

**Ministry of Education**

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**2018: B02**

**MEMORANDUM TO:** Directors of Education  
Secretary/Treasurers of School Authorities

**FROM:** Joshua Paul  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Capital and Business Support Division

**DATE:** **February 9, 2018**

**SUBJECT:** **Draft Revised Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline  
and Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline  
Updates**

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I am writing to inform you of the ministry's:

- Proposed revisions to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG).
- Next steps to support improved co-ordination of community infrastructure planning, including future revisions to the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG).

These policy initiatives were key elements of the province's Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education. The plan responded to feedback received during the government's rural engagement in spring 2017 and aims to better support:

- Quality rural education;
- Sustainable use of school space in rural communities; and
- Decision-making around school closures.

The ministry undertook a consultation on proposed revisions to the PARG and CPPG between October 12 and December 6, 2017. The consultation included an online survey, 19 in-person engagement sessions during the ministry's fall education funding symposia and a meeting of the Minister's Reference Group on Community and Education Planning and Partnerships. The Minister's Reference Group includes representatives from the education and municipal sectors and an academic and its mandate is to

advise the Minister of Education on effective ways to improve co-ordination of community infrastructure planning from a public education perspective.

The policy reforms presented in the following sections respond to consultation feedback received by the ministry in fall 2017.

### **Draft Revised PARG – Summary of Key Changes**

The amendments to the PARG presented below will affect all school boards across the province, not just those which cover rural and northern communities. I therefore encourage your board to provide feedback to the draft revised PARG, which is posted here, along with a summary of fall 2017 consultation feedback:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/reviewGuide.html>

The ministry will accept feedback during this current second phase of the consultation until **March 23, 2018**.

In addition, the ministry plans to convene a technical working group comprised of school board and municipal representatives to discuss these amendments in detail.

### **Initial Staff Report**

The initial staff report to the Board of Trustees must contain at least **three** options to address the accommodation issue(s): a recommended option, an alternative option and a status quo option.

The option(s) included in the initial staff report must address the following **four** impacts:

- Impact on student programming;
- Impact on student well-being;
- Impact on school board resources; and
- Impact on the local community\*.

*(\* Impact on the local community must include consideration of the local economy if at least one school that is eligible to receive support from the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) is included in a pupil accommodation review at any time.)*

Boards will be required to use a ministry-approved template to write their initial staff reports. This template is currently under development and will provide boards with flexibility to accommodate the varying circumstances of each pupil accommodation review.

The ministry is considering the following issues to support development of the template:

- **Student programming** issues such as multi-grade classrooms.
- While measurable **student well-being** indicators continue to evolve, impact on extracurriculars, student transportation and school climate surveys could be considered for inclusion.

- To support analysis of the impacts on **school board resources**, the ministry will provide additional guidance where there are standards in reporting, such as school capacity and facility condition.
- The current requirement for school boards to consider **community impacts**, such as loss or gain of community use of school space, will be maintained and extended to include consideration of any possible impacts on First Nation communities on-reserve.
- If at least one school that is eligible to receive support from the Rural and Northern Education Fund (RNEF) is included in a pupil accommodation review at any time then **economic impacts** must also be given consideration for each accommodation option. School boards will have discretion to undertake economic impact assessments in other communities, if needed. The ministry will:
  - Develop guidance that will define key parameters it expects the economic impact assessment to address (such as, impact on local businesses, impact on family commutes / schedules and housing starts). We will consult with school boards and municipalities on how these key parameters are shaped;
  - Develop an approved list of vendors from which boards may select a third party to undertake this work.
  - Seek approval for additional funding for boards that will be required to undertake economic impact assessments.

More information about RNEF can be found in *Memorandum B09 - Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education*, June 28, 2017.

These changes pertain to sections VI (Establishing An Accommodation Review) and VIII (School Information Profile) of the draft revised PARG.

### **Public Meetings**

For all standard PARs, a minimum of **three** public meetings for broader community consultation on the initial staff report must be held. There must be a minimum period of **60 business days** between the first and final public meetings.

For all standard and modified PARs, if a **new school closure** is introduced as part of any option in the final staff report, then an **additional public meeting** must be held no fewer than **20 business days** from the posting of the final staff report. If there is an additional public meeting, there must be no fewer than **10 business days** before the public delegations.

As a component of developing the template, the Ministry would like to hear from boards on what supports boards might need when undertaking PARs (i.e, facilitators, facilitation training).

These changes primarily pertain to sections X (Public Meetings), XIII (Timelines for the Accommodation Review Process) and XIV (Modified Accommodation Review Process) of the draft revised PARG.

### ***Final Staff Report***

For all standard and modified PARs, the final staff report must include a section that summarizes secondary school student feedback for pupil accommodation reviews involving one or more secondary schools. School boards will determine how best to involve secondary school students in the pupil accommodation review process, to promote their voice and ensure their well-being. Options could include a dedicated meeting for students or an online tool for students to submit anonymous feedback.

In addition, the ministry is developing a template for community partners to engage boards with proposed alternatives to closures and proposals for community use of schools.

These changes pertain to section XI (Completing the Accommodation Review) of the draft revised PARG.

### ***Modified PARs***

**A modified PAR may be not be undertaken** if one or more **RNEF-eligible schools** have been included in any of the accommodation options presented in the initial or final staff reports. That is, if a RNEF-eligible school is ever included in a PAR, that PAR must follow the standard process.

This change pertains to section XIV (Modified Accommodation Review Process) of the draft revised PARG.

### ***Administrative Review Process***

Guidance on administrative reviews has been integrated into the PARG. In addition, the ministry will develop guidelines regarding the use of e-signatures in petitions for administrative reviews.

These changes pertain to section XV (Administrative Review Process) of the draft revised PARG.

## Updates on Integrated Local Planning and the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline

The ministry remains committed to updating the CPPG to further encourage joint responsibility for integrated community planning as we learn more from the new voluntary pilot program and other work across government. This decision was based on consultation feedback, which suggested that adding new requirements on school boards through the CPPG in an attempt to compel local partnerships is unlikely to be successful. Instead, the ministry plans to work with the Ministries of Infrastructure and Municipal Affairs to:

- Develop a new voluntary pilot program that will provide flexible support to municipalities, school boards, and other relevant local actors who wish to enhance their collective capacity for integrated local planning. Best practices and lessons learned will inform future policy and supports for integrated local planning across the province.
- Continue moving forward with initiatives to support *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*, such as:
  - Provincial funding to retrofit excess school space for use by community partners.
  - The Community Hubs Mapper, which is an online tool within the Community Hubs Resource Network website that displays information about provincial and school board properties ([www.communityhubsontario.ca/community-hubs-mapper/](http://www.communityhubsontario.ca/community-hubs-mapper/)).
  - The Surplus Property Transition Initiative, a program designed to provide more time for communities to determine the viability of acquiring surplus provincial properties while covering the holding costs in order to repurpose the asset to meet the needs of the local community.

The above work will be undertaken chiefly through the Minister's Reference Group on Community and Education Planning and Partnerships. We also welcome any further input from boards and other partners.

During this period, the Ministry of Education expects school boards to continue to use the existing CPPG, including the requirement of convening an annual CPP meeting. In addition to sharing planning information at the annual CPP meeting, we encourage partners to continue these important conversations outside of this meeting and to develop other processes to foster better communication at the local level.

## Next Steps

The ministry plans to release a final revised PARG in spring 2018, after which school boards will be expected to amend their existing PAR policies. As part of this process, the ministry expects school boards to undertake extensive community consultations to promote understanding of PAR processes. Only once revised PAR policies have been approved by trustees can any new PARs be started, unless PARs are required to support a joint-use school initiative between two school boards.

Details regarding the ministry's plans to release PARG support materials will be announced alongside the release of the final revised PARG.

Thank you for your continued work on these important policy initiatives, I look forward with interest to receiving your feedback. If you require further information about these changes, please contact Colleen Hogan at 416-325-1705 or [Colleen.Hogan@ontario.ca](mailto:Colleen.Hogan@ontario.ca) or Hitesh Chopra at 416-325-1887 or [Hitesh.Chopra@ontario.ca](mailto:Hitesh.Chopra@ontario.ca).

Sincerely,

*Original signed by:*

Joshua Paul  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Capital and Business Support Division

Copy: Superintendents of Business and Finance

Enclosure: Draft Revised Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline