

Summary of Public Feedback

Open House Public Engagement and Survey for ÉWES Project



July 2025 Final Report

Prepared for: Department of Education

What We Heard Report: Stakeholder Feedback on the Relocation of École Whitehorse Elementary School (ÉWES)

Executive Summary

On April 10, 2025, the Yukon Government hosted an open house as a public engagement event for the public to learn more about the new École Whitehorse Elementary School (ÉWES) at the Educational Land Reserve in Takhini. The initiative aimed to inform the public concerns and gather suggestions about the recent traffic study, discuss planned safety measures, and outline the next steps for the project, including new investment in sports and recreation.

The event, held at Takhini Elementary School, was attended by approximately 110 people and supported by three Yukon Government Departments. A total of 154 community members responded to the survey, Takhini Neighbourhood Residents represented a majority share of respondents (81). There was also representation amongst ÉWES and Takhini Elementary School parents, educators, and other stakeholders.

Key Findings

1. Traffic and Student Safety

- Bus Loop Concerns: Respondents expressed mixed views on the proposed shared bus loop. While some appreciated the concept's efficiency, many raised concerns about safety, capacity, and increased traffic congestion, particularly along Range Road.
- Respondents felt the proposed projections of 90% of ÉWES students to take the bus daily was a lofty estimation.
- Traffic Mitigation: There was moderate support for proposed roundabouts and bike lanes, but residents stressed the need for coordinated planning with the City of Whitehorse and improved pedestrian safety measures, such as pedestrian controlled crosswalks across Range Road at Rhine Way and Normandy Road, raised crosswalks and traffic-calming infrastructure.

2. Community Recreation Facilities

- The inclusion of a large gymnasium and other recreational amenities was widely supported as a community benefit. Respondents suggested features like climbing walls, running tracks, and multipurpose rooms. However, concerns were raised about potential impacts on Takhini Elementary's outdoor learning and recreational space and the prioritization of community use over student needs.

3. School Start Times

- Proposals to stagger school hours to reduce traffic were met with hesitancy. While some saw the potential benefit, many parents worried about the impact on daily routines and after-school care logistics.

4. Green Space Preservation
 - Protecting local greenspace was a top priority. Nearly 74% of digital survey respondents highlighted the importance of accessible green areas. Many opposed the relocation if it meant the loss of existing natural play areas for Takhini Elementary students.
5. Public Communication & Engagement
 - Many respondents criticized the limited and late-stage engagement process. While some appreciated the opportunity to provide input, others expressed frustration with the format of the open house and the feeling of a lack of transparent, ongoing communication. A desire for townhall-style discussions and more proactive outreach was repeatedly emphasized. Some respondents expressed apathy toward the process of the engagement due to the perceived optics that the project appears to be moving ahead without meaningful engagement and public feedback.
6. Reaction to the Takhini Location
 - Public opinion on relocating ÉWES to Takhini was divided. While some valued proximity to recreational infrastructure, others raised equity concerns and questioned why alternative sites (e.g., Whistle Bend, across from CGC) weren't fully considered. There were also some who raised concerns about the location's proximity to the Whitehorse Correctional Centre.

Conclusion

The community showed a strong interest in contributing to the future of education and infrastructure development in Whitehorse. While many respondents acknowledged the potential benefits of the proposed relocation, significant concerns were raised—particularly about traffic, planning coordination, and preserving green space. Many respondents also strongly urge the Department of Education and greater Yukon Government to take a multi-jurisdictional approach, involving the City of Whitehorse as well as the *Ta'an Kwäch'än Council* and the *Kwanlin Dün First Nation* throughout the planning of this project.

Final version by: Robyn Burns of Merren Communications

Date: July 2025

What We Heard Report

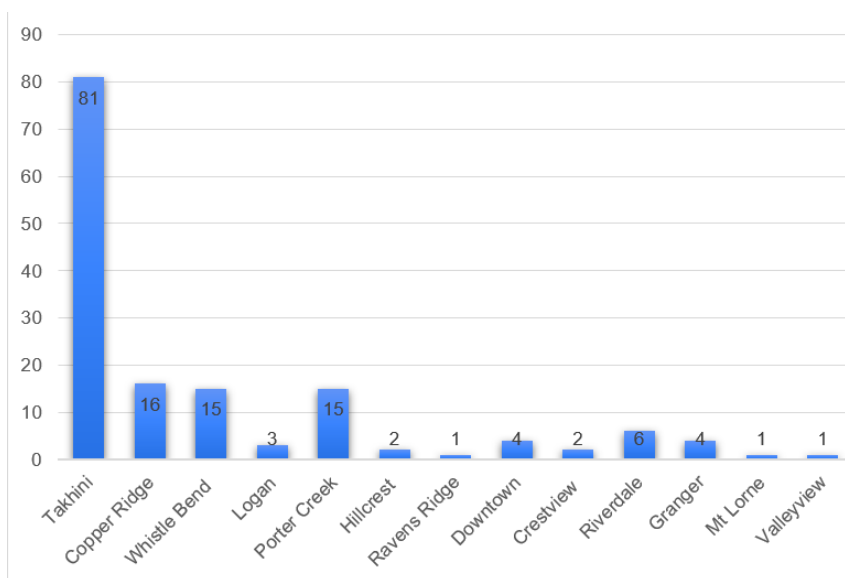
Introduction

On April 10, 2025, the Yukon Government, Department of Education conducted an open house at Takhini Elementary School to engage the public in the plan to relocate and build a new École Whitehorse Elementary

School (EWES) to the Educational Land Reserve in Takhini. This report summarizes the feedback received from community members through a survey created by the Yukon Government. It was offered in a hardcopy version handed out at the event as well as digitized as a Google survey in order to compile the feedback from community members consisting of: Takhini Elementary School parents, EWES parents, educators, Takhini Neighbourhood residents and other public stakeholders who attended the open house and who had the link to the digital survey that was closed to submission on April 11, 2025 at 10 pm.

The aim of the survey created by the Yukon Government was to understand concerns, preferences, and suggestions regarding transportation, infrastructure, community impact, and school amenities related to the school relocation. Merren Communications, a sole proprietorship based in Whitehorse, Yukon, was hired to compile the responses and create this report.

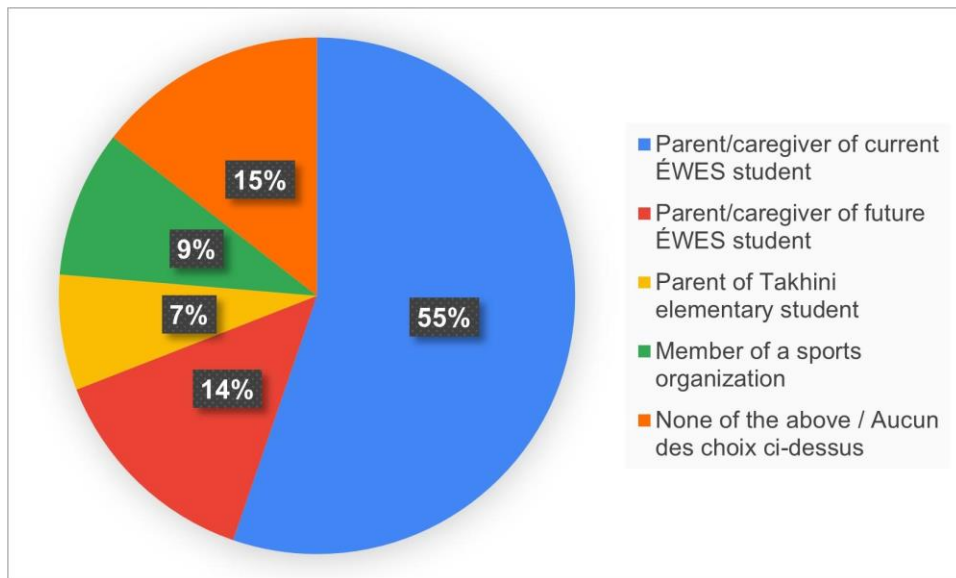
Scope of Public Reached



Approximately 110 people attended the open house. There were 4 Yukon Government booths set up with posters outlining project information for public consumption. Each booth was facilitated by at least one Yukon Government representative: Department of Education, Highways and Public Works and Community Services. Hardcopy surveys and additional feedback forms were available at all the tables as were QR codes to connect

attendees to the digital version of the survey.

In total, there were 154 respondents to the survey: 118 digital and 36 hard copies. And in total 52.9% of all survey respondents identified themselves as residents of the Takhini neighbourhood. When asked what best describes the respondent, 55% of the sample reported being a parent of a current EWES student.



The following are the key themes found through survey responses.

Key Theme 1: Concerns Around Traffic and Student Safety

Section A)

Proposed Bus Loop

i. Capacity & Safety Concerns

Many respondents are unsure whether a shared bus loop could safely and effectively handle the volume of buses and students. Key concerns include:

- Is there enough room for all the buses?
- Would drop-offs at one location be safe for young children from two separate schools?
- Is there precedent or research showing this works elsewhere?

Comments:

"Has it worked well elsewhere? Is it safe for small children?"

"Not sure the number of buses coming in all at once could be supported."

"How would it be supervised? Littles are little."

ii. Traffic, Congestion & Range Road Impact

A major theme is worry about increased traffic congestion with an additional school community as well as a growing Whistle Bend Neighbourhood with residents who use Range Road as a cut through.

- Concerns about Range Road already being a busy through-road from Whistle Bend and Porter Creek neighbourhood traffic.
- Fears that more buses + parent drop-offs could create confusion or bottlenecks in Takhini.
- Worries that traffic issues could spill beyond the school zone.

Comments:

"Not on Range Road — too many people use this road to get elsewhere."

"More congestion with buses as well as confusion potentially between schools."

"Regardless, buses will be turning and crossing traffic no matter how many loops are considered."

iii. Conditional or Cautious Support for Shared Bus Loops

Some respondents like the idea *in theory* — but only if specific conditions are met:

- Sufficient buses are available.
- Adequate drop-off parking for parents.
- Good design and traffic flow.
- Clear supervision and safety planning for students.

Comments:

"Fine as long as there is sufficient parking for parents to drop off."



"Makes good sense."

"Cost effective and efficient — go for it."

"It makes sense."

"I think it's going to cause congestion and delays."

Summary on Proposed Shared Bus Loop:

→ *The shared bus loop idea has mixed reactions:*

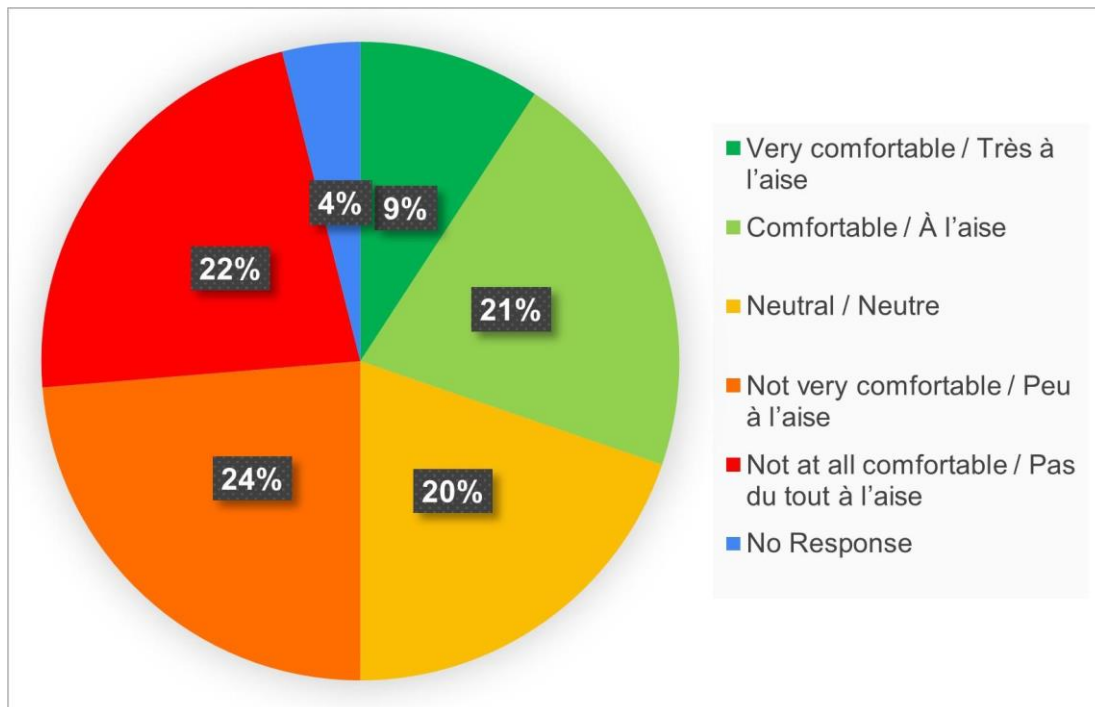
- Some see potential benefits (efficiency, cost-saving).
- But many raise questions about capacity, safety, and traffic impacts — especially on already congested Range Road, where morning traffic is described to be at times backed up from Two Mile Hill to the Whitehorse Correctional Facility.

Section B)

Traffic Calming Mitigation Design, Roundabouts and Safety

i. Proposed Roundabouts and Bike Lanes for Range Road

The greater share of respondents reported a greater comfort level or neutrality with the proposed infrastructure:



Some respondents expressed concern over the general public's lack of understanding of how roundabouts work, citing the Riverdale Neighborhood's use of roundabouts that come to a complete standstill during peak school drop off and pick up hours.

Several respondents called for the Yukon Government to work alongside the City of Whitehorse for a coordinated plan to improve safety infrastructure ahead of any major capital projects going into the Takhini Neighbourhood. Some called for pedestrian controlled crosswalks specifically at **Rhine Way** and **Normandy Road**. Others celebrated incorporating safe active transportation into the design plan.

Notable Comments, Ideas or Suggestions:

"I love everything about bike lanes and traffic calming. I would like further traffic calming such as speed bumps and cross walk lights to encourage safe speeds."

"There should be a car turning lane to the west (towards CGC) at the Two Mile Hill lights. Bumper-to-bumper traffic is not safe for children."

"Update the traffic study - show the flow of people along Range Road, including children and seniors... invite Yukon University to planning meetings."

"Protected Bike lanes on BOTH sides of Range Road please!"

"Two lanes need to be projected for going up to the university there will be backlog and traffic backups if not."

"Work on alleviating the traffic from Whistle Bend to downtown. The traffic from Takhini really isn't that bad."

"The buses aren't the problem; there are 5 or 6 buses to WES. Individual people in cars are the problem. We need better transit routes, incentive for people to take public transit, safer bike lanes and pedestrian crossing."

Concerns and Frustrations:

"Traffic is terrible, takes me 25 minutes to get downtown from University at 3:10 pm."

"It is frustrating to hear that the school is being placed here before any significant infrastructure improvements... It feels like a lack of coordination and passing the problem along."

"The traffic study downplays the significant disruption a new school will cause... From 7:45 to 9:00 a.m., traffic is regularly backed up all the way to the correctional center."

“The traffic report only considers the 80% busing scenario — essentially the best-case outcome... it feels like the Yukon Government is just checking a box.”

“Range road entry and exit do not have the capacity to support more traffic at peak times. We need better infrastructure to support this project before it goes forward.”

Summary of Community Feedback on Range Road Traffic and School Development

Key Concerns:

1. Traffic Congestion

- Many residents report daily backups along Range Road and Two Mile Hill, with traffic extending to Normandy Road and even the jail during peak hours.
- There is widespread concern that existing infrastructure is already overloaded, and that adding a school will significantly worsen congestion, especially during morning and afternoon commutes.

2. Questionable Assumptions in Traffic Report

- The projected **80–90%** bus ridership is broadly viewed as **unrealistic**. Many cite personal examples of children being registered for buses but only riding occasionally.
- Yukon’s **2.7%** growth rate and Whistle Bend’s rapid expansion are seen as underrepresented in the analysis. Some respondents suggest that a **3%+** scenario should be considered.

3. Infrastructure Planning & Coordination

- Many feel infrastructure improvements should come **before** placing a new school on the site.
- There is frustration about the perceived lack of coordination between the Yukon Government and the City of Whitehorse.

4. Safety for Pedestrians and Cyclists

While bike lanes and traffic calming are generally supported, concerns were raised about visibility at intersections, safety near traffic circles and poor design choices, particularly where Range Road meets University Drive.

- Suggestions include: raised crosswalks, flashing lights, physical barriers between bike lanes and roads, and wider sidewalks.

Summary of Public Ideas & Suggestions:

- Roundabouts: Mixed feedback; some support them, while others believe they are unsafe or ineffective for school buses, winter driving and cyclists.
- Bus Use: Expand public transit routes and offer real incentives for use; do daily bus ridership counts.



- Active Transportation: Prioritize city-wide investments in biking and walking infrastructure — not just near the school.
- New Access Roads: Consider additional exits from the area (e.g., toward Kopper King) to help disperse traffic.
- School Design: Ensure sufficient parent drop-off zones, one-way traffic flows, and setbacks from roads to minimize congestion.
- Better Communication: Provide summaries for those who could not attend open houses and involve stakeholders like Yukon University and the City of Whitehorse earlier and more transparently.

Diverse Viewpoints:

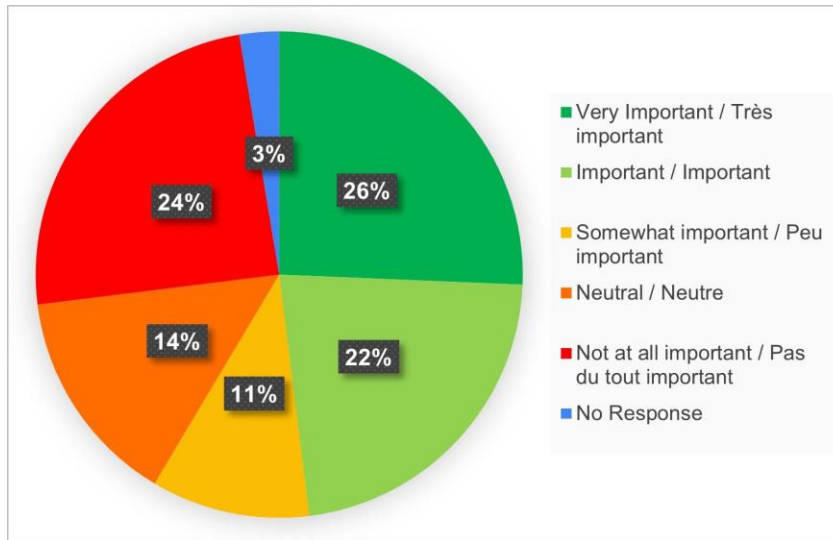
- Some respondents fully support the plan, citing the benefits of bus use and cycling infrastructure.
- Others believe traffic is a solvable problem and that school relocation should proceed with improvements.
- Still, a large segment sees the proposal as deeply flawed, calling for striking the Educational Land Reserve in Takhini off the list of the relocation site and a complete rethinking of traffic assumptions and infrastructure timelines.

Key Theme 2: Interest in Improved Community Recreational Facilities

The inclusion of a large gymnasium and upgraded recreational infrastructure as part of the relocation plan was positively received. Many respondents were supportive of community access to these facilities outside school hours and saw the gym as a key benefit to the broader neighbourhood and community.

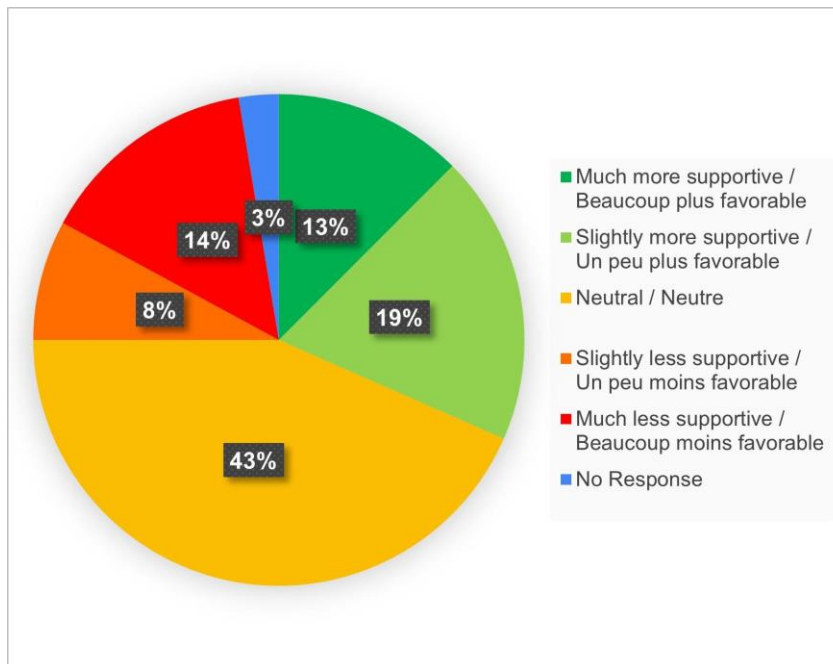
Suggestions include multipurpose rooms, drama space/stage, sports amenities: squash courts and climbing wall, and kitchen spaces for community gatherings.

In the survey respondents were asked: ‘How important is the planned construction of new sport and recreation infrastructure in Whitehorse (e.g. gym, softball upgrades, multi-sport field) to you?’ With which a combined total of 59% of question respondents reported importance.



The survey also asked respondents: "The new ÉWES will include a large gym, which will be available to the community outside school hours. Does this make you more or less likely to support the relocation of the school to the Takhini Land Reserve?"

With which a majority felt both neutral and in favour of it.



However, in terms of the outdoor multisport field there was considerable concern from the Takhini Elementary community that it would unfairly annex the school's outdoor playground space and affect how the school's outdoor pedagogy steeped in traditional teachings would carry on in the greenspace behind the existing school.

Notable Comments:

Supportive and Imaginative Ideas:

"It's going to have to be VERY large, with ample seating and viewing area, and will have to cater to basically ALL indoor sports played in the city; soccer, basketball, judo, EVERYTHING."

"Climbing wall and a stage for the school to use for performance."

"An inside running track that is on a 'second level', just like the one at the CGC... A separate area for kids to do Parkour. Fitness area with stationary bikes (great for winter)."

"Money does not seem to be a problem so invest in kids' activities as much as possible. 10k now in a kids' rock-climbing addiction might save 100k in medical treatment."

Balanced or Cautious Views:

"As long as the gym doesn't take away from classroom space. Large classrooms are desired over a large gym."

"Anything that is good value and accessible for as many as possible."

"The building of a new gym won't make this project work. It won't make me support the project. But yes, you are building a school, and a school is community infrastructure. Community infrastructure should include all sorts of amenities for the community."

"Biggest concern is removal of forest behind Takhini school and building of field complex. I teach Kwanlin Dun first nation culture at Takhini school, and the forest is our classroom. Medicines and first nations teachings are abundant in the space and removal, and destruction of our natural environment is irreversible. Could there be an area set aside for a culture camp? Could there be a fire ring indoor teaching structure for elders?"

"There needs to be enough space. Currently there is not a big enough gym for the kids at EWES to have gym as often as other schools in Whitehorse... ensuring that physical activity is thought out well for the students and the users is a very important aspect."

"Community spaces and noise dampening. Make considerations with neurodiversity in mind."

Critical and Concerned Feedback:

"Statements and questions related to new facilities are inherently biased. Facilities should be focused on needs for school rather than the community."

“This new gym looks like the government is just last minute trying to buy support.”

“Don’t approve of any facilities constructed in this area. Start moving construction of facilities outside the already overly congested areas.”

“Traffic management before gym and addressing local community who will bear negative impacts of school PRIOR to asking about gym or softball.”

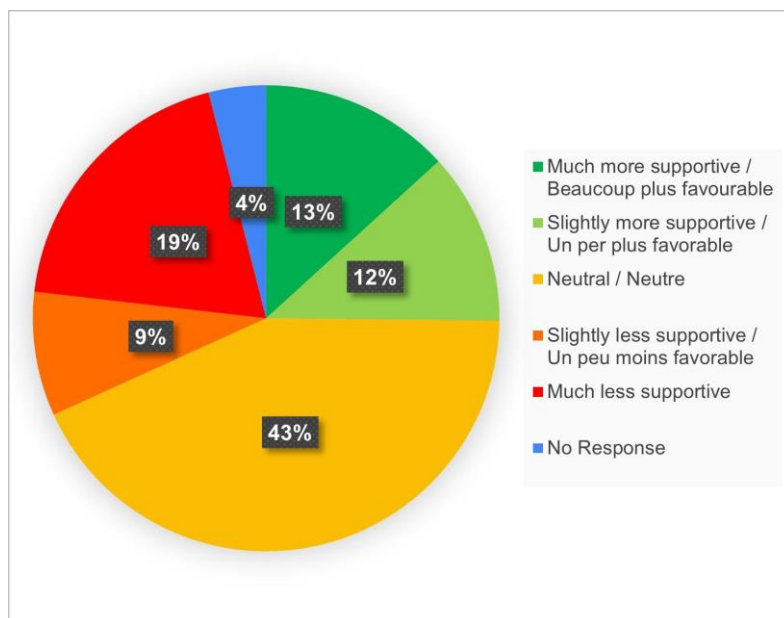
“Keep the school downtown. Moving it to Takhini is a bad idea.”

“As a teacher, I am very concerned that these infrastructures will be at the cost of smaller class sizes and a smaller library. This is not a rec center, but a school.”

“Why a new gym? The CGC is 1.5 km from the current Takhini school”

The survey also asked: “Sport Yukon and Softball Yukon support relocating ÉWES to enhance community access to recreational facilities. Does knowing this make you more or less likely to support the relocation?”

The majority of respondents were neutral, a combined group of respondents (28%) reported less favourable, while (25%) were favourable.



The Yukon Government employees tending the information tables reported hearing about drainage concerns from community members. Several attendees expressed concerns regarding what can be done to fix the drainage issues at the Takhini lot and noted that whatever may be built should not negatively impact the healthy trees in and around the school lot or the residences nearby.

Notable Comments:

“Feels like a baseball field is more important than the Takhini school and field. Remove the ballfield and have two

separate school fields. Where will Takhini be rebuilt? Educational land reserve should be set for schools not for softball Yukon. Prioritize the two schools.”

“The one softball field on the west side of Range that is proposed to be rebuilt needs to go elsewhere. That land could be so much better used by kids either as open yard, to play or soccer field (thereby reducing

impact on green space behind Takhini elementary). I can't believe the government has picked the needs of softball players who are there a few nights a week for a few months of the year over year-round residents. We are there 24/7 and our needs should come higher! It's a slap in the face to Takhini residents. If this field was moved I could support this project."

"Look at the big picture re planning sport fields. Whitehorse needs to reduce fire risk in the perimeter of the city. Build new softball fields, soccer fields, cricket fields etc. in the path of prevailing winds in summer, i.e., put these fields south of the city. We need all the wildfire protection we can get before a wildfire hits any residential areas."

"The current softball diamonds, and green space behind and beside Takhini Elementary are heavily used by students, neighborhood residents and recreation in the community. This would be a huge loss of green space. What is the infrastructure plan for drainage? It is well known in the neighborhood that every spring it floods and there is a forest swamp in that area and baseball diamonds. How would the new build accommodate this/ mitigate?"

Key Theme 3: Hesitancy About Changing School Hours

While traffic mitigation is a concern, proposals for staggered school start and end times received minimal support. Respondents were cautious about how such changes would affect family routines, after-school care, and coordination with other schools.

Notable Comments:

"An alternative bell schedule could work, but not to punish the parents"

"Not supportive—would affect after-school care."

"Somewhat in favour if it actually helps reduce traffic."

"Strongly oppose—kids need consistent timing."

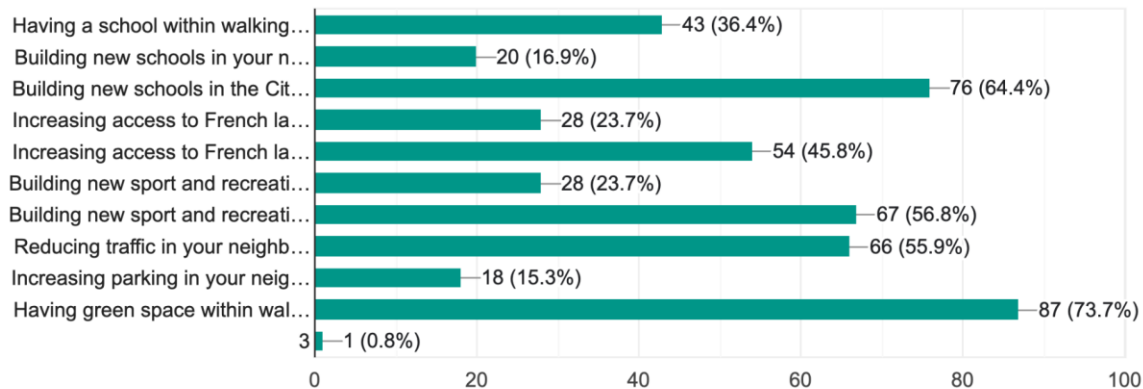
Key Theme 4: Protection of Green Space

When survey respondents were asked to select what was important to them in the digital version, the highest number of respondents selected, 'having greenspace within walking distance of your home' a total of 87 respondents- 73.7% of the share.

Below are the digital survey results for this question.

Please select the following factors that are important to you / Veuillez sélectionner les facteurs suivants qui sont importants pour vous

118 responses



(The complete questions as they appeared)

1. Having a school within walking distance of your home / Avoir une école à distance de marche de chez vous
2. Building new schools in your neighbourhood / Construire de nouvelles écoles dans votre quartier
3. Building new schools in the City of Whitehorse / Construire de nouvelles écoles dans la ville de Whitehorse
4. Increasing access to French language education in your neighbourhood / Accroître l'accès à l'enseignement en français dans votre quartier
5. Increasing access to French language education in the City of Whitehorse / Accroître l'accès à l'enseignement en français dans la ville de Whitehorse
6. Building new sport and recreation infrastructure in your neighbourhood / Construire de nouvelles infrastructures sportives et récréatives dans votre quartier
7. Building new sport and recreation infrastructure in the City of Whitehorse / Construire de nouvelles infrastructures sportives et récréatives dans la ville de Whitehorse
8. Reducing traffic in your neighbourhood / Réduire la circulation dans votre quartier
9. Increasing parking in your neighbourhood / Augmenter les possibilités de stationnement dans votre quartier
10. Having green space within walking distance of your home / Avoir des espaces verts accessibles à pied de votre domicile

Speaking with Takhini Neighbourhood residents and parents of students attending Takhini Elementary, protecting existing greenspace was of primary importance also noted above in reference to Softball Yukon Fields.

Yukon Government employees tending the information tables at the open house reported hearing from several attendees who want to ensure existing trees in the area (between Evergreen Townhouses and Takhini Elementary) remain.

Key Theme 5: Communication Preferences & Transparency

Respondents emphasized the importance of clear, consistent, and accessible communication throughout the project timeline. Most favoured digital methods for updates, including Yukon.ca, email newsletters, and social media.

However, many respondents and attendees at the open house expressed frustration that this was the first opportunity for real engagement on the ÉWES replacement project. Some expressed displeasure over the setup of the open house where they had to line up and ask questions of Yukon Government employees who were not always able to provide answers; some described the experience as scripted. Many said they would have opted for a townhall style public engagement where they would be able to ask questions openly and hear other attendees' questions and concerns. Meanwhile, Yukon Government employees staffing the booths during the open house described the event's structure as allowing attendees to voice their concerns politely. *'And that the staff went into the event with a positive and friendly attitude, which also helped keep the tone of the open house as positive as possible.'*

There was a slight majority of attendees at the open house from the Takhini Neighbourhood and many said there has been no meaningful engagement with the Community Association on this project to date. Takhini Elementary parents and staff also reported not having the opportunity to engage with the Yukon Government before this open house was held.

Notable Comments:

Critical Feedback:

"It seems that the Department of Education is doing homework on relocation of Whitehorse elementary after the political decision was made."

"Yukon government has never hosted any sort of engagement similar to what you were doing here in Takhini for downtown residents. Irresponsible shortsighted and offensive are the best terms to describe your complete disregard of our communities and trust."

"I'm disappointed with the format of the open house. I can't help but feel that that was intentional to minimize public sentiment. It's a very poor method if you want to disseminate information or to ask questions. There were not nearly enough staff for the number of people who attended."

"It would be nice if you provided a summary document of information for those who could not attend the open house so that we could complete this survey more effectively. Just because we didn't attend doesn't mean a lack of importance. I honestly feel reliance on the open house for relaying information to be outdated."

"I spoke to Community Services and was extremely disheartened to learn their role in this is to support Softball Yukon keeping their space in Takhini. Respectfully, I don't care if moving one or two of their baseball diamonds is an inconvenience to their group. They are infrequent, seasonal users and their

needs should not outweigh the needs of residents of Takhini - I am referring to the destruction of green space for the new multi-use field. If CS is supporting Softball Yukon, it only seems fair that another group in government is present to support the residents. I'm generally NOT opposed to having school in Takhini, but this is my biggest sticking point. I do not care if Softball Yukon is inconvenienced. Many YG staff present at tonight's open house were 'new' and didn't seem to know any answers. That was very disappointing to me and made me feel like YG was just checking a box with their open house."

Supportive Feedback:

"Thank you for consulting. Quite informative. Please continue consultations. From what I have learned, this was the best and most suitable location. Please plan within budget. If more time is needed that is OK Whitehorse elementary school is still operational for a few more years."

"Thank you for your efforts to build a new French school in Takhini. Thank you for holding this open house when we can ask questions."

Key Theme 6: Public Reaction to the Takhini Location

The proposed relocation of ÉWES to the Educational Land Reserve in Takhini prompted varied reactions. Some community members welcomed the move due to its proximity to recreational infrastructure and potential for new development. Many others expressed concern about the neighbourhood's capacity to absorb additional traffic, the impact on current residents and students at the existing FNSB (First Nation School Board) school - Takhini Elementary, and whether the location for the new ÉWES serves the broader population equitably.

In much of the feedback on this topic respondents questioned why other locations have not been considered mainly: land across from the CGC, the existing FH Collins or Robert Service Ball Park. They also questioned why the new ÉWES must go on a slice of Educational Land Reserve versus acquiring new land or working with a First Nation to rent land in a more suitable location with more space.

And 11 respondents mentioned their discomfort with the proximity of the site to Territorial Correctional Facilities.

Notable Comments:

"Not convinced Whitehorse Elementary needs to relocate to Takhini. There are huge concerns about losing our neighborhood school Takhini Elementary and increased traffic on and around Range Road and losing buffer between children and Whitehorse jail and losing green space for free play access to

nature. Put a school in Copper Ridge. If 80% of students bus to Whitehorse elementary put French immersion in neighborhoods so they don't have to bus."

"Why is Downtown out of the question?"

"The location is great for recreation but not ideal for accessibility."

"It would be terrible for the students and parents who don't live nearby."

"Takhini has the space, but what about equity for all neighbourhoods?"

Conclusion

The public engagement process for the construction of École Whitehorse Elementary School (ÉWES) to the Takhini Educational Land Reserve generated a wide range of feedback from community members, reflecting both enthusiasm and concern. Participants in the survey and open house identified key priorities including student safety, traffic and infrastructure planning, protection of green space, enhanced recreational amenities, and improved communication and transparency throughout the project.

While many respondents recognized potential benefits—such as new sport and recreation facilities and opportunities to support active transportation—significant concerns were raised about traffic congestion on Range Road, the capacity of current infrastructure, and the potential impacts on the Takhini neighbourhood, its residents, and existing school community. Feedback also highlighted a strong desire for the Yukon Government to improve coordination across departments and with the City of Whitehorse to ensure planning is integrated and responsive to community needs. Many respondents also wanted to ensure the Yukon Government approaches this project with projected wider population growth in mind, while also considering the needs of next door Takhini Elementary that also has aging infrastructure.

The importance of early, ongoing, and meaningful engagement emerged as a central theme. Community members expressed a clear expectation to be kept informed and involved as the project progresses. Many called for additional opportunities to provide input, greater transparency in decision-making, and a commitment to incorporating community voices in both the planning and implementation phases.

This "What We Heard" report is a key step in documenting the perspectives and priorities of Yukoners. It will inform the next steps in the planning process and help guide decisions to ensure the relocation of ÉWES upholds the needs and values for the communities it serves.