

Ministry of Education

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2018: B10

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

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

DATE: **April 27, 2018**

SUBJECT: **Final Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline and Updates on Integrated Planning and Supports for Urban Education**

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

1. Final revised version of the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG).
2. Next steps to support improved integrated capital and community planning among school boards, municipalities and community partners, including:
 - o A new voluntary integrated planning and partnerships initiative (VIPPI);
 - o A suite of new incentives to promote integrated project planning; and
 - o Future revisions to the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG).
3. New resources to incentivize school boards to share space in joint-use schools.
4. Intention to strengthen supports for urban education.

These policy initiatives flow from the province's Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education, which responded to feedback received during the government's rural and northern engagement in spring 2017 and aims to better support:

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

Following the government's spring engagement, the ministry undertook a two-phased consultation in fall 2017 and winter 2018. The first phase was undertaken between October and December, 2017 and sought feedback on proposed high-level concepts to revise the PARG and CPPG. Based on feedback received, the ministry posted a draft revised PARG for consultation between February 6 and March 23, 2018. Both phases of the consultation included an online posting for public feedback as well as a variety of in-person meetings with representatives from the education and municipal sectors. Our engagements with the education sector through these phases included the regional GSN meetings in the fall, meetings of the Minister's Reference Group and Technical Working Group on Community and Education Planning and Partnerships. The mandate of the Minister's Reference Group and the Technical Working Group is to advise the ministry on effective ways to improve co-ordination of community infrastructure planning from a public education perspective.

The amendments to the PARG and proposals on integrated planning presented in the following sections respond to consultation feedback received by the ministry in fall 2017 and winter 2018.

1. Final Revised PARG – Summary of Key Changes

The amendments to the PARG presented below will affect all school boards across the province, not just those that serve students in rural and northern communities. I therefore encourage your board to review these amendments closely as your board's PAR policy will need to be revised accordingly in due course. The revised PARG is posted here, along with a summary of winter 2018 consultation feedback:

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

Initial Staff Report

The initial staff report to the Board of Trustees must contain a recommended scenario and at least two alternative scenarios, which could include the status quo.

The scenarios 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**.

In addition, 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, the initial staff report must address the following impact:

- Impact on the **local economy**.

Boards will be required to use a ministry-approved template to write their initial staff reports. This template is being developed in consultation with our Minister's Reference

Group and Technical Working Group and will be made available by the ministry in fall 2018. The template will aim to provide boards with flexibility to accommodate the varying circumstances of each pupil accommodation review while ensuring greater consistency across the province. The ministry is considering the following issues to support development of the template:

- **Student programming** issues such as multi-grade classrooms.
- While **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 standards in reporting are required, 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 scenario. School boards will have discretion to undertake economic impact assessments in other communities, if needed. To support boards to undertake economic impact assessments, in fall 2018 the ministry will:
 - Release a template and 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). School boards will be required to use the ministry-approved template to undertake economic impact assessments.
 - Develop an approach for school boards to undertake economic impact assessments through the Technical Working Group on Community and Education Planning and Partnerships.

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

In addition, in fall 2018 the ministry plans to release a template that community partners may use to engage boards with proposed alternatives to closures and proposals for community use of schools.

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

Community Engagement

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:

- School boards are expected to **provide facilitated public meetings** to solicit broader community feedback on the scenarios contained in the initial staff report. In addition to the required public meetings, school boards may use other methods to solicit community feedback.
- There must be no fewer than **40 business days** from the date of the Board of Trustees' approval to conduct a pupil accommodation review **before the first public meeting is held**.
- The meeting between the school board, affected single, lower and upper-tier municipalities and other community partners that expressed an interest prior to the pupil accommodation review **must be scheduled to take place before the first public meeting**.
- **Municipalities and community partners** should provide their **response** on the scenarios in the school board's initial staff report **before the final public meeting**, otherwise school boards will not be required to include this response in the final staff report.
- If a **new school closure** is introduced as part of any scenario 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. **Feedback** from this additional public meeting should be presented to the Board of Trustees as **part of the final staff report**.

These changes primarily pertain to sections IX (Consultation with Local Municipal Governments), X (Public Meetings), XIII (Timelines for the Accommodation Review Process) and XIV (Modified Accommodation Review Process) of the revised PARG.

The Accommodation Review Committee

Although no substantive changes have been made that pertain to the Accommodation Review Committee (ARC), the revised PARG clarifies that:

- The ARC should be formed following the Board of Trustees' consideration of the initial staff report but prior to the first public meeting.
- An overview of the ARC orientation session must be included at the first public meeting.

These changes primarily pertain to sections VII (The Accommodation Review Committee) and XIII (Timelines for the Accommodation Review Process) of the 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. Feedback from elementary students may also be included in this section if school boards wish, although this is not a minimum requirement.

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

Administrative Review Process

Guidance on administrative reviews has been integrated into the PARG and clarifies:

- That the affected school is one that trustees agreed to close as part of their final decision on the pupil accommodation review.
- That signatures from parents/guardians of students attending the affected school are eligible for inclusion in the petition regardless of whether they formally participated in the accommodation review process.
- That school boards are required to forward their response to an administrative review petition to **the Minister of Education and the petitioner** within thirty (30) calendar days of receiving the petition.
- The process associated with a ministry-appointed facilitator undertaking an administrative review.

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 revised PARG.

Next Steps for Implementing the Final Revised PARG

During summer 2018 the ministry plans to develop the following templates and guidelines to assist boards in conducting PARs through the Minister's Reference Group and Technical Working Group on Community and Education Planning and Partnerships:

- initial staff report template;
- economic impact assessment template;
- community partner template; and
- e-signature guidance.

The final revised PARG will take effect in fall 2018 upon the release of these templates and guidelines. School boards may then revise their PAR policies to bring them into alignment with the minimum requirements of the final revised PARG. The ministry anticipates that these templates and guidelines should help inform school boards' local consultations with communities and municipal governments on their PAR policies and thereby promote understanding of their revised PAR policies. 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. In such cases, the 2015 version of the PARG can, in the interim, represent the framework of minimum standards for school boards to meet when undertaking PARs.

2. Updates on Integrated Capital and Community Planning

In response to consultation feedback on the need to improve integrated planning among school boards, municipalities and community partners, the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Ministries of Infrastructure, Municipal Affairs, Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and Economic Development and Growth, has developed a **Voluntary Integrated Planning and Partnerships Initiative (VIPPI)** to provide flexible support to local partners that wish to enhance their collective capacity for integrated capital and community planning. Feedback from the Minister's Reference Group was instrumental to VIPPI's development by highlighting the need for a new type of community planning table.

Our intention is to issue a call for expressions of interest (EOI) for participation in VIPPI from communities across Ontario in early summer 2018. EOIs will need to demonstrate that multiple local partners are interested in pursuing this opportunity, including the school board and the municipality. Approximately three communities will be selected to represent a mix of rural, urban, Francophone and northern communities. Each community that is selected will be supported by a facilitator to undertake three to four sessions over approximately one year, to accommodate partners' planning cycles. At these sessions partners will be encouraged to establish collaborative capital and community planning processes and to share relevant data, with the ultimate goal of generating best practices. More information will be provided with the call for EOIs.

To build on VIPPI and other existing provincial supports for integrated planning, the ministry is developing a suite of new incentives to promote integrated project planning. These incentives will be launched in phases.

The ministry will introduce immediate new supports for school boards working with their communities to share and co-build facilities:

- The ministry will provide boards with **seed funding** of up to \$40,000 to assist with the planning of projects that involve a municipal or community partner. Currently, the Ministry offers seed funding to support coterminous school boards that wish to pursue joint-use opportunities.
- The ministry will also provide funding for a **project manager** to assist with approved projects as they move forward.

The ministry will also look for opportunities to support integrated planning through the capital funding processes, with a focus on better aligning the timing of capital decision-making processes with community needs. In so doing the ministry seeks to ensure that school boards and communities have flexible support that can respond to local needs.

Lastly, the ministry remains committed to updating the Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG) within the coming year as we learn more from VIPPI and other work across government to promote integrated planning. The ministry will consult on proposed revisions to the CPPG with the Minister's Reference Group on Community and Education Planning and Partnerships. Proposed CPPG revisions will seek to improve information sharing among school boards, municipalities and community partners.

During this period, the ministry 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.

3. New Resources for Joint-Use Schools

As originally announced in *Memorandum 2016: B04 - Capital Planning Capacity Program 2015-16 and 2016-17*, the ministry procured external consultants to undertake a Joint-Use Schools Experience Study and develop a Joint-Use Schools Toolkit. To complement this policy initiative, the ministry also announced financial incentives to promote joint-use schools in *Memorandum 2017: B09 - Plan to Strengthen Rural and Northern Education*.

The Experience Study and the Toolkit are now complete and will be made available to all school boards at the following link: <https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/CapitalPrograms.htm>

This Experience Study provides significant insights into the benefits and challenges of those involved in joint-use schools. It captures the unique joint-use experiences of students, parents, school principals/vice-principals, school board administration and municipalities.

The Joint-Use Schools Toolkit is a reference document for School Board Trustees, School Board Administrators and Staff responsible for developing and implementing joint-use schools. The Toolkit provides school board staff with: 1) a how-to-guide for creating, designing, constructing and operating a joint-use school; 2) key conditions of success; and key legal agreement frameworks for joint-use schools.

School boards are encouraged to utilize these resources when considering joint-use opportunities.

4. Strengthening Supports for Urban Education

During our rural and northern engagements, we have heard from a number of stakeholders regarding the unique challenges related to growth and intensification that are unique to our province's large urban communities. This includes the challenges faced by school boards and municipalities with planning, partnering and building schools in these changing communities and the financial tools available to support this work. In response, the Ministry of Education is pleased to announce the following:

- **Urban Student Accommodation Engagement:** The government will undertake an engagement this fall focusing on supports for pupil accommodation in urban areas experiencing rapid growth and intensification, including Education Development Charges.
- **Land Priorities Enhancement:** The government will increase the amount of funding available through its Land Priorities program from \$60 million to \$100 million this coming year. This will support land acquisition for all boards, including those dealing with rapid enrolment growth in urban, densely populated areas within their boundaries.

In closing, I would once again like to express my gratitude for your contributions to these policy initiatives, which I look forward to undertaking with your support. If you require further information about these changes, please contact Colleen Hogan at 416-325-1705 or Colleen.Hogan@ontario.ca or Hitesh Chopra at 416-325-1887 or 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: Final Revised Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline