

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION PUPIL ACCOMMODATION REVIEW GUIDELINES

PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines* (previously referred to as school closure guidelines) is to provide direction to school boards regarding public accommodation reviews undertaken to determine the future of a school or group of schools.

The guidelines ensure that where a decision is taken by a school board regarding the future of a school, that decision is made with the full involvement of an informed local community and it is based on a broad range of criteria regarding the quality of the learning experience for students.

In recognition of the important role schools play in strengthening rural and urban communities and the importance of healthy communities for student success, it is also expected that decisions consider the value of the school to the community, taking into account other government initiatives aimed at strengthening communities.

School boards in Ontario are responsible for providing schools and facilities for their students and for operating and maintaining their schools as effectively and efficiently as possible to support student achievement.

Under paragraph 26, subsection 8 (1) of the *Education Act*, the Minister of Education may issue guidelines with respect to school boards' school closure policies. These guidelines are effective upon release.

SCHOOL BOARD ACCOMMODATION REVIEW POLICIES

School boards are responsible for establishing and following their own accommodation review policies. At a minimum, boards' accommodation review policies are to reflect the requirements of the *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines* set out below.

A copy of the school board's accommodation review policy, the government's *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines* and the *Administrative Review of Accommodation Review Process* documents are to be available at the school board's office and posted on the school board's website.

The guidelines recognize that, wherever possible, accommodation reviews should focus on a group of schools within a school board's planning area rather than examine a single school. These schools would be reviewed together because they are located close enough to the other schools within a planning area to facilitate the development of viable and practical solutions for student accommodation.

SCHOOL VALUATION

School boards in Ontario are responsible for conducting public accommodation reviews to determine the future of a particular school or schools. School valuation is the focus of the pupil accommodation review process. To support the school valuation process, school boards are required to develop a generic School Valuation Framework that assesses each of the following four considerations about the school(s) being reviewed:

- Value to the student
- Value to the community
- Value to the school board
- Value to the local economy

The assessment is to weigh the value of the school(s) to the student above the other considerations. School boards are to develop their generic School Valuation Framework with the assistance of a public committee. It is recommended that this committee include parents, educators, board officials, and business and municipal leaders.

The public review of a particular school or schools is to be led by an Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) appointed by the board. Each ARC must include membership drawn from the school community and the broader community. It is recommended that the committee include parents, educators, board officials, and business and municipal leaders. The generic School Valuation Framework will be customized for use by the ARC to assess the value of the school(s) being considered. If multiple schools within the same planning area are being reviewed together, each school must undergo a valuation specific to that school using the same framework.

The following are examples of factors that the ARC may assess under each of the four considerations. ARCs are encouraged to introduce other factors that could be used to reflect local circumstances and priorities which may help to further explore the value of the school(s).

Value to the Student

- quality of the learning environment at the school;
- student outcomes at the school;
- range of course or program offerings;
- range of extracurricular activities and extent of student participation;

- adequacy of the school's physical space to support student learning;
- adequacy of the school's grounds for healthy physical activity and extracurricular activities;
- accessibility of the school for students with disabilities;
- safety of the school;
- proximity of the school to students/length of bus ride to school.

Value to the School Board

- student outcomes at the school;
- range of program or course offerings;
- availability of specialized teaching spaces;
- condition and location of school;
- value of the school if it is the only school within the community;
- fiscal and operational factors (e.g., enrolment vs. available space, cost to operate the school, cost of transportation, availability of surplus space in adjacent schools, cost to upgrade the facility so that it can meet student learning objectives).

Value to the Community

- facility for community use;
- range of program offerings at the school that serve both students and community members (e.g., adult ESL);
- school grounds as green space and/or available for recreational use;
- school as a partner in other government initiatives in the community;
- value of the school if it is the only school within the community.

Value to the Local Economy

- school as a local employer;
- availability of cooperative education;
- availability of training opportunities or partnerships with business;
- attracts or retains families in the community;
- value of the school if it is the only school within the community.

ACCOMMODATION REVIEW PROCESS

As indicated above, the public review of each school or group of schools is to be led by a local Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) appointed by the board. Each ARC must include membership drawn from the school community and the broader community.

Once the ARC's review begins, school boards must present alternate accommodation plans for the students of the school(s) as part of the ARC review. The plans are to address where students would be accommodated; what changes to existing facilities may be required; what programs would be available to the students; and transportation.

The Ministry recommends that, wherever possible, schools should only be subject to an accommodation review once in a five-year period.

The Accommodation Review Committee will be responsible for:

School Valuation Framework

ARCs are to customize the board's generic School Valuation Framework to the school(s) under review and make the customized School Valuation Framework public prior to public consultations. The School Valuation Framework must include the four considerations: value to the student, community, school board and the local economy.

Public Information and Access

ARCs are to ensure that all information relevant to the accommodation review is to be made public by posting it in a prominent location on the school board's website or making it available in print upon request. All information that is used to determine the value of a school must be publicly available. Where relevant information is technical in nature, it is to be explained in plain language.

Community Consultation and Public Meetings

Once an accommodation review has been initiated, the ARC must ensure that a wide range of school and community groups are consulted. These groups may include the school(s)' councils, parents, guardians, students, teachers, the local community, and other interested parties.

The consultations must be based on the customized School Valuation Framework in order to elicit input from the various perspectives around the value of the school to the students, community, school board and the local economy. The ARC must also seek input and community feedback on options for accommodating students who would be affected by a school closure.

Public meetings must be well publicized, in advance, through a range of methods and held at the school(s) under review, if possible, or in a nearby facility if physical accessibility cannot be provided at the school(s). Public meetings are to be structured to encourage an open and informed exchange of views. All relevant information developed to support the discussions at the consultation is to be made available in advance.

At a minimum, ARCs are required to hold four public meetings to consult and to present the School Valuation Framework report and recommendations.

Minutes reflecting the full range of opinions expressed at the meetings are to be kept, and made publicly available. ARCs are to ensure that there is a process in place to respond to questions raised at the meetings that cannot be answered at the meetings. For example, responses could be appended to the minutes of the meeting and made available on the board's website.

School Valuation Report and Recommendations

ARCs must complete a School Valuation report for each school reviewed, using the customized School Valuation Framework. The needs of all students within the board's particular planning area are to be considered. To ensure that this is being done, the value of each school should be considered objectively and fairly. The School Valuation report will make recommendations regarding the future of the school(s) being considered.

ARCs must share the School Valuation report, in plain language, with the community at a public meeting. The ARC may make changes to the report based on feedback at the meeting.

The ARC is to submit the School Valuation report to the school board administration. The School Valuation report is to be accessible to trustees and the public. School board staff should review and analyze the School Valuation report. School board staff will present the findings and recommendations of the valuation report along with their proposals and recommendations to the trustees, who will make the final decision regarding the future of the school(s). As part of the board's resolution to close a school, the board must outline clear timelines around when the school(s) will close.

TIMELINES FOR AN ACCOMMODATION REVIEW PROCESS

After the intention to conduct an accommodation review of a school or schools has been announced by the school board, there must be no less than 60 days notice prior to the first of four (minimum) public meetings.

Beginning with the first public meeting, the public consultation period must be no less than 90 days.

After the ARC completes its valuation report it is to make the report and recommendations publicly available and submit the report and recommendations to the school board administration. After the submission of the School Valuation report, there must be no less than 60 days notice prior to the meeting where the trustees will vote on the recommendations.

School holidays such as summer vacation, Christmas break and Spring break must not be considered part of the 60 or 90 day periods.

APPLICATION OF ACCOMMODATION REVIEW GUIDELINES

These guidelines apply to schools offering elementary or secondary regular day-school programs. The following outlines circumstances where school boards are not obligated to undertake an accommodation review in accordance with these *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines*. In these circumstances, although a board is not obligated to undertake a full accommodation review, the board should provide appropriate notice of decisions that would affect the accommodation situation of students.

- Where a replacement school is to be rebuilt by the board on the existing site or located within the existing school attendance boundary as identified through the board's existing policies; i.e., replacement of a rural school within its existing rural community;
- When a lease is terminated;
- When a board is considering the relocation of a grade or grades, or a program, where the enrolment in the grade or grades, or program, constitutes less than 50% of the enrolment of the school;
- When a board is repairing or renovating a school, and the school community must be temporarily relocated to ensure the safety of students during the renovations;
- Where a facility has been serving as a holding school for a school community whose permanent school is under construction or repair.