years for Merritt?

Our district population has been projected from the Ministry. We are dropping by more than projected by the Ministry in the last two years. Over the original 10-year estimate, we were to drop a total of 150 students. We were down 40 in our brick and mortar schools in 2024-2025 alone. We are down over 100 students in the last 5 years in our brick-and-mortar schools.

As a district, we have projected dropping another 10 students but may drop more. Enrollment is currently not holding to projections. That said, we will not know until after September 30, 2025, what our actual enrollment is.

4. Have the bands been consulted?

One of the Rightsholders asked about school closure in the budget consultation meetings, but it needs to be a meaningful consultation with the Rightsholders, especially Coldwater and Upper Nicola, as Central is their designated school of choice currently. This is part of the school closure process.

5. Central and the high school have a unique relationship due to proximity, allowing for big buddies, high school leadership projects, and a supported transition for grade 7s to the high school. Have these relationships been considered?

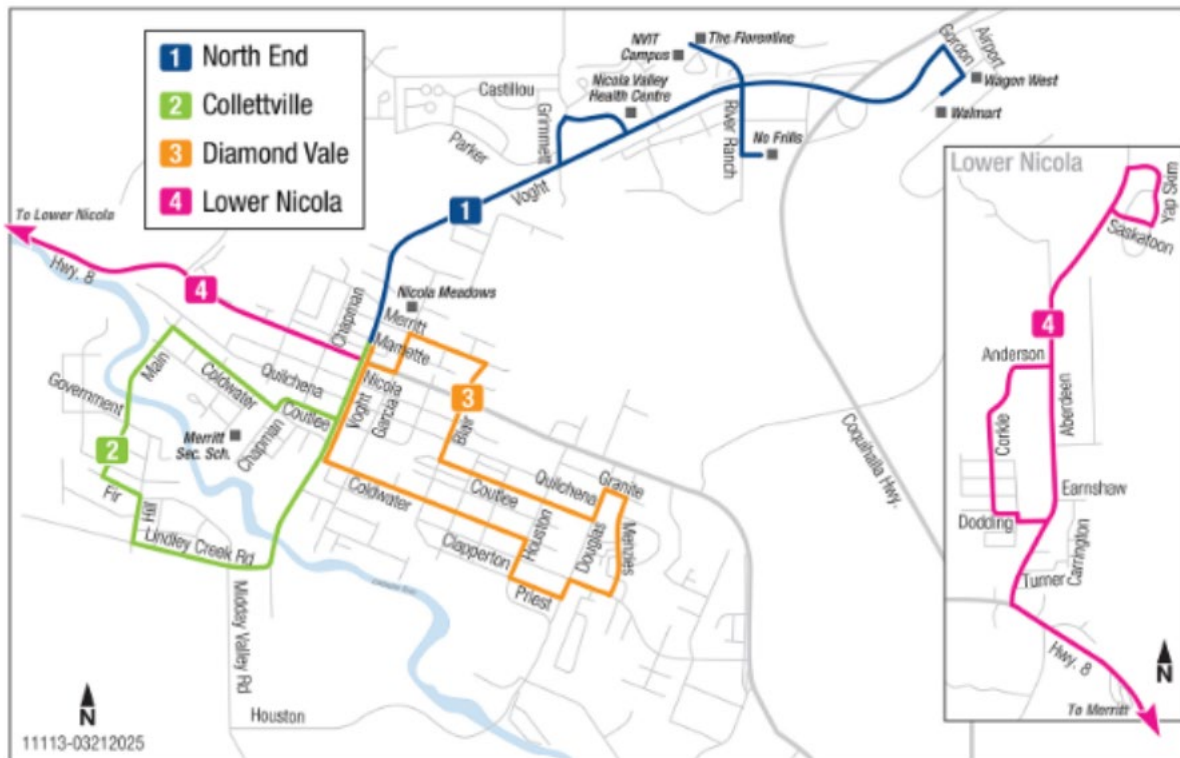
Yes, we would look for ways to continue these programs. Diamond Vale (1.7 kms) and Collettville (1.2 kms along the River Walk or 2.0 kms by Coldwater St) are also within our walk limits to the high school.

6. Central has the ability to attend several field trips throughout the year that are free or low cost due to the location (river walks, pool, bowling, library, museum, tours of the police and fire hall, etc.). Have you considered the impact of paying for more children on field trips than before?

Yes, most locations within town are within walking distance of the schools, with Central and Diamond Vale being the closest.

7. Several parents utilize Central's location to manage their day to day, for example, using the library as after school care/ activity until the parents can get there to pick them up after work. Similarly, they would go to the pool or walk to their parents' downtown work locations. Several parents, including myself, will need to use the bus route more, and for several more years than currently planned.

We have included a copy of the current bus routes. Primary students are not able to access the pool without supervision.



8. Central is the largest school, with more space to manage the needs of our children (I'm thinking the wider hallways, classrooms, etc). Giving up those would be challenging for students and staff to move into a smaller school.

All of our schools need to meet accessibility requirements. We have too much nominal capacity in our elementary schools in Merritt.

Nominal capacity can be defined by the following definitions:

- existing or being something in name or form only
- of, being, or relating to a designated or theoretical size that may vary from the actual: APPROXIMATE.

Nominal capacity represents the student capacity of a school based on the following capacities per instructional space:

- Kindergarten 20 pupils per classroom
- Elementary 25 pupils per classroom
- Middle & Secondary 25 pupils per classroom and vocational module.

The nominal capacity for each new and existing school shall be based on the space standards for elementary, middle and secondary schools. The nominal capacity will form a baseline capacity which will remain fixed,

subject only to changes being made in physical space that would affect the nominal capacity and adjustments in the space standards. Examples include additions and/or renovations.

Wider hallways and wider classrooms were built when classrooms had over 35 to 40 students per class. Smaller class sizes mean the Ministry builds to a smaller footprint for hallways and classrooms.

[Area Standards](#)

9. At Central, we have a high number of designated students who will undoubtedly struggle with a transition to another school. We know that physical location and relationship changes can make or break the success of children who are managing a diagnosis. Would the board be considering how to maintain those relationships, and would students move with their support person? How would the new School adjust to the influx of needs while managing with less space?

There are collective agreement provisions that we need to adhere to, but we would make our best efforts to have the same support person with our students with intensive needs.

10. Has the board confronted the Ministry of Education around the room designation struggles? - We have rooms being used for other purposes, that I would argue are very important yet are viewed as empty classrooms.

Confronting the Ministry will not solve the issue around room designation. It is a hard calculation of usable instructional spaces. It is the same formula that applies to all districts and schools across the province. Document is linked.

After the flood, the board had proposed building a new school, but it was turned down. There are limited new schools being built, and they are most often going to growing districts like Surrey (2500+ students a year), which have more political capital with 10 MLAs to advocate.

[Area Standards](#)

11. In the thought process of trying to impact the least amount of students in downsizing by eliminating one school, why was the school with the most students chosen?

It is the age of the building and the amount of space available at our other schools.

12. Would all the schools continue to have bus students?

Currently, Diamond Vale and Bench do not have bussing for their students in their catchment. Collettville now only has a transfer bus for rural students outside our walk limits. Central is currently a transportation hub. If the school closes, we will have to build a new transportation system and depending on the school of choice from Coldwater and Upper Nicola, we may need to extend bussing to other schools.

13. The board presented a budget plan with the necessary cuts and how we would move forward in the years to come. The board had this all mapped out, and it seemed to work, so why was school closure brought up after this conversation, where it seemed to be decided that with the budget, we could move forward without any talks of closure?

There is a potential for cost savings that would be put back into staffing or other resources. If we continue to experience declining enrollment, it will minimize or eliminate the need for further cuts in the future. Also, with finite dollars, hard decisions must be made about whether dollars go to student supports and services or towards aging infrastructure and continuing maintenance costs.

14. Some people feel the board should be attempting to utilize other "school" locations more efficiently - the empty buildings that are being rented out, to create more revenue, or sell off some properties. Has that been considered?

Yes, to all of the above. It was part of our budget working group discussions.

15. Is the former question's idea what prompted the idea of school closure?

Parents asked at the Budget Consultation meeting if we had considered closing a school to save dollars. It was also brought up in one of our Rightsholders' budget consultation meetings.

16. There are several students in our district who are assumed to be in need of a designation but do not have one yet due to a lack of pediatrician availability. Has this been considered when looking at the numbers and what the teachers are managing?

Yes, but the composition requirements of the collective agreement are determined by designations being in place. We do not have control over the requirement for some designations that require a pediatric assessment. Designations require an assessment from a qualified professional.

17. What other options have the board discussed?

There were 32 other ideas for increasing revenue or mitigation strategies. Our budget consultation documents are on our website: <https://www.sd58.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/25-26-Public-Budget-Meetings-April-16-and-17.pdf>

This is the school population and nominal capacity of the schools in 2024/2025:

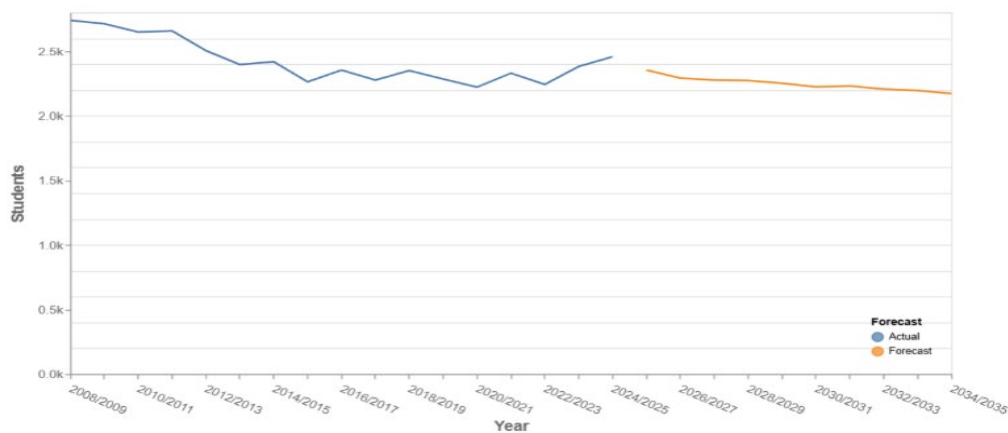
School District No. 58 (Nicola Similkameen)

-Capacity Utilization of School Buildings

			Capacity	Enrolled*	Utilization
Merritt	Collettville Elementary	Elementary	195	114	58.5%
Merritt	Diamond Vale Elementary	Elementary	265	128	48.3%
Merritt	Merritt Bench Elementary	Elementary	120	153	127.5%
Merritt	Merritt Central Elementary	Elementary	320	226	70.6%
Merritt	Merritt Secondary	Secondary	675	620	91.9%
Merritt	Nicola Canford Elementary	Elementary	170	140	82.4%
Princeton	Princeton Secondary	Secondary	325	193	59.4%
Princeton	John Allison Elementary	Elementary	145	136	93.8%
Princeton	Vermilion Forks Elementary	Elementary	195	138	70.8%
Total			2410	1848	76.7%
Secondary			1000	813	81.3%
Elementary			1410	1035	73.4%
Merritt			1745	1381	79.1%
Princeton			665	467	70.2%
Elem - Merritt			1070	761	71.1%

*Enrolled - September 30, 2024

Student Enrolment Over Time



You will notice that this graph also includes our SCIDES (online enrollment), and the Ministry is projecting a downward trend. Right now, the Ministry is approving 1-year rather than 3-year extensions for POLs schools, and we will not know whether the extension is granted until November.

Number of Students Across All Grades

Student Group	Total	Grades													
		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	K	Others
All Students	2,458	135	121	129	132	148	161	171	182	173	177	299	318	109	203
Diverse Abilities**	352	13	12	11	16	36	33	37	44	33	48	29	32		
Indigenous	955	53	48	40	54	59	65	62	91	85	75	130	117	45	31

*Other includes elementary ungraded, secondary ungraded, and graduated adults in the school system

**Disabilities or Diverse Abilities

This chart includes our SCIDES enrollment (online), but you will notice that number of Kindergarten students is significantly less than the number of Grade 12's who will be leaving. In addition, if you track the number of students from Grades 1 -11, you will see our declining enrollment over the past number of years. Most of our SCIDES enrollment is in Grades 10-12