

Guide to

Pupil Accommodation Reviews



It could grow school boards of parents
and the community to the new process

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Introduction

This Guide to Pupil Accommodation Reviews is to help inform parents and guardians about the process that Ontario’s school boards undertake when reviewing whether to consolidate or close a school.

For parents* attachment to a local school may make the thought of change very difficult. Similarly, school closure decisions are often among the most challenging for school boards. Despite these challenges, school board trustees must focus on the educational needs of all of their students and the prudent distribution of resources to meet those needs.

School boards are committed to community engagement, and when considering school consolidation or closure, they reach out to parents and the public for their input. This public consultation process is called a “pupil accommodation review.” This process is mandated by the Ministry of Education and must occur prior to a decision to close or consolidate a school. It is through the pupil accommodation review that parents communicate to the school board their perspective on the educational needs of their children and their views on the board’s specific proposal for change.

* Throughout this document the term “parents” refers to both parents and legal guardians.

This guide outlines the roles of school boards, parents and community members in the process. The following pages will address the following questions:

- z Why do school boards consolidate and close schools?
- z What do school boards consider before proposing school closures and/or consolidations?
- z How does a pupil accommodation review work?
- z How do I get involved?
- z What happens after a pupil accommodation review is completed?



Why do school boards consolidate and close schools?

Benefits to Students

School boards generally consolidate and close schools to enable improved educational options and opportunities for students.

By bringing students together through a school consolidation, school boards are often able to offer a better educational experience. Some of the potential improvements may include:

- z The range of programming and courses available
- z The availability of specialized support services for individual students or small groups.
- z Specialized facilities, such as gyms, libraries, design and technology, music and science rooms.
- z Sufficient enrolment to support sports teams and other extracurricular activities.
- z A school building in better condition than the one that is to close.
- z Accessibility features with respect to entry, movement within the facility and outdoor play space.

Between 2003 and 2014, the number of students in Ontario schools declined by 152,000 due to a drop in the overall number of school-aged children. This is equivalent to 500 schools of 300 students each. In 2014, 57 of 72 school boards across the province experienced a decline in the number of students enrolled. To compound this challenge, declining enrolment was rarely distributed evenly across all schools of a board. Even boards that are experiencing overall enrolment growth may include neighbourhoods or communities experiencing declining enrolment. In the 2014-15 school year, 358 elementary and 205 secondary schools were less than half full.

Since Ontario school boards are mainly funded on a per-student

Changing Demographics

School boards across Ontario have always opened new schools and closed older schools where the population of students has shifted. This is a reflection of the cycle of economic growth or decline and demographic change within communities. If school boards are to deliver high quality education programs and services to their students, they must respond and adjust to such changes. The Ministry of Education funds education in Ontario and works in partnership with local school boards to manage this change.

What do school boards consider before proposing school closures and/or consolidations?

School Board Planning – An Ongoing Process

School boards are responsible for providing their students with the best possible educational experience. Their job is to put the needs of students first. To maximize their investment in students, boards work to keep education funds focused on the classroom.

Through their regular planning process, boards must ensure that students are being provided with appropriate programming and facilities. This requires that boards manage school space, including excess space, responsibly. The cost of excess space, and the reduced staffing which results from lower enrolment, may make it difficult to support a range of programs in each school building. The breadth and quality of programming available to students may be particularly challenging at the secondary level, but can also have consequences for elementary programs that require teacher specialists. Boards must develop a school accommodation strategy that takes their specific issues into consideration when ensuring how to best support program delivery, student achievement and well-being.

Maximizing Investment in Students – Managing Excess Space

To help keep education funds focused on student needs, school boards must manage the costs associated with empty space in schools. School boards use a variety of strategies to manage enrolment and space

in their schools to help benefit students. These strategies may include making boundary changes to balance enrolment across a number of schools. When boundary changes are proposed, the school board will notify the parents and will hold information sessions.

The Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline

Another strategy available to school boards to manage excess space can involve bringing a tenant or partner into a school or a portion of a school, on a fast-recovery basis. The ministry has provided school boards with the [Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline](#) to ensure that school boards and community organizations exchange information about their current and future needs and opportunities. The [Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline](#) and [Building and Partnerships Guideline](#) and [Tj EMC3 /Span](#)

Community Hubs and School Facilities

The objective of the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline is consistent with the overall provincial direction on community hubs. In 2015, the Premier's Community Hubs Framework Advisory Group released a report titled [Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan](#). This action plan brought renewed focus to the discussion of strategies to support the formation of community hubs across the province. The action plan encourages joint planning across government ministries and agencies and highlights that in some cases, open or surplus school facilities can be ideal locations for the community to develop a community hub.

Making school facilities available for the community to develop hubs is supported by school boards' community planning and partnerships policies, the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (see page 5), and school boards' process for the lease or sale of surplus assets (see page 13 for details). Across all of these considerations, school boards manage program needs first, then they identify the school's eligibility for other options such as facility partnerships or hubs.

Pursuing a School Closure or Consolidation

Another option for managing excess space is the possibility of a school closure or consolidation. When this is the case, school boards will generally indicate that other strategies, such as those listed on page 5, have been considered for a school or group of schools but have been found to be not viable. Boards of Trustees make the final decision to close or consolidate schools. Prior to making their final decision, boards consider the proposed solution from the staff of the board, as well as feedback from parents and the community. Consolidation is the combination of the student populations of two or more schools into an existing, or new structure. Consolidation may mean different groupings of students than in the existing

schools. For instance, the organization might be grades JK-6, or 7-12 or K-12. The deciding factor would be meeting student needs.

The school board must decide which strategy would best manage the changing circumstances of its schools. The responsibility of the Board of Trustees is to ensure that the educational needs of their students are met before other options such as facility partnerships are considered.

If you wish to know more about your local school board's planning processes, or its community planning and partnerships policy, check out its website.

If an accommodation review has started in your community, you may also find information about the management of excess space in the initial staff report presented to the board before it made the decision to review student accommodations. This report should be on your board's website.

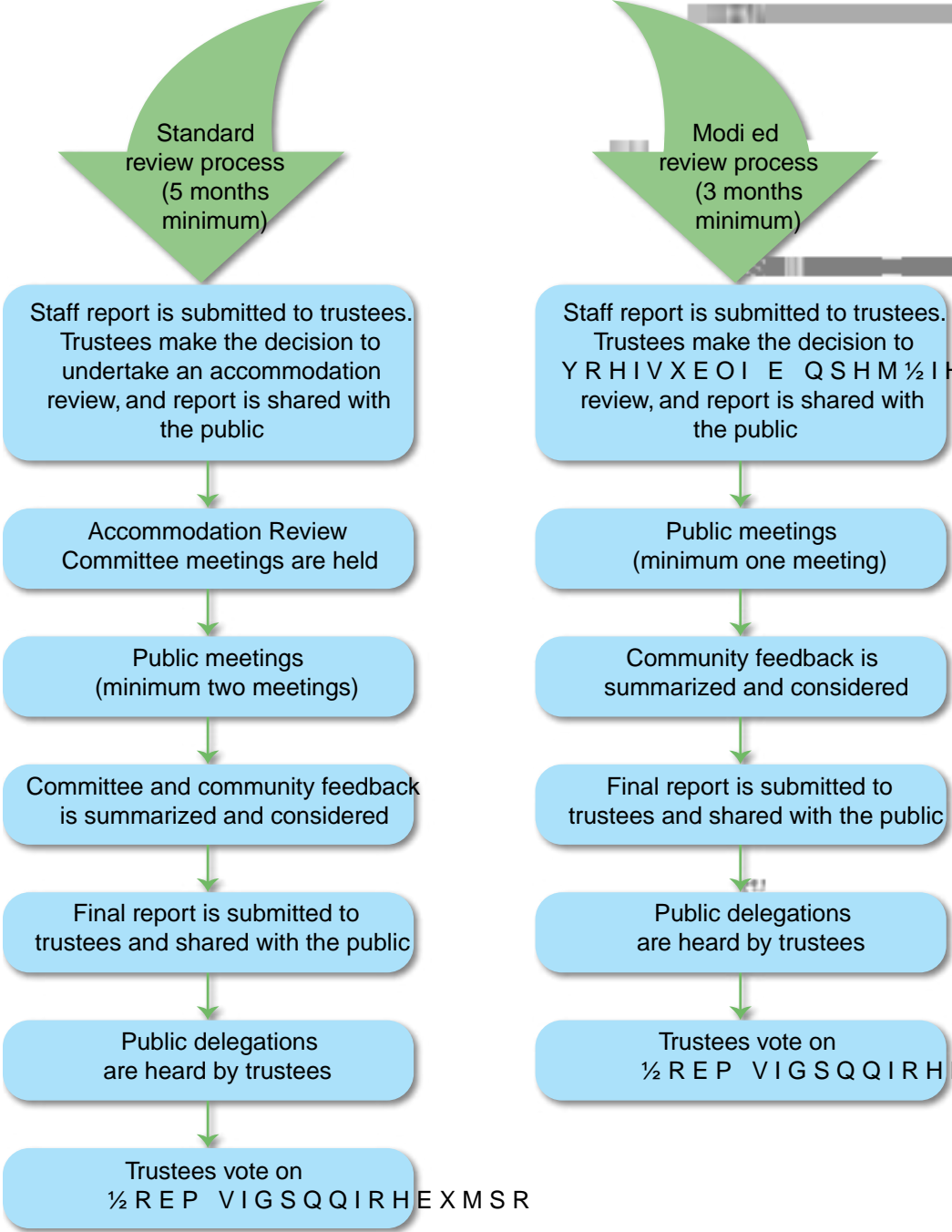


How does a pupil accommodation review work?

Province-wide Guidelines,
Community Consultation and
Local School Board Decisions

Every board must develop and approve its own

Pupil Accommodation Review Processes



How do I get involved?

In a pupil accommodation review process, board staff share detailed reports on a group of schools with parents and the community. All parents and members of the public may access this information on the school board's website and by attending public meetings.

As a parent, getting involved means that:

- z You will be informed of the objectives and details of the staff proposal.
- z You may identify and communicate your interests and concerns regarding any proposed changes prior to a final decision being made by the Board of Trustees.

Your involvement will result in:

- z Feedback on the proposal, and your opinion on the effect of the proposed changes on students, being given to board staff while they develop their final recommendation to the Board of Trustees.
- z Feedback on the proposed changes being submitted, along with the staff report, to the Board of Trustees.
- z Improved understanding of the proposed changes to the schools and school programs once a decision is made by the Board of Trustees.

More on Getting Involved

The pupil accommodation review is the opportunity for you, as parents and community members, to provide feedback to the school board about the accommodation proposal. It is the chance to discuss which aspects of the accommodation recommendation matter most, and which aspects will best support student achievement and well-being. Opportunities for input will be different depending on whether the board has chosen the standard review process or the modified review process.



What is Involved – The Standard Review Process

School board staff are available to help parents and community members understand the proposal throughout the accommodation review process. The Accommodation Review Committee will serve as a conduit for the school community to communicate with the board. The Accommodation Review Committee will receive from board staff the initial staff report and the School Information Profiles, which will also be posted on the board's website. School Information Profiles can enable an informed discussion of the current programs available to students and the potential for improved programming to support student learning.

Public meetings will also inform the discussion. Board staff will ensure that the feedback provided by the Accommodation Review Committee and community members is gathered and shared with the Board of Trustees. The board will also provide an opportunity for feedback on the final recommendation through its public delegations process (i.e., where individuals can

What happens after a pupil accommodation review is completed?

Transition Process

When the decision is made to close a school, students must be transferred to a different school. School boards want students to feel welcome at their receiving school, and they develop a transition plan to make the move to a different school culture as smooth as possible. The transition plan organizes the transfer of students, program materials, equipment and school memorabilia from the closing school to the receiving school or schools.

The transition plan will typically include opportunities for students and parents from all of the consolidating schools to come together, prior to the consolidation,

Lease or Sale of a School Facility

Should a school board decide that a closed school is no longer needed for the purposes of the board, the facility can be declared “surplus to the needs of the board.” School boards can then proceed to lease or sell the surplus property to other organizations, according to the [process required in the Education Act](#).

In an effort to encourage public properties to remain in the public sphere, school boards are required to first offer their properties to other public sector organizations in priority order (which includes other school boards, municipalities and other levels of government). If the surplus property is not leased or purchased by the public sector, then the property may be offered on the open market.

If you have further questions about the pupil accommodation review process, please contact your school board.



Note: This document is for information and discussion purposes only. Formal instructions are available through the policies approved by individual school boards.

