

Pupil Accommodation Reviews

Understanding transitional changes for all

Accommodation decisions around closing or consolidating schools can be a difficult time for students and the school community. Boards are responsible for developing policies and procedures to address Pupil Accommodation Reviews (PARs) to deal with this issue. Prior to making any decision, your board administration will prepare an initial staff report to local Trustees. This report must contain one or more option(s) to address the accommodation issues(s) and includes detailed School Information Profiles (SIPs), which you may be asked to develop or review.

Following approval of this report by the Trustees, an Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) is formed. The ARC then acts as the official conduit for information shared between both board and school community. This committee is required to follow the current Ministry of Education's Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines (PARG) and Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG). If your school is going to be part of an ARC, you should familiarize yourself with your board's specific process. You may be asked to attend meetings of the ARC to act as a resource.

Who decides to close a school?

A final staff report is presented to the Trustees, following ARC meetings and at least two public meetings (if the process is following the Standard PAR process) or one public meeting (if the process meets Ministry specifications for a modified process). Meetings for public delegations to the board occur prior to any final decision. Trustees, after hearing delegations, vote on the report and make a final decision.

Why would a school close?

Boards have often opened and closed schools as local student population in the surrounding community shifts with time. School funding is mainly set based on student numbers, so with fewer students a school may see less monetary support, which can correlate to a decline in certain programs and even staff. Therefore, through school consolidation, boards can offer better educational experiences in one larger school, rather than in two or more smaller ones.

Who gets consulted in the review?

Boards are committed to community engagement, with PARG developed to assist the public in understanding the PAR process. Public meetings are structured to gather input and share information to and from the local community. These meetings are open to anyone who may wish to attend including parents, teachers, students, school council members, local community members and other interested parties.

How is information from the ARC shared?

Board administration must ensure parents and the public have access to information, including meeting agendas and minutes. In many cases, the board and/or school website or newsletters are used to share updates regarding the ARC progress and/or upcoming public meetings.

Does a review guarantee my school may close?

No. Oftentimes boards include a number of schools in a PAR because the option(s) developed by the administration may include the consolidation of two or more schools, the closure of a school building, the repurposing of a school or the construction of a new school.

What is the principal's role in the PAR process?

Your role is to facilitate the gathering and sharing of information required for the review. It is imperative that you communicate your obligation to follow board policy and to remain neutral with respect to your personal feelings or opinions. If you are attending ARC meetings, it is important that you share information to support the board's staff report. To be – or seem to be – a part of an advocacy group in opposition to a potential or real board decision to close or consolidate (a) school(s) could attract serious discipline for insubordination; that is, a failure in your duty of loyalty to your employer-board. If strong emotions may be provoked and that you feel you may be pressured to oppose the board's direction, you are encouraged to seek support and advice from your supervisory officer.

It's important to remember that boards must focus resources so that all students have access to high quality education. A closure or consolidation of a local school can be a very emotionally heavy and difficult transition for parents, guardians, students and the community. As an administrator, you play a very important role in supporting your community in carrying out this important work.

Resources: Ministry of Education, board websites, People for Education *Guide to Pupil Accommodation* Reviews document edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1516/2015B9appenAEN.pdf