

Ministry of Education

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Memorandum To: Directors of Education

From: Gabriel F. Sékaly
Assistant Deputy Minister
Financial Policy and Business Division

Date: March 26, 2015

Subject: **Release of New Pupil Accommodation Review
Guideline and Community Planning and Partnerships
Guideline**

I am writing to advise you of the release of the new Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) (see Appendix A) as well as the revised Facility Partnerships Guideline (now known as the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG)) (see Appendix B), and to provide you with details of the changes to these guidelines.

In 2014-15, the Ministry of Education introduced the School Board Efficiencies and Modernization (SBEM) strategy to provide incentives and supports for school boards to make more efficient use of school space. One of the elements of the strategy was to revise the PARG to allow school boards to have a more effective tool to address their needs to close and consolidate facilities, while continuing to ensure that communities have the opportunity to provide meaningful input.

The Ministry of Education is also revising the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline to align and more closely link with the new PARG. Changes have been made to both guidelines to enhance opportunities for school boards to work more closely with local municipal governments and other community partners when planning to address their underutilized school space, and more generally to require greater coordination and sharing of planning related information between school boards and other community partners.

The PARG and CPPG continue to represent a framework of **minimum** standards for school boards to meet in developing their pupil accommodation review and facility partnerships policies. **School boards are expected to amend their existing pupil accommodation review and facility partnerships policies to reflect the changes incorporated into the new PARG and CPPG before announcing any new pupil**

accommodation reviews. The Ministry of Education expects school boards to consult with local communities prior to adopting or subsequently amending these policies.

The new PARG and CPPG are effective upon release and replace the previous versions dated June 26, 2009 and February 11, 2010, respectively.

A. New Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG)

Since the PARG was last updated in 2009, the Ministry of Education and school boards have received a significant amount of feedback about the effectiveness of the existing PARG for school boards, parents and guardians, and other community members. Among the feedback received about the existing PARG were concerns about the contentiousness of the existing process for members of the accommodation review committee (ARC), the inflexibility of the existing process with its “one size fits all” approach to all accommodation reviews, the length of the existing process, the lack of a formal role for municipal representatives, and the fact that trustees do not always make decisions that reflect the reports of the ARC.

To address many of the concerns noted above, the Ministry of Education’s Capital Advisory Committee (CAC), consisting of 15 school board representatives from across the province, undertook a comprehensive review of the existing PARG. This review, which began in early 2014, was also intended to ensure that school boards have an effective tool to support the SBEM strategy of addressing underutilized space. The CAC then provided recommendations on potential PARG revisions to the Ministry of Education for further consideration.

In late 2014 and early 2015, the Ministry of Education consulted on the CAC’s recommendations with stakeholders, including trustee associations, senior school board officials, parent groups, student associations, teacher federations, education worker unions, municipal sector representatives, and administrative review facilitators.

The Ministry of Education has incorporated the CAC’s recommendations and the feedback from the consultations into the new PARG. As a result, the PARG has undergone a significant transformation. School boards should ensure that they review the new PARG carefully before examining how to amend their local pupil accommodation review policies.

B. Highlights of the New PARG

1. Requirements for School Boards to Consult with Municipal Governments and Other Community Partners on Underutilized Space:

The PARG includes a requirement for school boards to seek feedback from their local municipal governments and other community partners on capital and accommodation planning related to addressing underutilized space. The PARG outlines consultation with local municipal governments and other community partners after the pupil accommodation review process has commenced. (Note that

the CPPG includes requirements for school boards to reach out to municipalities and other community partners on an annual basis as part of the regular planning cycle, and when school boards are beginning to review underutilized space in schools in specific areas of the school board.)

2. Changes to the Accommodation Review Committee Structure:

a) Role:

The role of the ARC has been refocused as a conduit for information sharing between the school board and the school communities. At a minimum, the ARC will provide feedback on the initial staff report option(s). The ARC may provide other options, however, it must include a supporting rationale for any such option. ARC members do not need to have a unanimous opinion regarding the information provided to the Board of Trustees.

b) Membership:

The ARC membership, at a minimum, should include parent/guardian representatives from the school(s) under review. Where established by a school board's pupil accommodation review policy, there may also be the option to include students and representation from the broader community. In addition, school board trustees may serve as ad hoc ARC members.

3. Changes to Timelines for the Accommodation Review Process:

a) Standard Accommodation Review Process:

The standard pupil accommodation review process requires school boards to hold a minimum of two public meetings over a minimum five month period. The new PARG lists minimum requirements for the first public meeting.

b) Optional Modified Accommodation Review Process:

The optional modified pupil accommodation review process requires school boards to hold a minimum of one public meeting over a minimum three month period. As with the standard process, the new PARG lists minimum requirements for the first public meeting.

4. Changes to School Board Staff Reporting Requirements:

Initial and final staff reports, respectively, must be presented by school board staff to the Board of Trustees prior to, and immediately after, a pupil accommodation review.

a) Initial Staff Report to Board of Trustees:

An initial staff report must be presented before a pupil accommodation review can be undertaken. The initial staff report must contain one or more options, including a recommended option, with supporting rationale for each option. Furthermore, the initial staff report must also include information on actions taken by school board staff prior to establishing a pupil accommodation review process.

b) Final Staff Report to Board of Trustees:

The final staff report must contain a Community Consultation section that contains feedback from the ARC and any public consultations as well as any relevant information obtained from municipalities and other community partners prior to and during the pupil accommodation review.

5. Introduction of Transition Plan Requirement:

Following the decision to consolidate and/or close a school, a transition plan should be developed in consultation with parents/guardians and staff.

6. Introduction of Optional Modified Accommodation Review Process:

An optional modified pupil accommodation review process has been introduced in the new PARG for school boards to address local circumstances. For a school board to adopt a modified pupil accommodation review process as part of its pupil accommodation review policy, the school board must identify explicitly the factors that need to be met before a modified process can be initiated. The new PARG lists the factors for school boards to consider in their pupil accommodation review policies for a modified process. At least two of these factors must be incorporated as part of the conditions that must be met before a school board can initiate a modified pupil accommodation review process. School boards can also include factors beyond those listed in the new PARG.

A school board must consult with its community on the factors that could trigger a modified pupil accommodation review process before these factors are adopted as part of the school board's pupil accommodation review policy. **A school board may still choose to use the standard pupil accommodation review process even if the conditions for the use of a modified process, based on the school board's pupil accommodation review policy, are satisfied.**

The optional modified pupil accommodation review process requires a minimum of one public meeting, and does not include the need to form an ARC.

7. Introduction of Additional Exemptions:

Two new exemptions have been added to the new PARG for specific circumstances where school boards are not obligated to undertake a pupil accommodation review.

- a) Where a replacement school is to be built by the school board on the existing site, or built or acquired within the existing school attendance boundary and the school community must be temporarily relocated to ensure the safety of students and staff during the reconstruction, as identified through the school board's policy.
- b) Where there are no students enrolled at the school at any time throughout the school year.

8. Other Changes:

a) School Information Profiles (SIPs):

The SIP minimum data requirements and factors have been refocused to the measureable data within the school boards' areas of expertise.

As school boards integrate the changes to the new PARG into their pupil accommodation review policies, it is important to note that the Ministry encourages school boards not to make final pupil accommodation review decisions during the summer holiday period.

C. Revised Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG) (formerly the Facility Partnerships Guideline)

As a result of the consultation feedback on the new PARG, the Ministry of Education is building in a more formal consultation between school boards and municipal governments and other community partners in the planning process around underutilized school space, as well as green space/parkland. These changes are being made to help ensure that municipalities and other community partners are made more aware of a school board's plans and available school space on a regular basis, and well before a school is considered for inclusion in a pupil accommodation review.

The Ministry of Education's 2014 mandate letter acknowledged that it will be engaging stakeholders in the near future on community hubs, in cooperation with other ministries in this area, to promote efficient use of public assets, build better ties between schools and municipalities and other community organizations, and ensure more viable schools are able to remain open. As a result, further revisions to the CPPG may be introduced as the government reviews its policies towards supporting community hubs.

D. Highlights of the CPPG Revisions

- 1) The Facility Partnerships Guideline has been re-named the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG) to reflect that in addition to encouraging facility partnerships, the guideline also supports effective planning with community partners, including land use and green space/park planning.
- 2) At a minimum, all levels of municipal government, District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs), Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs), public health boards, Local Health Integration Networks (LHINs), and children's mental health centres must be on school boards' notification list when key information regarding facility partnerships or planning is changed or updated.
- 3) At a minimum, on an annual basis, the sharing of planning information between school boards and other community partners must take place at a public meeting.

- a) In addition to this meeting, school boards and other community partners have the option to meet at a staff-level to discuss potential partnership and planning opportunities.
 - b) The type of information to be shared at this meeting by both school boards and community partners, and the documentation of exchanged information by school boards has been specified.
- 4) In addition to the annual meeting, school boards should continue discussions with affected municipalities and other community organizations as they explore options to address underutilized space issues in schools within specific areas of their school board. These discussions will inform proposals that school board staff may present to the Board of Trustees, including recommendations to undertake a pupil accommodation review process.

As part of these discussions with community organizations, school boards should obtain a clear indication of any community planning and partnership opportunities in areas where a pupil accommodation review may take place. Additionally, school boards are to request technical information from the local municipality or municipalities where a planned pupil accommodation review may occur. This technical information is to be specified by the school board and can include, but is not limited to, population and future development projections in the area.

The *Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline* provides a full description of the pupil accommodation review process that school boards are required to undertake prior to making a pupil accommodation review decision.

E. Transition

The Ministry of Education recognizes that some school boards may have begun pupil accommodation reviews (i.e., consultation process is substantially underway or completed) or facility partnerships talks prior to the release of the new PARG and CPPG. Pupil accommodation reviews and facility partnerships that are currently announced or underway should proceed based on the school board's existing policies. Furthermore, school boards should not review previous ARC processes or decisions based on the new PARG.

School boards are expected to amend their existing pupil accommodation review and facility partnerships policies to reflect the changes incorporated into the new PARG and CPPG before announcing any new pupil accommodation reviews.

Training and support materials for school boards are anticipated to be developed to assist with them with the implementation of the new PARG and CPPG. Details regarding these materials will be announced later this year.

F. Ministry Contacts

The Ministry of Education wishes to thank the members of the CAC for their

contributions towards the development of the new PARG. The Ministry of Education will continue to work with school boards regarding the best use of space in schools.

If you have any questions regarding the new PARG and the CPPG, please contact Grant Osborn at 416-325-1705 or Grant.Osborn@ontario.ca, or Mathew Thomas at 416-326-9920 or Mathew.P.Thomas@ontario.ca.

Original signed by

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Attachments: Appendix A: Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline, March 2015
Appendix B: Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline, March 2015

Copy: Superintendents of Business
Superintendents of Planning