



## What We Heard

# Public engagement on a location for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School

June 2026 Report



**Government of Yukon**  
Department of Education

1000 Lewes Blvd.  
Box 2703 (E-1)  
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 2C6

[Edu-Policy@yukon.ca](mailto:Edu-Policy@yukon.ca)



École Whitehorse Elementary School

## Contents

Background	1
The engagement process	3
Stakeholder engagement	5
Online public survey	22
Public information sessions	27
Next steps	28
Appendix	29

# Background

From February through April of 2026, the Department of Education conducted a public engagement to help identify a preferred location for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School (ÉWES).

The Government of Yukon had identified three potential locations for a new ÉWES, considering the need for a site that can accommodate a school of suitable size to meet the growing educational needs. The proposed locations were:

- Option A: The current ÉWES site at 4181 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, downtown Whitehorse.
- Option B: Kopper King (Lot 435) at 91841 Alaska Highway.
- Option C: An unsurveyed lot by the Canada Games Centre on Hamilton Boulevard.

## The need for replacement

At 75 years old, École Whitehorse Elementary School is the oldest operating school in the Yukon. In 2020, the Colliers International Report on Yukon School Facilities identified ÉWES as the territory's highest priority for replacement. This was further reinforced by the [2022 Whitehorse School Replacement Ranking](#), which identified ÉWES as the highest-priority urban school for replacement based on its current state.

## About École Whitehorse Elementary School

École Whitehorse Elementary School (ÉWES) was constructed in 1950 and opened in 1952. Originally designed to serve a broad range of students, it operated as a combined elementary and high school until 1963, when the opening of F.H. Collins Secondary School allowed the facility to focus exclusively on primary education.

The school's identity as a centre for French-language learning began in January 1981, when the Early French Immersion program was introduced. Over the following decades, ÉWES transitioned from a dual-track school into a full French Immersion institution.

As of March 2026, the school enrollment was 470 students – the largest elementary school population in the territory.





As a French Immersion school, the ÉWES catchment area encompasses the entire City of Whitehorse, drawing students and families from every neighbourhood in the community.

Subdivision/area	Number of students	Percentage of students
Copper Ridge	88	18.72%
Whistle Bend	80	17.02%
Porter Creek	44	9.36%
Takhini	42	8.94%
Riverdale	37	7.87%
Outside City of Whitehorse	33	7.02%
Downtown	31	6.60%
Granger	26	5.53%
Hillcrest	22	4.68%
Crestview	12	2.55%
*Other areas	55	11.70%

\* 19 other areas/subdivisions with fewer than 10 students in each.



# The engagement process

The Government of Yukon is committed to transparent engagement on the development of all future schools. To ensure a comprehensive view, we used a three-pillared approach to reach the ÉWES community, key partners, and stakeholders:

- 1. Online survey:** Conducted from February 26 to April 26, 2026.
- 2. Public information sessions and student engagement:** Four public information sessions were held in Whitehorse on March 24, 25, 26, and 30, giving residents and ÉWES families an opportunity to ask questions and share perspectives directly with officials. Additionally, the department held a dedicated day-long engagement session with ÉWES students on April 10 to capture the youth voice on their future school.
- 3. Stakeholder engagement:** Targeted in-person meetings were held throughout March and April with key partners, including:
  - the ÉWES School Council and Project Advisory Committee (PAC);
  - the Downtown, Takhini, and Valleyview neighbourhood associations;
  - City of Whitehorse Mayor and Council;
  - Yukon University; and
  - the Whitehorse Disc Golf Association.

Additionally, dedicated in-person government-to-government engagement with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council will take place to discuss the proposed site options before a final decision on the school's location is made.



What We Heard:

## Stakeholder engagement

# The student voice: insights from ÉWES

## Overview

On Friday, April 10, 2026, project staff from the Department of Education conducted a day-long engagement session with students at École Whitehorse Elementary School. The goal was to ensure that the voices of those most impacted by the project – the students themselves – are reflected in the planning process.

The session included all students from Grades 3 through 7.

## Engagement process

The engagement was designed to be interactive and informative, consisting of three main phases:

1. **Presentation:** Staff provided a plain-language overview of the three location options, outlining key facts regarding site size, proximity to services, and potential construction impacts.
2. **Question and answer:** Students participated in a facilitated Q&A session.
3. **A student vote:** To capture individual preferences, each student was asked to write their preferred site on a sticky note, along with any specific comments or reasons for their choice.

## Quantitative feedback

A total of 263 students participated in the voting process. The results showed a significant consensus among the student body, with a clear preference for option C, the unsurveyed lot near the Canada Games Centre.

- Option C: Unsurveyed lot by the Canada Games Centre: **70.3%** (185 votes)
- Option B: Kopper King (Lot 435): **15.2%** (40 votes)
- Option A: Current ÉWES site: **14.4%** (38 votes)

## Qualitative feedback

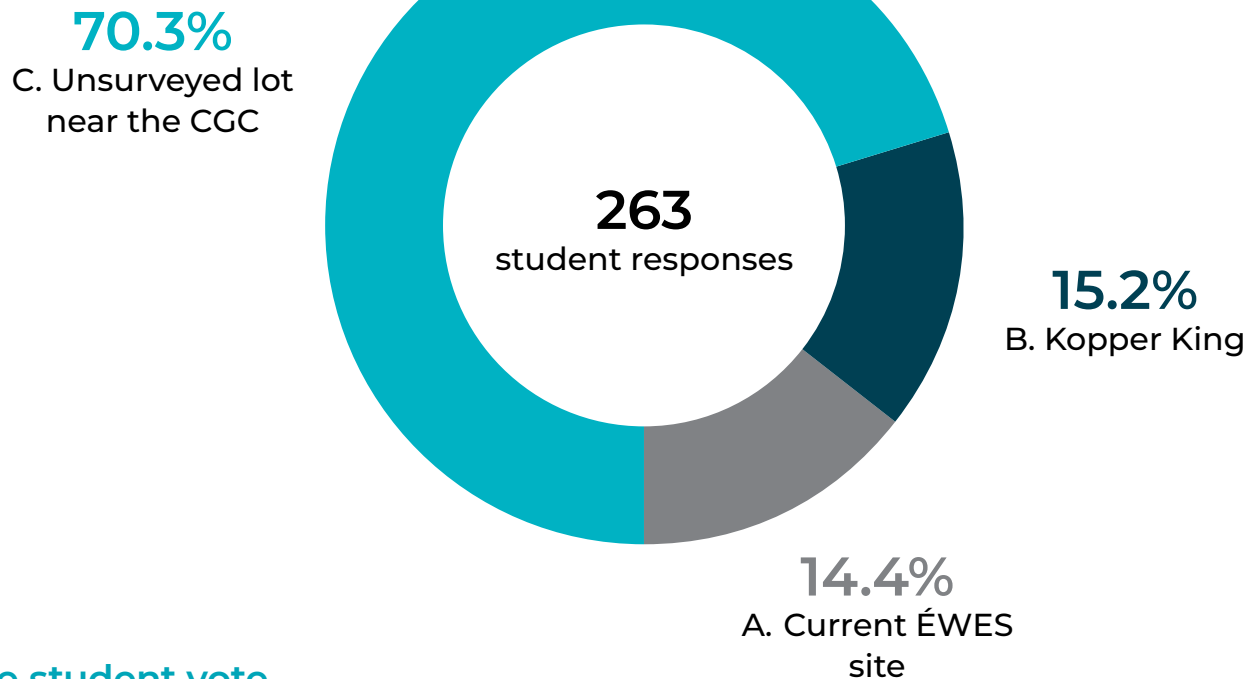
Beyond the quantitative results, the students demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the trade-offs involved in each site option. Their feedback focused heavily on the quality of their learning environment and long-term recreational opportunities.

### Concerns regarding option A (current ÉWES Site)

While some students appreciated the familiarity of the current site, many voiced significant concerns regarding a rebuild at this location:

- **Educational disruption:** Students expressed worry that construction noise, dust, and increased traffic would create a major distraction for several years.
- **Loss of amenities:** Several students noted that the loss of their playing field during a multi-year construction phase would significantly impact their outdoor time and school spirit.
- **Safety and environment:** A number of students raised safety concerns related to the school's downtown location and the lack of dedicated green space.





## The student vote

---

### Opportunities regarding option C (lot by CGC)

The overwhelming preference for this site was driven by a desire for a different type of school environment:

- **Access to nature:** Many students expressed excitement about the prospect of a school “surrounded by forest.” The ability to access trails and natural spaces directly from the school was a recurring theme.
- **Recreational opportunity:** Proximity to the Canada Games Centre (CGC) was a decisive factor. Students viewed the site as a way to better integrate their school day with modern recreational facilities and nearby trails, particularly the Mt. McIntyre recreational area.
- **Site safety:** Students perceived this location as a safer environment compared to the downtown core.

### Summary of student priorities

The engagement session revealed that ÉWES students prioritize uninterrupted learning, access to natural environments, and modern recreational infrastructure. Their feedback suggests that they view the school replacement not just as a new building, but as an opportunity to change the fundamental “feel” and safety of their educational experience.



ÉWES students casting their votes

"Option C because it's safer and good for field trips; finally, think of the drug dealers near A."

"I think C would be a good choice because it has forest, it is accessible to families, and it's close to the CGC."

"I like option C. I don't like B because it's right off a highway. Option A would be too loud for the students to learn."

"I like B the best because there would be a bunch of places to play."

"Option A. I like walking to school."

~ Written comments from ÉWES students

# Perspectives from ÉWES staff

## Summary

To ensure frontline perspectives were captured, feedback from ÉWES staff was gathered through an invitation to submit their input via email. A total of 19 staff responded.

Their feedback reflects a near-unanimous consensus regarding the three proposed locations. There is an overwhelming preference for the site across from the Canada Games Centre (CGC), cited as the option that best supports student wellness and educational outcomes.

Conversely, there is profound and unified opposition to rebuilding on the current downtown site, with many staff characterizing that option as “unviable” or “detrimental” to the school community.

### Staff sentiment at a glance:

Site option	General staff consensus
C. Unsurveyed lot by the Canada Games Centre	<b>Highly recommended:</b> Viewed as the best option for student wellbeing, outdoor learning, and operational stability.
B. Kopper King (Lot 435)	<b>Mixed/neutral:</b> Some support for natural space, but concerns over highway safety and traffic.
A. Current ÉWES site	<b>Strongly opposed:</b> Viewed as detrimental to student learning, staff retention, and safety.

## Key theme: impact of on-site construction

A primary concern for staff is the projected 4- to 5-year timeline for on-site construction and demolition if the school remains downtown.

- **Learning and focus:** Staff noted that sustained construction noise, vibrations, and heavy machinery would create a highly distracting environment, particularly for students who require calm, structured settings to succeed.
- **Loss of play space:** Rebuilding on the current lot would severely restrict outdoor play areas for nearly half of a student’s elementary education. Educators stressed that “two little strips of gravel” are insufficient for the regulation and development of more than 400 students.
- **Safety and logistics:** Managing safe student movement and emergency access in an active, multi-year construction zone was identified as a significant safety risk.

## Key theme: safety, health, and the downtown environment

Many staff members expressed that the current downtown location has become increasingly challenging for young learners.

- **Social environment:** Feedback highlighted frequent encounters with unpredictable behaviour and “deranged individuals” in the downtown core.
- **Hazardous materials:** Staff reported that they frequently find used drug paraphernalia, broken glass, and other hazardous waste on school grounds.
- **Health concerns:** Concerns were raised regarding potential exposure to asbestos and dust during on-site demolition, particularly for students and staff with respiratory conditions.

## Key theme: the “catchment” reality

Staff emphasized that ÉWES is not a traditional neighbourhood school.

- City-wide service: As a French Immersion school, ÉWES serves families from across Whitehorse, with several staff noting that fewer than 10% of students currently reside within walking distance of the downtown site.
- Accessibility: Relocating to a more central, residential-adjacent area like the CGC site is viewed as a more equitable and convenient option for the majority of families.

## Key theme: Advantages of the Canada Games Centre (CGC) site

All school staff who provided written feedback framed the CGC location as a major educational opportunity.

- Land-based learning: Unlike the downtown site, which lacks green space, the CGC location offers immediate access to forests and trails. This would facilitate the incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing and outdoor education without the logistical barriers of busing.
- Financial and time savings: Proximity to the CGC and Mount MacIntyre trails would significantly reduce transportation costs for swimming, skating, and skiing programs.
- Operational stability: Building at a new site allows students to remain in a calm environment until the new facility is complete, avoiding years of “construction-related trauma”.

## Staff retention and professional wellbeing

Professional burnout and retention were recurring concerns.

- Staffing shortages: Educators warned that the added stress of working in a construction zone for four to five years, without adequate parking or vehicle plug-ins, could exacerbate the current shortage of French Immersion teachers.

- Retention risks: Several staff members explicitly stated they would consider seeking employment elsewhere if the downtown rebuild moves forward.

## Perspectives on the Kopper King site

While staff preferred the Canada Games Centre location, the Kopper King site was viewed as a secondary alternative that offered specific environmental benefits alongside significant safety concerns.

- Environmental and educational opportunities: Educators noted that this site provides direct access to expansive forests and trail systems, which would support land-based learning, orienteering, and cross-country skiing.
- Concerns regarding traffic and safety: A primary drawback cited by staff was the site's proximity to the Alaska Highway. Concerns were raised regarding high traffic volumes and the need for significantly improved speed control and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Barriers to active transportation: Some staff argued that the highway location would promote a “driving culture”, noting that the current bike path infrastructure is insufficient for safe student commutes.
- Connectivity issues: Although the site is near nature, educators pointed out that the highway creates a “so close but yet so far” scenario, making it difficult for classes to safely reach amenities like Mount MacIntyre.
- Site development impacts: Feedback also included concerns about the environmental impact of development, specifically the necessity of cutting down existing trees to accommodate the school facility.
- Mitigation potential: It was suggested that with thoughtful design, some of the challenges (such as highway noise) could be mitigated.





“As an experienced educator at École Whitehorse Elementary School (ÉWES), I am deeply concerned about the possibility of rebuilding the school on its current site...”

“If the decision is made to rebuild on the current downtown site, I fear the impact on students’ wellbeing and learning would be profound, and comparable to the pandemic’s effects on the healthy development of social and self-regulation skills.”

“Choosing the Canada Games Centre site would best support a thriving educational environment — both during and after construction.”

“When you need help growing a thriving garden, you turn to a gardener — not a carpenter. In the same way, consulting teachers who have spent their careers at École Whitehorse Elementary School offers an essential and informed perspective on the realities our school community faces, and the challenges we will continue to face if we remain in our current downtown location.”

“As you make this crucial decision, I urge you to keep the students’ wellbeing, learning, and overall development at the forefront.”

~ Written comments from  
ÉWES educators



# ÉWES School Council

The ÉWES School Council met with department officials to review the proposed sites. The Council expressed appreciation for the renewed engagement process and noted that the new site options represent a significant improvement over the previous proposal.

## Key themes and feedback

- Preference for the Canada Games Centre (CGC) site: The Council identified the CGC/Valleyview area as a “superior site experience.” They highlighted the benefits of immediate access to nature and existing recreational facilities, noting that this location offers the best long-term opportunities for students.
- Concerns with the current downtown site: The Council characterized the current downtown location as “not reasonable” for a multi-year rebuild. Their concerns centred on the logistical constraints of operating a school adjacent to an active construction site and the permanent lack of green space and trees.
- Viability of the Kopper King site: The Council viewed Kopper King as a promising and flexible option due to its larger footprint. However, they flagged the proximity to the Alaska Highway and a nearby gas station as points requiring careful technical consideration.
- The decision-making process: The Council emphasized that the final decision should not be based on project cost alone. Instead, they urged the government to use a transparent evaluation matrix that weighs:
  - o quality of the learning environment;
  - o adequacy of outdoor space;
  - o projected enrolment and future growth; and
  - o quality of resources.
- Long-term planning: Council members raised the potential impact of a large (approx. 600-student) school on city-wide busing and suggested that the government continue to consider how to support walkability for downtown families.

## Evaluation matrix

The ÉWES School Council provided the department with an evaluation matrix (see next page) on the three proposed sites. Council members looked at the main considerations for each site, based on the question “Where do we envision learning happening?”



Current ÉWES site	
PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proximity to downtown amenities.</li> <li>Connection to the downtown community.</li> <li>Proximity to before and after care locations/ daycares.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two–three years to build new school plus two years for demolition and finishing grounds, which will be five years of learning interruption.</li> <li>RISK – Proximity to challenging and negative societal issues that interact with school.</li> <li>No green space.</li> <li>Smallest lot of the three options.</li> <li>Dependant on buses for most school excursions.</li> </ul>

Kopper King (Lot 435)	
PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green space.</li> <li>Proximity to trails.</li> <li>Forest school programming.</li> <li>Largest lot of the three options (though it is unknown what portion of this lot will be allocated for school grounds).</li> <li>Along the Whitehorse Corridor proposed segment C trail.</li> <li>School could continue at current ÉWES without interruption to learning during new build.</li> <li>Bike/multi-use trail nearby.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proximity to the Alaska Highway.</li> <li>Not a very walkable/ bikeable commute (but accessible via Takhini/College).</li> <li>Dependent on buses for all school trips and excursions.</li> </ul>

Unsurveyed lot across from the Canada Games Centre	
PROS	CONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green space.</li> <li>Proximity to trails.</li> <li>Forest school programming.</li> <li>Adequate size lot to accommodate the largest elementary school in Whitehorse.</li> <li>Proximity (walking access) to CGC for student activities and field trips.</li> <li>School could continue at current ÉWES without interruption to learning during new build.</li> <li>Bike/multi-use trail nearby.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High traffic area.</li> <li>Unsurveyed.</li> </ul>

# ÉWES Project Advisory Committee

Department staff met with the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) – a technical working group comprising school leadership, the City of Whitehorse, neighbourhood associations, and architectural consultants – to conduct an operational assessment of the three site options. The committee’s feedback emphasized that the quality of the long-term learning environment must take priority over the speed of construction.

## Key themes and feedback

- Preference for quality over speed: A critical takeaway was the recommendation that the department “wait for the right site” rather than move forward prematurely with the downtown location. The PAC emphasized that a new school must have the capacity for future growth and immediate access to nature – resources they feel the current site cannot adequately provide.
- Operational and pedagogical concerns (downtown): The committee raised several high-priority concerns regarding a downtown rebuild:
  - o The “decanting” hurdle: Temporary relocation during construction was flagged as particularly difficult for a French Immersion school, as specialized resources must be moved and student stability maintained.
  - o Construction impacts: For up to three years, students would learn in or adjacent to an active construction zone, facing noise, dust, heavy equipment, and “sensory impacts” from sirens and environmental pollution.
  - o Scale and accessibility: The PAC questioned if a regulation-sized gymnasium and field could fit on the lot and noted that a 600-student school might require a four-story vertical design, creating significant accessibility challenges.
  - o Safety and security: The group noted that moving out of downtown would remove students from area-specific safety concerns, such as drug-related activity and discarded needles, which complicate school security.
- City zoning and approval realities: Both the CGC and Kopper King sites would require a minimum

of one year for approvals, involving a Master Plan (3–4 months), an OCP amendment (~6 months), and rezoning (~4 months). The PAC noted the inherent risk that City Council may not approve the final recommendations at each step.

- Transportation benefits: The PAC observed that moving the school out of the downtown core could reduce city-centre congestion. Because most students do not live downtown, bus cancellations currently cause spikes in traffic as parents drive into the core; relocating the school would mitigate this “choke point” effect.

## Evaluation of alternate sites

- CGC site: This was the most favored option. The committee noted it would provide “easy accessibility” off secondary roads without affecting highway speeds. It offers superior access to trails, skiing, and “learning on the land” (e.g., berry picking), while potentially reducing busing costs due to proximity to the Canada Games Centre.
- Kopper King: Viewed as a flexible design option with proximity to Yukon University and McIntyre Creek. However, the PAC noted the need to clarify highway “school zones” and active transportation, as there is currently no bike lane along the Alaska Highway.

## Technical feedback on engagement

The committee flagged that the public survey images were not to the same scale across options, which might lead the public to select the downtown site for “convenience” without realizing the true constraints regarding play space, parking, and security.

# Whitehorse Mayor and Council

Minister of Education Scott Kent, Minister of Community Services Cory Bellmore, and Minister of Highways and Public Works Linda Benoit met with the Whitehorse Mayor and Council on February 27, 2026, to discuss the three proposed sites. The City's feedback focused on long-term urban planning, the integration of school infrastructure with municipal transportation networks, and the future of the downtown core.

## Key themes and feedback

- **Traffic and highway improvements:** While noting that traffic is a concern at all three locations, Council identified the Kopper King site as a potential opportunity to improve access and safety along the Alaska Highway corridor.
- **The future of the downtown core:** Council emphasized the ongoing need for an elementary school in the downtown area. They specifically inquired about the government's long-term plan for the current ÉVES site should a different location be selected, noting the importance of this land to the downtown neighbourhood's future development.
- **Active transportation:** The City stressed that any selected site must prioritize active transportation. They advocated for infrastructure that supports students and families walking or cycling to school safely, regardless of the location.
- **Community amenities:** Council highlighted the need for shared community spaces within the new facility, specifically identifying a large gymnasium that could serve both the school and the broader public.
- **Intergovernmental coordination:** Discussion touched on the potential for federal funding requests to support the project. The City requested to be kept informed of such pursuits to ensure alignment.
- **Ongoing collaboration:** The meeting concluded with a commitment from the Minister of Education to return to Mayor and Council at the end of the public engagement period to share final findings and discuss next steps.

A view of the unsurveyed lot by the Canada Games Centre on Hamilton Boulevard



# Downtown Residents' Association

The Minister of Education met with the Downtown Residents' Association (DRA), which advocated for the continued presence of an elementary school in the downtown core. During this meeting, the DRA emphasized that school infrastructure is a critical component of neighbourhood revitalization and aligns with the goals of the City of Whitehorse Official Community Plan (OCP).

## Key themes and feedback

- **Schools as social infrastructure:** The DRA emphasized that a downtown school is essential “neighbourhood social infrastructure.” They argued that a school is a primary driver for families choosing to live downtown and that its absence would negatively impact downtown revitalization, economic health, and community safety.
- **Support for the current downtown site:** The association reiterated its strong preference for rebuilding on or near the current ÉWES site. They suggested exploring construction at the back of the existing lot to allow for a phased transition, acknowledging that this would likely result in a significant “trade-off” regarding reduced playfield and outdoor space.
- **The “neighbourhood school” distinction:** A key point of clarity raised by the DRA was that while rebuilding a new ÉWES downtown might solve a facility issue, it does not necessarily solve the need for a “walkable neighbourhood school” for downtown residents, given ÉWES’s city-wide French Immersion catchment.
- **Alignment with city planning:** The DRA highlighted that maintaining a downtown school aligns with City of Whitehorse sustainability objectives and the OCP, which anticipates future population growth in the urban core.
- **Concerns with alternate sites:** The association expressed skepticism regarding the suitability of the other proposed sites, specifically flagging concerns about the “highway” location (Kopper King) and potential zoning delays that could arise at the Valleyview/CGC site.

## Urban planning and neighbourhood vitality

- **Economic and social drivers:** The DRA framed the school location as an issue broader than education, citing it as a factor in residential recruitment and the long-term economic viability of the downtown area.
- **Data and support:** The association referenced what they characterized as strong territory-wide support (~80%) for maintaining an elementary school presence in downtown Whitehorse.

# Takhini Neighbourhood Association

The Minister of Education met with representatives from the Takhini Neighbourhood Association (TNA) to discuss the three site options. While the association views the options as viable, they emphasized to the Minister that their support is contingent on detailed design transparency and specific infrastructure commitments to protect the neighbourhood's character and safety.

## Key themes and feedback

- **Scale and flexibility of the Kopper King Site:** The TNA identified Kopper King as the only site large enough to accommodate not only a school but also a significant sports facility, similar to previous project visions. They noted an assumption that this size might make it a preferred technical choice for the government.
- **Site placement concerns (quarry vs. disc golf):** Within the Kopper King site, the association raised questions about exactly where the school would sit. They noted that the quarry and the disc golf course are the two most suitable areas for construction but are also heavily used for recreation. They requested preliminary design information on utility servicing and access to understand how these areas would be affected.
- **Traffic and active transportation:** A significant concern for the TNA is the potential for increased traffic within the residential neighbourhood. They flagged potential impacts on University Drive and emphasized that the paved trail from Porter Creek to Takhini must be protected to maintain safe active commuting routes.
- **Request for design transparency:** The association stressed that the public needs more preliminary technical data – specifically regarding road connections and utility infrastructure – before an informed final decision can be made.

## Neighbourhood mitigation and infrastructure commitments

- **Pumphouse Road connectivity:** The TNA requested a firm commitment that Pumphouse Road will not be connected to the highway in a way that creates a new through-route for traffic between Range Road and the Alaska Highway.
- **Highway safety and noise:** The association proposed specific mitigation measures to address the site's proximity to the Alaska Highway, including:
  - **Sound attenuation:** The installation of sound barriers to reduce traffic noise near the Two Mile Hill intersection.
  - **Grade-separated crossing:** Interest in an underpass or overpass to ensure students and residents can safely cross the highway to access amenities.
- **Community incentives:** The TNA suggested that the government should explore “incentivizing” the host neighbourhood. They noted that just as sports groups (such as Softball Yukon) have sought accommodations, the local neighbourhood expects comparable investments in safety and infrastructure.



# Valleyview Community Association

The Minister of Education met with the Valleyview Community Association (VVCA) to discuss the potential for a new school at the Canada Games Centre/Valleyview site. While the association recognized the site's advantages, its feedback focused on protecting the “green belt” between Valleyview and Hamilton Boulevard and ensuring that school traffic does not impact local residential streets.

## Key themes and feedback

- **Protection of treed buffers and trail networks:** The VVCA emphasized that the existing forest between Valleyview and Hamilton Boulevard serves as a critical buffer for noise and dust. They advocated for the retention of this treed barrier and the preservation of the well-defined trail network that spans City, KDFN, and Yukon government lots.
- **Access and traffic circulation:** A primary concern for the association is preventing new vehicle traffic from entering the Valleyview neighbourhood. They expressed a firm preference against any vehicular circulation via Sumanik Drive, arguing that school-related traffic should be contained to major arterials rather than residential streets.
- **Construction impact and site preparation:** The association raised concerns about standard site-clearing practices. They argued that “clearing first and landscaping later” is not appropriate for this location, given the long timelines required for tree regrowth in the Yukon. They requested a more surgical approach to site preparation to minimize environmental disruption.
- **Winter maintenance for accessibility:** If the school is built in this area, the VVCA requested that trails be maintained in the winter. They noted that this would support the neighbourhood's aging population and ensure that the trails remain a usable community asset year-round.
- **Infrastructure and engineering concerns:** The association flagged outstanding water and engineering issues related to the South Valleyview Master Plan, suggesting that any new development must be coordinated with existing municipal infrastructure challenges.

## Green space preservation and neighbourhood buffers

- **Community amenities:** The VVCA suggested that if the school moves forward, the government should work with the City of Whitehorse and/or Kwanlin Dün First Nation to include a soccer pitch on adjacent lots, creating a shared community and school resource.
- **Alternative locations:** The association proposed exploring alternative sites that might have a lower impact on existing green space, including areas adjacent to Elijah Smith Elementary School or the brownfield site at the northwest corner of the Alaska Highway and Hamilton Boulevard.



# Joint submission: neighbourhood group consensus

In a joint letter to the Minister of Education, the three primary neighbourhood groups impacted by the site selection expressed a unified position: rebuild the school on its current downtown site. The associations argue that the proposed alternate sites (CGC and Kopper King) repeat the same errors that led to the rejection of previous proposals.

## Key arguments for the current downtown site

- Procedural certainty: Rebuilding downtown is within the Yukon government's direct control. It avoids the 1–2 year delays associated with City of Whitehorse OCP amendments and rezoning required for the other sites.
- Infrastructure efficiency: Utilizing established access and active transportation routes avoids the high costs of “pioneering” utilities and roads in undeveloped areas.
- Social value: Maintaining a school downtown is essential “social infrastructure” that supports urban vitality and neighbourhood health for the next 75 years.

## Concerns regarding alternate sites

- CGC: Focuses on the loss of a critical “green buffer” (Lot 66) and significant safety risks for children at the already congested Hamilton Boulevard–CGC intersection.
- Kopper King: Cites non-compliance with the City's OCP and potential legal delays regarding the Parks and Land Certainty Act and the management plan for the new Chasàn Chùà Territorial Park.
- Traffic and safety: Both sites are viewed as creating new “choke points” on the Alaska Highway or Hamilton Blvd, shifting traffic problems rather than solving them.

“Rebuilding ÉWES on the current site is the most certain means of achieving the objective in the near term... construction can begin within your government's current mandate.”

# Yukon University

Department staff met with the acting President of Yukon University (YU) to discuss the implications of the proposed sites on university land and the broader community. The university's feedback highlighted significant technical hurdles regarding specific lots and provided a unique "legacy" perspective on the downtown location.

## Key themes and feedback

- Concerns about Kopper King: YU expressed concern and confusion regarding the inclusion of the Kopper King site, describing it as "quite jarring," noting that the area is designated as University Endowment Land. The University emphasized that using this land for a school would require significantly broader engagement and a clear, overarching development plan that does not currently exist.
- Safety and isolation at Kopper King: Beyond land-use issues, YU raised serious safety concerns regarding the Kopper King site. They flagged the risk of student pick-up and drop-off occurring directly from a heavily congested highway and noted that the site's topography (including steep cliffs) could isolate the school from the surrounding community.
- Support for the CGC/Valleyview Site: The university viewed the Canada Games Centre site as providing the "greater benefit for students." They highlighted the strong potential for educational programming and community connection due to the proximity to Mount McIntyre and the CGC.

## Institutional land use and legacy perspectives

- Endowment land implications: A follow-up conversation was recommended to fully map out the legal and design implications of utilizing university endowment land for a territorial school project.
- Historical and social connection: The university emphasized the strong emotional and historical ties generations of families have to the downtown site, characterizing it as a "magnet school" that provides creative and experiential learning opportunities through its proximity to urban parks.



The Solstice disc golf course on the Kopper King site

## Whitehorse Disc Golf Association

The Minister of Education met with members of the Whitehorse Disc Golf Association (WDGA) to discuss the potential impact of a school development on the Solstice disc golf course at the Kopper King site. The members provided technical context on the course's usage and expressed openness to collaborative solutions.

### Key themes and feedback

- **Value of the Kopper King site:** The WDGA emphasized that the Solstice course is highly valued due to its central location and large footprint. A unique and critical feature of this site is its year-round usability. Unlike other potential areas, this site remains accessible in winter due to regular grooming and heavy tracking by the community, supported by established parking and access via Pump House Road.
- **Operational requirements:** The association identified winter access and adequate parking as the two most difficult factors to replicate elsewhere. They noted that while other areas (such as near the hospital or Chadburn Lake Road) have potential, they currently lack the necessary access infrastructure.
- **Flexibility in design:** The WDGA expressed a high degree of flexibility regarding the school project. They indicated that they could work with a smaller course footprint or a redesigned layout to accommodate a new school building on the Kopper King site.
- **Land use agreements:** The association clarified that the current land agreement for the course is renewed every three years and is up for renewal in May 2026. They expressed openness to adjusting agreement structures to meet the project's requirements.

### Recreational mitigation and site compatibility

- **Cost of relocation/development:** The WDGA provided a preliminary low-cost estimate for developing a 9-hole course. This figure includes concrete, brushing, and equipment, providing a benchmark for potential mitigation costs if the course needs to be altered or moved.
- **Co-existence potential:** The feedback suggests that because of the site's size, there is a potential for the school and the recreational course to co-exist, if parking and winter access are maintained for both parties.



What We Heard:  
**Online public survey**

# Online public survey

## Overview

The online public survey was open from February 26 through April 26, 2026. Designed for accessibility, the nine-question survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete.

A total of 1,902 Yukon residents completed the survey, providing a robust and statistically significant dataset. The participation rate reflects the high level of community interest in the future of École Whitehorse Elementary School.

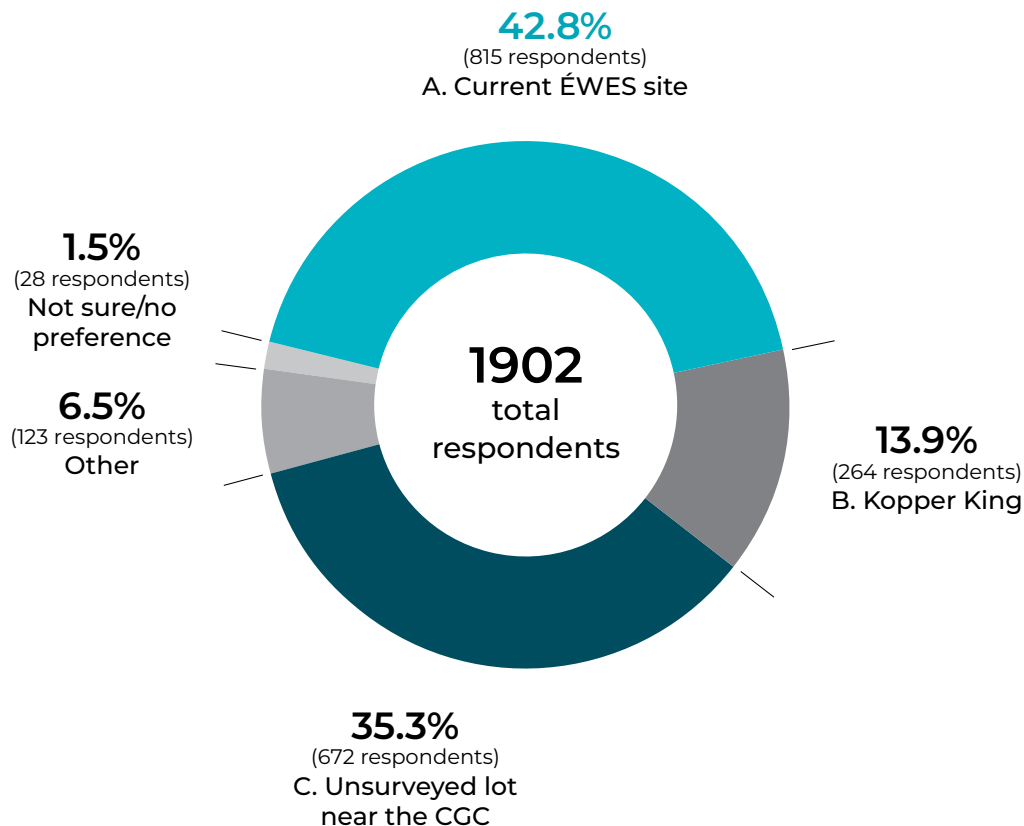
## Summary of survey results

This section details the public's site preferences and the underlying values driving those choices. While respondents provided a wide range of feedback, the data reveals a clear division of preference between two primary locations, with specific priorities – such as proximity to families and access to amenities – shaping the results.

### Site preference (Question 7)

**“In your view, which one of the following sites would be the best location for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School?”**

The current downtown site was the most common choice among respondents, receiving 42.8% of the vote. This was followed by strong support for the site across from the Canada Games Centre, which received 35.3%. The Kopper King option trailed as a distant third at 13.9%.



## Other location suggestions

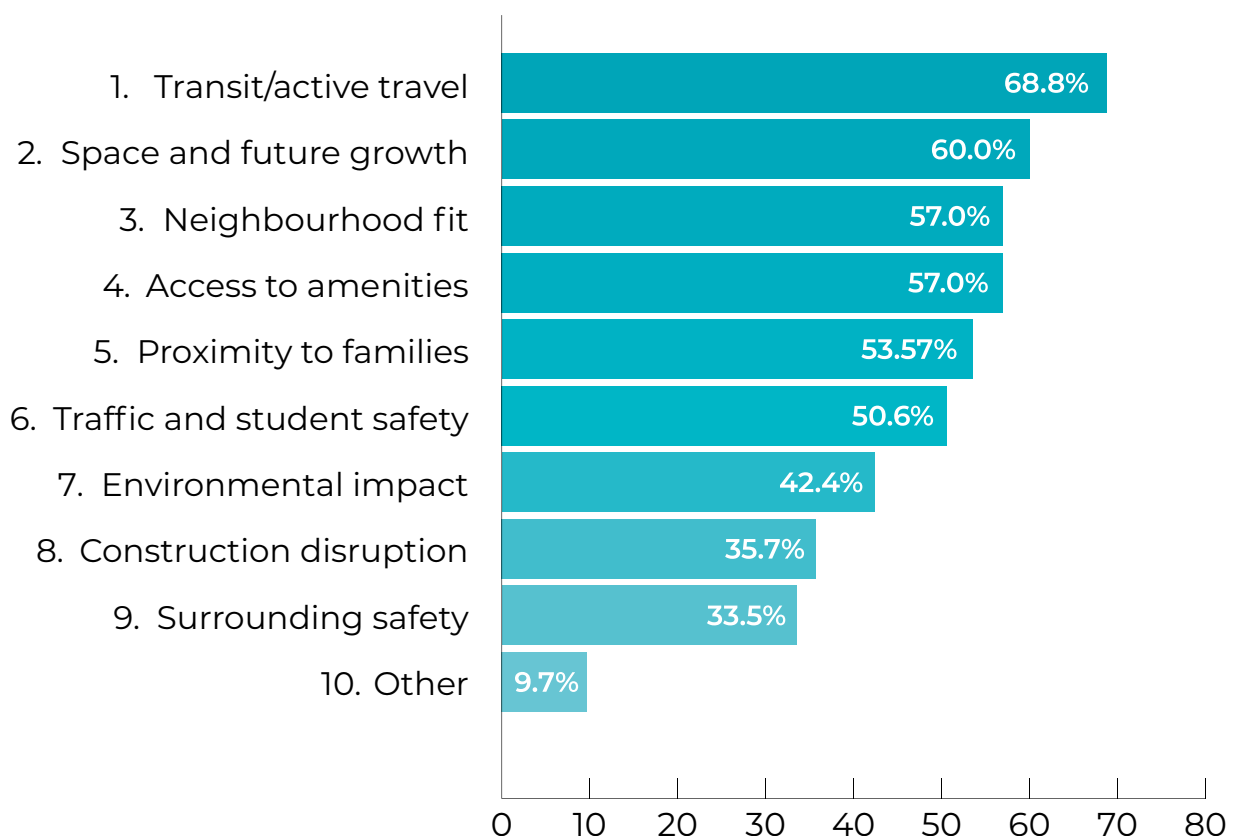
Approximately 6.5% of respondents selected “Other,” providing alternative ideas for the school’s location. The most frequent suggestions included:

- The previous Takhini North site (37 mentions)
- 5th and Rogers (11 mentions)
- Behind Copper Ridge Place (9 mentions)
- Whistle Bend (9 mentions)
- The City of Whitehorse lot on 4th Avenue (7 mentions)

## Primary drivers for preference (Question 8)

**“What are the main reasons for your preference? (Select all that apply)”**

Respondents were asked to identify the factors that influenced their choice. This “select all that apply” question allows us to see the values that Yukoners prioritize for school infrastructure, regardless of which site they ultimately chose.

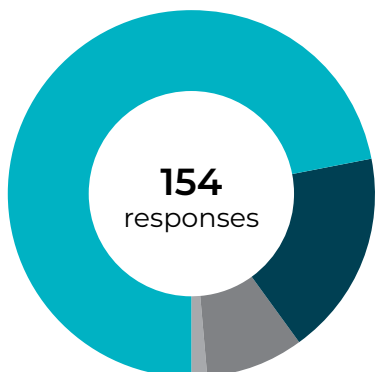




## Survey results: neighbourhood preferences

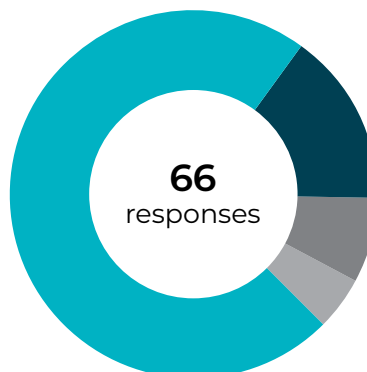
While the survey collected data from residents across all Whitehorse neighbourhoods, this section highlights responses from the four areas most directly adjacent to the proposed locations: Downtown, Kopper King, Takhini, and Valleyview. By isolating these results, we can better understand how local proximity influences site preference and community concerns. The following chart illustrates the specific feedback provided by residents in these high-impact areas.

### Downtown Whitehorse



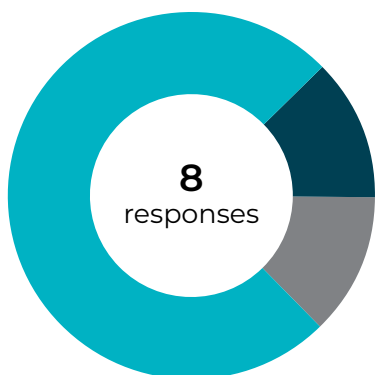
**70.8%** Current ÉWES site  
**17.5%** Lot near the CGC  
**1.3%** Kopper King  
**8.4%** Other

### Valleyview



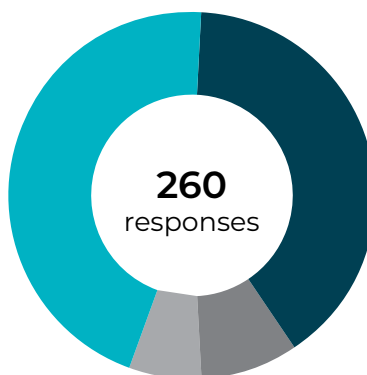
**72.7%** Current ÉWES site  
**15.1%** Kopper King  
**7.6%** Lot near the CGC  
**4.6%** Other

### Kopper King



**75.0%** Current ÉWES site  
**12.5%** Lot near the CGC  
**12.5%** Kopper King

### Takhini



**44.6%** Current ÉWES site  
**38.8%** Lot near the CGC  
**8.5%** Kopper King  
**6.1%** Other

## Survey results: open-ended question

The final survey question asked, “Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?”

Of the 1902 survey respondents, more than 900 provided a comment. These reveal a community that is deeply engaged but divided on the “perfect” solution. While there is a strong emotional and sustainability pull toward the downtown core, there is an equally strong demand for a modern “campus” experience that includes nature and recreational amenities.

Here are the 10 most common recurring themes from the open-ended survey feedback:

### 1. Traffic congestion and student safety

This was the most frequent topic. Respondents expressed high anxiety over the “chaos” of downtown drop-offs and pick-ups. Conversely, those looking at the alternate sites raised flags about the Alaska Highway (speed and crossing safety) and the lack of safe highway access for the Kopper King option.

### 2. The “downtown heart” argument

There is a significant contingent of “Downtowners” who believe a school is essential for a vibrant city centre. They highlighted the convenience for parents working downtown and the ability to walk to school, which offsets the territory’s current busing challenges.

### 3. Outdoor learning and green space

A major critique of the current downtown site is its “concrete” feel. Many parents and teachers advocated for the CGC/Valleyview or Kopper King options specifically because they offer immediate access to trees, trails, and “learning on the land” – something they feel is currently missing.

### 4. Construction disruption and “decanting”

A recurring worry for current families is the transition period. Comments frequently mentioned that a rebuild on the current site would be “miserable” for students due to noise, dust, and the loss of what little playground space exists for up to three years.

### 5. CGC/Valleyview: the “parent’s dream”

The site across from the Canada Games Centre is viewed by many as the most logical “community hub.” Parents liked the idea of dropping kids at school and being able to access the pool, rink, or trails immediately afterward, though some residents are worried about “infilling” their local green space.

### 6. Kopper King: highway and industry concerns

While the larger footprint of Kopper King was seen as a plus for “future-proofing,” many questioned its proximity to a gas station and the highway. There were also technical questions about how it might interact with nearby KDFN settlement land.

### 7. Active transportation vs. bus reliance

Respondents are tired of “unreliable” busing. Themes here focused on the need for real bike lanes and walking paths. There is a fear that moving the school to the CGC or Kopper King will force more families into their cars if active transportation infrastructure isn’t built first.

### 8. Lingering support for the Takhini site

A notable number of respondents are still frustrated that the previous Takhini North site was discarded. They cited the “wasted time and money” and argued it was still the most logical, “shovel-ready” location for a 600-student school.

### 9. The “school as a community hub”

There is strong support for the school being more than just a school. Comments frequently suggested including a regulation-sized gymnasium, pickleball courts, and shared spaces that could be used by the public after hours, particularly in the growing “top of the hill” neighbourhoods.

### 10. Security and social environment

Particularly regarding the downtown site, several comments raised concerns about student wellbeing related to nearby social issues, specifically mentioning drug-related activity and discarded needles on or near the current school grounds.



What We Heard:

**Public information sessions**

# Public information sessions

## Overview

Between March 24 and 30, 2026, the Department of Education hosted four public information sessions in Whitehorse. These sessions were designed to provide an open, face-to-face forum where residents could review technical site data, ask questions of department officials, and share their perspectives in a more conversational setting than the online survey allows.

While the sessions saw a modest total attendance of 31 participants, the depth of dialogue was significant. Attendees included current ÉWES parents, community association members, and key political stakeholders, including Kate White (Leader of the Official Opposition) and Linda Moen (NDP Education Critic).

## Summary of themes

### 1. The “downtown school” commitment

A recurring theme across all three sessions was the necessity of maintaining an elementary school presence in the downtown core. Participants emphasized that a school is a cornerstone of neighbourhood vibrancy and called on the government to honour past commitments to downtown educational infrastructure.

### 2. Student perspectives: life during construction

Several ÉWES students attended the sessions, offering a “boots-on-the-ground” view of the proposal. Their concerns were remarkably practical and centred on their daily quality of life:

- Play and recess: Students expressed worry about losing soccer and play fields during a multi-year rebuild at the current site.
- Safety: One student highlighted the need for a traffic light at the Kopper King site to ensure safe crossing, while others questioned the safety of learning adjacent to heavy equipment and construction dust.

### 3. Technical and site-specific feedback

- Kopper King: Feedback focused on the site's topography and history. Specific concerns were raised regarding the presence of historical artifacts on the southeast portion of the lot. Residents also flagged spring flooding issues and the lack of existing active transportation (bike paths) along the highway.

- CGC/Hamilton Boulevard: While popular for its proximity to recreational amenities, some residents questioned the impact of “infilling” green space in Valleyview and sought clarity on the future plans for adjacent Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN) settlement land.

### 4. Alternative site suggestions

Participants used these sessions to suggest locations not in the current proposal, including:

- The previous Takhini North site (reiterating support for the original plan).
- 5th and Rogers: Undeveloped downtown lot.
- Collaborative site: A suggestion to build adjacent to Elijah Smith Elementary, citing existing infrastructure and the potential for a “campus-style” collaboration between Francophone and First Nations programming.

### 5. Community amenities

There was strong advocacy for the new school to serve as a community hub. The Yukon Pickleball Association specifically recommended the inclusion of a regulation-sized gymnasium and the development of outdoor pickleball courts to maximize the public value of the new school grounds.

## Next steps

We sincerely thank everyone who took the time to participate in this engagement. The feedback gathered through this process is a vital component of the decision-making process for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School.

To inform the final site selection, the Government of Yukon is also conducting a comprehensive technical analysis led by Kobayashi + Zedda Architects. This evaluation examines physical and environmental feasibility, infrastructure and utility requirements, and accessibility for pedestrians and transit. It also considers land-use compatibility with surrounding neighbourhoods and a detailed comparative cost analysis of each location.

Additionally, government-to-government engagement with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation and the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council will take place to discuss the proposed site options before a final decision on the school's location is made.

The goal is to balance what we heard from the community with these technical and financial realities to choose the best long-term home for the school. We will continue to engage with the ÉWES community, local residents, and other key stakeholders as this work moves forward.

# Appendix 1

## Online public engagement summary

### Provide feedback on the new location of École Whitehorse Elementary School

#### How do I participate?

You can participate by completing a short, anonymous survey. It should take about 10 minutes to complete. The survey is open until April 26, 2026.

You can also participate by attending a public information session. There are 3 bilingual drop-in sessions available (French-speaking facilitator on site):

- Date: Tuesday, March 24  
Time: 6 to 8 pm  
Location: Hidden Valley Elementary School, 5 Macpherson Road, Whitehorse
- Date: Wednesday, March 25  
Time: 6 to 8 pm  
Location: CSSC Mercier, 1009 Lewes Boulevard, Whitehorse
- Date: Thursday, March 26  
Time: 6 to 8 pm  
Location: Elijah Smith Elementary School, 1399 Hamilton Blvd, Whitehorse

To submit written responses, share additional input or ask questions about the École Whitehorse Elementary School replacement project, email [edu-policy@yukon.ca](mailto:edu-policy@yukon.ca).

Yukoners have until April 26, 2026, to provide feedback.

#### What is this engagement about?

We want to hear from Yukoners about their preferred location for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School. As part of this, we want to understand your priorities for the new location.

In December 2025, the Government of Yukon announced it would look for a new location for the future École Whitehorse Elementary School. The project will no longer move forward at the Takhini Educational Land Reserve. With 3 possible locations identified, your feedback will help inform the Yukon government's decision on where the new school will be built.

#### How will my input make a difference?

Your ideas, input, concerns and needs will help guide this decision for the school community and the broader Whitehorse area.

#### Where can I find related information?

The Whitehorse schools replacement ranking, released in 2022, identifies Whitehorse schools to be renovated or replaced in the coming years. The ranking is based on a set of weighted criteria, including:

- building condition;
- enrolment demand;
- utilization; and
- support for an adaptive, modern and integrated learning environment.

In October 2023, we released the What We Heard report: Whitehorse Schools Capital Planning public engagement following a public engagement that ran from March 2023 to May 2023.

#### Where can I find results?

We'll post the results of this engagement on [yukon.ca/engagements](https://yukon.ca/engagements).

#### Give your feedback on the engagement process

We value Yukoners' input in the decision-making process. If there's something we could do to improve the engagement process, share your thoughts by emailing [edu-policy@yukon.ca](mailto:edu-policy@yukon.ca).



# Online public survey

## Preamble

The Government of Yukon has identified three possible locations for a new École Whitehorse Elementary School. Each site could accommodate a school of the size needed to support current and future students.

The following background information explains:

- why the school needs to be fully replaced
- why relocation is being considered
- which sites are being looked at
- what this survey is meant to do

École Whitehorse Elementary School is 75 years old. It is the oldest operating school in the Yukon. Renovating the existing building would cost about 1.4 times more than building a new school. The building would also need major upgrades to meet current building standards. For these reasons, renovation is not a cost-effective option.

The school is also operating over its intended capacity. The building does not adequately support modern learning needs. There are challenges with:

- technology
- flexible and innovative learning spaces
- accessibility
- natural and indoor lighting
- acoustics

These issues negatively affect the learning environment for students and staff.

Three potential sites were identified through an initial review. This review focused on Government of Yukon–owned land that is relatively central and close to major roads. The sites being considered are:

- A. Current École Whitehorse Elementary School Site**
- B. Kopper King – Lot 435**
- C. Unsurveyed Lot by the Canada Games Centre**

Aerial images of each site are included in the survey to help provide context.

Feedback from this survey, along with input from other engagement activities, will be used to help assess the options and inform recommendations for a preferred site.

## Survey questions

### 1. Are you a Yukon resident?

- a. Yes
- b. No

### 2. Where to you live?

- a. Whitehorse area
- b. Another part of the Yukon

### 3. What neighbourhood do you live in?

- a. Arkell/Ingram
- b. Copper Ridge
- c. Cowley Creek
- d. Crestview
- e. Downtown
- f. Granger
- g. Hidden Valley/Macpherson
- h. Hillcrest
- i. Kopper King
- j. Lobird
- k. Logan
- l. Macrae/Whitehorse Copper/Mclean Lake/Mt Sima/Canyon Crescent
- m. Marwell
- n. Mary Lake/Spruce Hill
- o. McIntyre
- p. Pineridge/Fox Haven
- q. Porter Creek/Kulan/Taylor
- r. Range Point
- s. Ravens Ridge/Eagles Eye
- t. Riverdale
- u. Takhini/University
- v. Valleyview
- w. Whistle Bend
- x. Wolf Creek
- y. Not within a defined neighbourhood

### 4. How old are you?

- a. Under 18 years old
- b. 18-29 years old
- c. 30-39 years old
- d. 40-49 years old
- e. 50-59 years old
- f. 60-64 years old
- g. Over 65 years old

### 5. Are you a parent or legal guardian of a child 18 years of age or younger?

- a. Yes
- b. No

**6. Are you the parent or guardian of a student who attends École Whitehorse Elementary School?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**7. In your view, which one of the following sites would be the best location for the new École Whitehorse Elementary School?**

- a. Current École Whitehorse Elementary School Site
- b. Kopper King – Lot 435
- c. Unsurveyed Lot by the Canada Games Centre
- d. Other (please specify):
- e. Not sure / no preference

**8. What are the main reasons for your preference? Select all that apply:**

- a. Close to where families live, which can reduce travel time.
- b. Helps reduce traffic and improves safety for students who walk, bike, or are dropped off.
- c. Fits well with the surrounding neighbourhood and supports a strong sense of community.
- d. Has enough space for a modern school, outdoor play areas, and possible future growth.

- e. Close to shared community spaces, such as parks, trails, recreation centres, or sports fields.
- f. Easy to access by public transit, bike, or on foot.
- g. Helps reduce environmental impacts (for example, by limiting development on natural or green spaces).
- h. Is not close to areas that could raise safety concerns for students.
- i. Minimizes disruptions to learning and access for École Whitehorse Elementary School students, staff, and families during the new school construction.
- j. Other (please specify):

**9. Do you have any additional comments or suggestions?**

[Open ended]

A mural at ÉWES







Department of Education

June 2026