

2006:B12

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

FROM: Nancy Naylor
Assistant Deputy Minister
Business and Finance Division

DATE: October 31, 2006

SUBJECT: **Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines**

A key priority of this government has been to keep good schools open. The government has removed the financial incentives to closing schools and has increased the funding to support schools.

I am writing to advise you of the release of the *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines* (previously referred to as school closure guidelines). 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 now in effect and reflect the principles outlined in the February 17, 2005 document *Good Places to Learn: Renewing Ontario's Schools*.

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 ministry's *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines* (attached).

With the release of these guidelines, it is recommended that school boards revisit their capital plans to provide information on their accommodation reviews, as necessary.

School boards are requested to pass their resolutions approving their board's accommodation review policy by March 31, 2007 or prior to the announcement of an accommodation review, whichever is earlier. Boards are requested to email the resolutions to the Ministry at BSB.SFIS@ontario.ca. These resolutions will be appended to the School Facilities Inventory System.

The guidelines were developed in consultation with the ministry's *Good Places to Learn* Technical Advisory Committee, a group made up of school board and Ministry staff.

Context

The government's February 17, 2005 *Good Places to Learn* initiative announced that the Ministry would release new school closure guidelines that would require school boards to

make school valuation the centre of board and community decision-making. School valuation requires school boards to consider the value of a school or schools based on community consultation.

Timelines

The guidelines outline a fair and transparent process for undertaking accommodation reviews. School boards are requested to work with students, parents and communities to implement them as required.

The guidelines also provide for a timeline for school boards to work with their communities to undertake an accommodation review process.

- After the intention to conduct an accommodation review of a school has been announced, 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 should be no less than **90 days**; and
- There must be no less than **60 days** prior to the public meeting where the trustees will vote on the accommodation review and recommendations.

Administrative Review of Accommodation Review Process

A review of a school board's accommodation review process may be sought on the grounds that the accommodation review process followed was inconsistent with the board's accommodation review policy. If the conditions set out in the *Administrative Review of Accommodation Review Process* document (also attached) are met, the Minister would appoint a facilitator to assess whether the school board has followed its own accommodation review policy.

The Ministry expects that boards will work cooperatively with the facilitator in addressing the community's concerns, should this situation arise.

Transitional Policy

The Ministry recognizes that some school boards may have begun accommodation reviews (i.e., consultation process is substantially underway or completed) prior to the release of the guidelines.

Where a school board has initiated a consultation process, it would be expected to respect the spirit of school valuation outlined in the February 17, 2005 *Good Places to Learn* announcement. Specifically, the Accommodation Review Committee undertaking the review should consider the value of the school(s) under review to the student, community, school board and the local community. School boards should also ensure that appropriate time has been allocated for seeking community input and revisions to the School Valuation report as well as sharing the School Valuation report, in plain language, with the community affected by the accommodation review.

Where a school board has announced its intention to undertake an accommodation review(s) for specific schools or planning areas, but has not proceeded beyond its announcement of intent, the board must adhere to the direction outlined in these new guidelines.

Website posting / Information Sessions

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 Ministry will be arranging information sessions for school board staff in the coming weeks. The dates and times for regional tele-conferences will be sent by e-mail to school boards' Senior Business Officials shortly.

Ministry Contacts

If you require further information regarding the *Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines*, please contact Nancy Whynot at (416) 325-4030 or nancy.whynot@ontario.ca or Lygia Dallip at (416) 325-2017 or lygia.dallip@ontario.ca



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cc : Superintendents of Business and Finance
Senior Plant Officials