

# Intermediate (Grade 5-9) School for Portugal Cove - St. Philips

Pre-budget Consultations - March 6th, 2015



Submitted by: Krista Trask, Education Committee Representative  
Beachy Cove Elementary, Portugal Cove - St. Philips

## Introduction

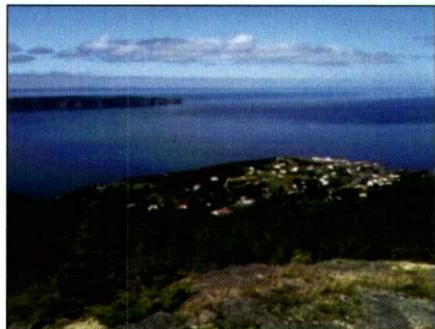
In 2011, during the review of school facility requirements in St. John's and surrounding areas, the Town of Portugal Cove - St. Philips (PCSP) was allocated a new intermediate school to house grade 5-9 students in the community. As budget 2015 is being finalized, we ask that government stand by this commitment by providing the necessary funds to finish this project. The proposed 5-9 school will alleviate the strain on Beachy Cove Elementary which is currently at 713 students with eleven classrooms added in the past ten years. All free space and expansion options have been fully utilized and the space restrictions at the school have reached a critical point.

Beachy Cove is a beloved school with a stellar reputation for excellence but this cannot continue without alleviating some of the strain from overcrowding. The proposed intermediate school will help immensely to open up space within Beachy Cove while bringing a sense of community back to our town. With our children leaving PCSP in grade seven, they lose their connection to their home town. They no longer are PCSP athletes and students but rather identify with St. John's. We have a fantastic community of families that provide support to PCSP with their time and financial contributions. We want the ability to continue this support into the later grades.

Beachy Cove elementary has been extremely fortunate to have excellent teaching and support staff who have been successful in delivering academic outcomes despite critical space challenges. The steady rise in enrolment and tighter classroom restrictions will make this more difficult with each passing year. It has been four years since our government recognized the need for the new grade 5-9 intermediate school and we are still looking at an empty school site. For each month the site sits empty the stress levels in the kids, staff and parents increase. We implore this government to do whatever it takes to ensure that this intermediate school receives the necessary monies needed to complete this project in the timeline, September 2016, promised by this government. We understand the current economic conditions but the children are our future and should not suffer the consequences. The investment in this school is not just a short term investment but one that will influence the lives of many students in our community for many years to come.

## Town of Portugal Cove - St. Philips

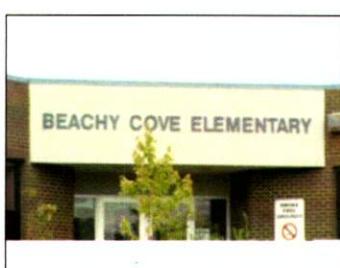
Portugal Cove - St. Philips was amalgamated in 1992 and has since become one of the largest municipalities in Newfoundland and Labrador expanding over 56 square kilometres. In 2011, Statistics Canada noted a 12% increase in population from 2006 with over 7366 residents and counting. The rise in population has seen more than 2695 private residences in the



town, up 14.9% since 2006. Our community has seen steady growth similar to other neighbours like Torbay. Over the past five years, the Town of Portugal Cove - St. Philips has approved over 295 permits for single dwellings and there are several significant residential developments currently in the planning stages. The residential home development in our community is on the rise and with this will come more families and students.

## Beachy Cove Elementary

Beachy Cove Elementary (BCE) is located at 412 Beachy Cove Road in the heart of our community. It currently serves 713 students from kindergarten to grade six. It is projected that by September 2015, Beachy Cove Elementary will be at 745 students with 117 grade six students graduating and 125 kindergarten students coming into the school. This is a conservative number with an expected inflow of new student arrivals prior to school opening. Over the past number of years there has consistently been more students entering the school than graduating and hence the demand for additional instructional space each year.



## Student Enrolment at Beachy Cove Elementary

June 2012	June 2013	June 2014	September 2015*
674	692	713	745

## **Proposed Intermediate School (Grade 5-9)**

After a review of the St. John's greater metro school system it was recommended that the Town of PCSP be allocated a new intermediate school to house grade 5-9 students. The current elementary school, Beachy Cove Elementary, will accommodate kindergarten to grade four once the new school has been completed. This conversion will free up the much needed space to bring back the cafeteria, open up the full gym for regular sessions and eliminate the use of the small classrooms currently needed.

The site was identified and purchased from the Town of PCSP later in 2014 and septic and water was completed on Thorburn Road to connect to the future school. The first tender for site clearing and grubbing has been awarded and a sign has been erected noting the future site of the school. Some work has begun on the clearing of this site.

In the past three years, since the first money was allocated in the 2012 budget, we still have no evidence of a commencement or completion date for the building. The proposed 2016 opening seems less and less likely as the months go by with little progress beginning onsite.

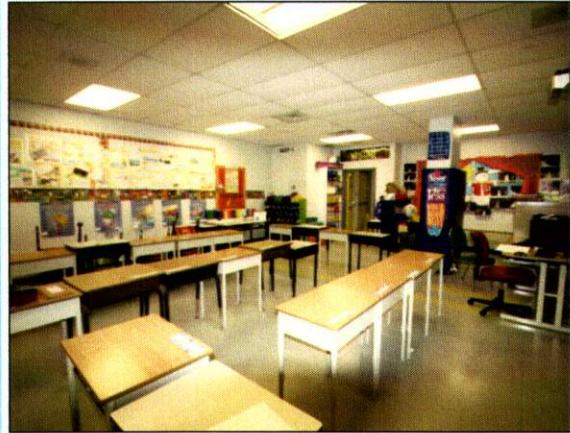
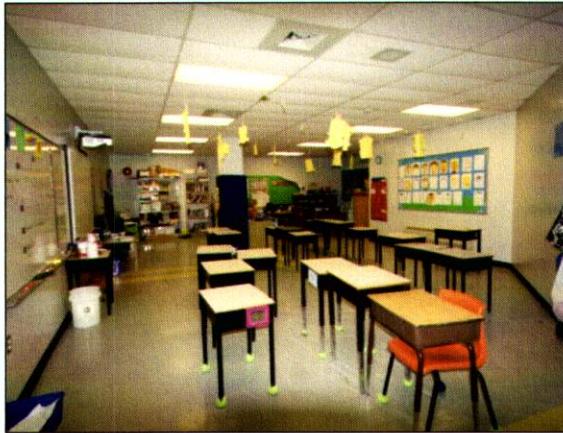
## **Why Do We Have Concerns?**

### **Critical Space Restrictions at BCE**

The exponential population growth continues to place demands on the current elementary facility. In the past ten years Beachy Cove has seen eleven classrooms added to the original building. This addition includes three modular classrooms; numerous extensions to the school; and converting the cafeteria into two windowless classrooms; and some children being taught in tiny instructional spaces.

The two converted cafeteria classrooms are spacious but lack natural light due to no external windows; no lockers for students to store their belongings and no washing station. Parents of the children in these classrooms have expressed concerns over the above issues as well as air quality and ventilation.

## Cafeteria converted into two windowless classrooms



The conversion of our cafeteria in June 2012 meant that all students would eat lunches in their classrooms as well as the loss of a common space for the entire school. The only remaining common space besides the gym is our small resource centre, which also houses our computer lab. On many occasions the library programming had to be rescheduled in order to accommodate extracurricular activities such as class photographs and student immunizations.

The small gymnasium was halved by a curtain to facilitate dual classes in order to provide the required number of weekly gym sessions to all grades. This halved gym area is now used for a regular gym class. For example, only one badminton net can be put in place in this area. During a thirty minute session, twenty six students take turns playing. This limited floor space now impacts a child's actual floor time. Children today struggle to maintain a healthy active lifestyle and with little physical education in the school, the physical, mental and overall wellbeing of the children is negatively impacted.

## Halved Gym



An increase in our student numbers has also impacted the school's ability to celebrate together. It is a common occurrence in the school to have to host the same event multiple times in order to offer it to all students. Our gym can no longer house the entire school community because of our growing numbers. Holiday concerts are also limited with only certain grades performing each year and with limited tickets available for visiting families and friends.

The school currently has only one music room. Some music classes are now taught in the home room due to a lack of space. Prior to the remodel of the cafeteria, additional music and gym sessions were using this space. Our most vulnerable students, kindergarten and grade one spend a large majority of their school day in their classroom with little opportunity to move around the school. With our class sizes averaging 20+, it is challenging to say the least. Despite the addition of multiple classrooms including three modulars, there are still a number of extremely small instructional spaces that have to be used. These spaces can only be used by a small class size with little room for storage or movement by the children throughout the day.

Overcrowding has also put added stress on the infrastructure including the school's well and septic systems which were put in place many years ago when the school was much smaller and housed a much smaller student community.

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School council and the education committee has worked closely with the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLES) to address the space restrictions each year but we are running out of options.

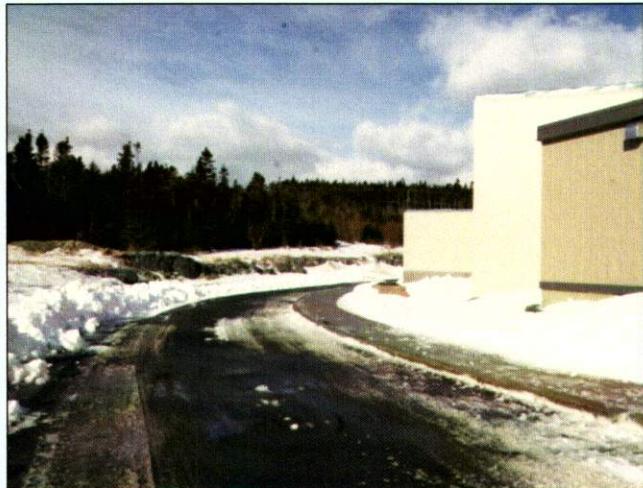
**It is our belief, and that of the NLES, that BCE has given up all free space and we must get the intermediate school built ASAP.**

The rise in mental health issues with young students has been highlighted in recent times and we have major concerns with how the overcrowding at Beachy Cove has placed unnecessary strain on already stressed students. We are cramming more students into smaller spaces with little to no movement throughout the building. In years past, our children enjoyed lunch in a cafeteria, gym class in a regular sized room and music in the music room. This is no longer the experience. Our classroom numbers are rising with more children in smaller classrooms spending the majority of their day in their homeroom. We are seeing more anxiety, eating disorders and stress related issues in our young students.

Just as the school footprint is maximized on the inside, the outside school grounds are also at a critical state. As you can see by the below photos, the parking lot has a minimal number of spaces to accommodate staff. A number of our students are driven to school which causes a number of stresses in the morning. The school requires a dedicated group of volunteer parents daily to help facilitate this process in the morning to ensure the safety of the children. This is especially a concern for the special needs students that require more time and space to vacate their buses and vehicles.

The bus lane, located in the rear of the school near the playground, was installed a few years ago to free up valuable room in the parking lot at the front of the building. This bus lane has no room for error and leaves very little room for our busing students to enter and exit safely. There is a lack of sidewalk space in the winter months to get children out to the buses in the afternoons.

## Narrow Bus Lane



The lack of parking has been a major concern for our families especially during special events at the school. Narrow shoulders along Beachy Cove Road and limited street lights pose a major security risk for parents and their children visiting the school. School council has undertaken numerous initiatives to rectify this problem, with no success.

## Overcrowded Parking Lot



## **Timing of Intermediate School Construction**

To date there has been some progress made with the new school project but we are concerned that delays and lack of activity onsite is putting unnecessary strain on our students at the elementary level. As mentioned above, the space restrictions and lack of future expansion options are a major cause of concern for our families and their children.

In the 2014 budget there were \$99.3 million dollars allocated for ongoing capital projects relating to education. What is unclear is what percentage of that capital has been assigned and spent on this intermediate school for PCSP? The school site was identified and purchased later last year and the tender for site work and grubbing was awarded. The town recently finished water and septic work on Thorburn Road to accommodate the new school.

## **Conclusion**

On behalf of the education committee at Beachy Cove Elementary, we would like to thank this government for recognizing the importance of our young people and their education. As the Northeast Avalon continues to grow so does the need for quality facilities for our student community. The town of Portugal Cove - St. Philips is experiencing the same growing pains as other surrounding communities with overcrowded schools, busy residential developments and increased road traffic. This intermediate school is just one step towards meeting some of the demands of our growing community.

It has been four years since the intermediate school was approved by this government for PCSP. In four years this school has been analyzed, discussed, a school site identified, bought and cleared. How many more years will it take to have this school structure completed and open to our students? With a proposed opening for September 2016, is it realistic to expect a school be constructed, commissioned and operational? It appears to this committee and the families in PCSP that this timeline is not reasonable. In those four years the student population at Beachy Cove has grown, there are more children per classroom, the cafeteria has been removed and the gym has been halved. We are in a critical state after eleven classroom additions in ten years with a need for more space in the future and no expansion options available.

Our children deserve the right to a quality education in an appropriate learning environment that positively affects their overall well being. We implore this government to dedicate the necessary resources in the 2015 budget to this project so that the doors of the intermediate grade 5-9 school will open in September 2016.