

Executive Summary

Community Engagement on Educational Offerings in Peace River

Peace River School Division, May 13, 2026

Purpose of This Engagement

The Peace River School Division (PRSD) Board of Trustees undertook a structured community engagement process in April and May 2026 to inform its upcoming Value Scoping Session, at which the Board will determine the future direction of educational offerings in Peace River. No final decisions have been made regarding school configurations, grade-level organization, program offerings, or the location of possible new facilities.

This engagement was designed at the Consult level of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum of participation. This means the Board sought community input to inform its decisions while retaining final decision-making authority.

How the Community Was Engaged

Input was gathered through three channels between April 20 and May 8, 2026:

- Two in-person engagement sessions on April 30, 2026, one for community members, one for PRSD staff, using card storming and a gallery walk format. Approximately 22 community members and 30 staff participated.
- A Community Survey, completed by 88 respondents drawn primarily from Peace River and area parents of currently enrolled students, with additional responses from community members, teaching staff, and support staff.
- A Jr./Sr. High School Student Survey completed by 16 student respondents (one response was removed as it was submitted by a parent) from T.A. Norris Middle School, Peace River High School, and Peace Regional Outreach Campus.

Feedback was organized around four key topic areas: Grade Configurations, Language Programming, Facilities & Location, and Quality Education.

Who Was Heard

The engagement reached a specific and engaged segment of the community. The majority of community survey respondents (66%) were parents of currently enrolled students in the 35–54 age range. Approximately 51% of respondents lived in the Town of Peace River, with 49% from surrounding areas including Northern Sunrise County, County of Northern Lights, Village of Nampa, and the MD of Peace. School-to-home communications were the most effective channel, accounting for nearly half of all survey reach.

Topic 1: Grade Configurations

What the community told us

The most consistent and strongly endorsed signal across all three engagement channels was a preference for a two-school grade configuration. This was the single most represented theme in the in-person sessions, and community survey data reinforces this direction. The current three-school K-4 / Grade 5-8 / Grade 9-12 model received limited support.

The most debated question was which two-school model to pursue. Two configurations received the strongest support:

- K-6 / 7-12
- K-8 / 9-12

The most broadly shared specific criticism of the current model, raised across all three engagement groups, was the placement of Grade 5 and 6 students alongside Grade 7 and 8 students at T.A. Norris Middle School. Respondents consistently described the maturity gap as too wide. Concern about Grade 9 placement in the high school (alongside Grades 10-12) was also raised, though views were not unanimous. Students themselves were more satisfied with the current configuration than either adult group, with 47% indicating it works well as it is; their primary concern about any change was losing access to CTF/CTS or athletic programs.

Topic 2: Language Programming

What the community told us

French Immersion (FI) was the most broadly and consistently supported topic across the entire engagement. Support for continuing the program was the single largest theme in the in-person sessions, and 51% of community survey respondents rated FI as very or somewhat important. While the community survey revealed more divided opinion than the in-person sessions, the overall weight of data across all three channels points clearly toward an expectation that French Immersion programming will continue.

The most critical concern identified was not whether FI should continue, but whether students can complete a full pathway. Key findings include:

- "Ensuring students can complete a full FI pathway" was the top-selected Q18 option in the community survey (34 selections) and the student survey (6 selections).
- The absence of a bilingual graduation diploma (DELF) was identified in the in-person sessions as a significant driver of student attrition
- 27% of student survey respondents are former FI students who have since left the program, reinforcing the attrition signal.
- The difficulty of recruiting and retaining qualified French teachers and EAs, particularly at the high school level, was identified across all groups as the underlying threat to program continuity.
- Inter-divisional collaboration with the HFCRD was the most frequently proposed solution, with specific interest in pooling resources to enable a bilingual diploma.

Topic 3: Facilities & Location

What the community told us

Perspectives on a potential new school on the West Hill of Peace River were more varied across engagement channels than on any other topic, and the Board should weigh these differences carefully.

In-person participants were largely skeptical of a West Hill location for elementary-aged students, with concern about accessibility, transportation costs, loss of walkable access to the pool, Baytex Centre, gymnastics, and daycare being the dominant theme. However, those same participants were often open to a West Hill location for a new high school.

Community survey respondents were more positive: approximately 31% were positive about a West Hill location, 34% neutral, and 30% expressed concern. Students were the most positive of any group at 67% in favour, drawn primarily by the prospect of improved facilities rather than location preferences.

Across both the community and student surveys, a consistent theme emerged: the case for a new building is most compelling when framed around program quality and facility capability. Students identified improved trades spaces, foods labs, and practical learning facilities as their primary desire from any new build. Their top concern about any reconfiguration was losing access to CTF/CTS or athletic programs — not the location of the building itself.

Topic 4: Quality Education

What the community told us

Across all three engagement channels, two themes emerged as the most prominent markers of quality education in Peace River:

Resourcing for complex needs

The most frequently raised concern, from community participants in-person, in the community survey, and echoed by students, was the perception that students with complex learning or behavioural needs are not receiving adequate support, and that this gap is affecting the learning environment for the broader classroom. Respondents called for more trained EAs, smaller class sizes, and better provincial funding. Some respondents specifically called on the PRSD to actively lobby the provincial government for improved funding, signalling awareness that this challenge extends beyond what the Division can address on its own. The engagement data points toward a gap between inclusion as policy and inclusion as practice.

Teacher quality and real-world preparation

Across all channels, teacher quality was identified as the single most important factor in quality education. Students were particularly clear on this: their most consistent theme was a desire for teachers who actively instruct through demonstration and explanation, rather than directing students to work independently on devices. Both adult and student respondents also emphasized the importance of practical programming in skilled trades, life skills, CTS, and career preparation as markers of a quality education.

Engagement Process Evaluation

Participant satisfaction with the engagement process was generally positive. In-person participants rated their experience highly, with 14 of 15 indicating the process gave them a genuine opportunity to share their perspective, and 9 of 15 giving the highest satisfaction rating. Community survey respondents were more moderate, with the largest group rating their experience 4 out of 5.

The most common improvement requests across all channels were greater advance notice and broader promotion. Student respondents gave lower clarity ratings on the survey introduction, and most learned about the survey through social media or word of mouth rather than school channels. Both findings will inform improvements for future engagement phases.

Next Steps

The Board of Trustees will use this summary and the complete report to prepare for the upcoming Value Scoping Session, at which it will determine the future direction of educational offerings in Peace River. Following approval from the Board at the May 21 regular meeting, this summary and the complete report will be published on the PRSD Engage webpage and shared with participants and the broader community, along with a communication about how the input received has informed the Board's direction, fulfilling the Division's commitment to closing the loop with participants.

This Executive Summary was prepared to accompany the full Community Engagement on Educational Offerings in Peace River report (May 2026). For complete findings, data tables, and appendices, please refer to the full report.