



Operational Review

→ Final Report

April 22, 2022



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Executive Summary

Background

Optimus SBR was retained by the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board (“HPEDSB” or “the Board”) to perform an operational review of its Central Operations, including identifying opportunities for improvement across several functional areas.

HPEDSB serves over 15,000 students across the Hastings and Prince Edward counties, which covers an area of over 7,000 square kilometres. In 2016, the Ministry of Education put in a place a financial recovery plan for HPEDSB when the Board’s accumulated surplus ran low after the use of reserves to balance budgets. This recovery plan included permanent and non-permanent savings measures such as consolidating and closing schools, reducing staff, reducing department and school budgets, deferring the replacement of technology, and other measures. The Board completed the financial recovery plan in 2020 and is now in a position where it can strategically invest to overcome numerous challenges that link to student achievement.

The central operations of school boards play an important role in student achievement, as the administration of school boards creates the environment and conditions in which the students learn. This includes ensuring that the physical space where students learn, the devices and tools that students use, and the curriculum support teachers receive are optimal. Ensuring processes operate efficiently, resources are allocated to the areas of highest value and policies are up to date all help ensure that students are best supported to succeed and grow.

To better understand how Central Operations can improve and support student achievement, it was decided that an operational review should be conducted to identify opportunities for increased effectiveness, efficiency, service experience, and optimal resource allocation. The recommendations from the operational review will be used to help the Board identify areas for strategic investment to support improvement and student achievement going forward.

Project Context

Optimus SBR partnered with HPEDSB to conduct this operational review of Central Operations. The purpose of the review was to identify opportunities for improvement in HPEDSB Central Operations so that school board administration and operations are aligned to best support student achievement. The scope of the project includes departments such as Facility Services, Information and Technology Services, Human Resources Support Services, Curriculum Services, and Student Services.

For this review, Optimus SBR focused on a broad but limited number of areas at a high level:

Functional Area	Description
Board Administration	A functional area dedicated to the Senior Administration team with the review focusing on how they operate and collaborate amongst each other. The Senior Administration team is comprised of the Director of Education, a Superintendent of Business Services, a Superintendent of HR, and two Superintendents of Education.

Functional Area	Description
Human Resource Management (HR)	HR conducts several key functions for the Board including labour relations, compensation, recruitment, performance management, organizational development, health, safety, and wellness among other aspects.
Information and Technology Services (IT)	IT provides support for corporate systems, central departments, and learning technology.
Curriculum and Student Services	For the purposes of this review, the Curriculum and Student Services departments have been combined into one functional area. Curriculum Services is focused on the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of programs such as early years, elementary, and secondary schools. Student Services is focused on special education programs and services.
Financial Services	The Finance department is responsible for ensuring resources are spent effectively and efficiently. Functions include accounting, payroll, and procurement.
School Operations and Facilities Management	The Facility Services department is responsible for ensuring schools are in an optimal physical condition for learning. This includes overseeing the construction, maintenance, sustainability, and operations functions for the Board.
Communications	Communications is responsible for overseeing a wide range of communication activities for the Board. This includes internal communication, community engagement, issues management, and media relations.

Overview of Findings and Recommendations

Below is an overview of the 37 recommendations for the Board based on current state findings. Recommendations have been developed based on interviews, focus groups, and working sessions with HPEDSB staff, document review, and best practices observed in comparable school boards. The recommendations are further detailed in the body of this report, including each recommendation’s rationale, expected benefits, and considerations for implementation.

Organizational Level

HPEDSB Central Operations is a team of dedicated and engaged staff who are committed to seeing students succeed. Adjustments in culture, processes and planning can help Central Operations achieve that goal.

Current State Finding	Recommendations
Stakeholders mentioned several organizational challenges related to culture	R.1 Adopt best practices in change management.

Current State Finding	Recommendations
such as a high resistance to change and a limited customer service orientation.	R.2 Enhance the organization’s culture to support collaboration between Central Operations and schools and enhance the customer service orientation within Central Operations.
<p>The organization has recently had several experienced members retire or leave the organization. Due to limited documentation, organizational knowledge has been lost.</p> <p>Roles and responsibilities are unclear or not being followed at times, resulting in shifts in workload and areas of duplication.</p>	R.3 Ensure policies, procedures, and processes are documented and updated periodically to support knowledge transfer and enhance accountability.
It was reported that project management and planning capability and capacity are generally lacking to support the implementation of improvement initiatives.	R.4 Develop a project management focus and capability to ensure consistency, rigour, and discipline for larger projects and to help the Board ensure that people and financial resources are properly allocated to projects.

Board Administration

The Senior Administration team is dedicated and passionate about student achievement. With limited capacity, the team is challenged to provide the right level of leadership and oversight across portfolios.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
HPEDSB Superintendents have large portfolio responsibilities, which has led to some portfolios (e.g., Indigenous education) not receiving the required attention.	R.5 Management should consider introducing a new Superintendent role to the Senior Administration team.
Multiple departments within Central Operations are involved in the budgeting and reporting process for Ministry-funded initiatives. The lack of clear roles and responsibilities is leading to confusion internally.	R.6 Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities regarding the allocation of funds and reporting of Ministry-funded initiatives.

Human Resources Management

The HR department has undergone significant changes in recent years. In this time of transition, it is important for the department to define and establish a corporate philosophy for their role in the Board.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
<p>The HR department has undergone several personnel and structural changes over the past couple of years. The new staff have responded well to this change and are actively seeking opportunities to improve.</p>	<p>R.7 Maintain the current structure over the next year to allow staff to adjust to the recent changes within this department. Over this short-term period, management should consider establishing measures to determine the effectiveness of this new structure.</p>
<p>There is a need for greater clarity about HR’s responsibilities as it relates to providing services to schools. Incongruent expectations between HR and school administrators are forcing school administrators to spend more time on operational tasks.</p>	<p>R.8 Clarify the roles and responsibilities for Central Operations HR and schools for key HR functions such as recruitment, discipline, and performance management. The roles and responsibilities should be documented in the form of a service level agreement.</p>
<p>HR staff focus primarily on day-to-day transactional work and not strategic work. By creating process efficiencies enabling the ability to shift time and effort to strategic activities, the department may be able to proactively solve issues and prepare HPEDSB for future challenges.</p>	<p>R.9 Senior leaders within the HR department should consider identifying and delegating operational tasks throughout the department to ensure time and resources can be focused on implementing strategic initiatives such as organizational training, development, and recruitment strategies.</p>
<p>The systems and business processes used by HR and Payroll require manual data entry at several points in the process.</p>	<p>R.10 Explore implementation of an ERP solution based on Ministry Direction for better integration of HR, Finance, Payroll and Purchasing functions.</p>
<p>Payroll is not notified early enough in the onboarding process, which can lead to delays in paying staff.</p>	<p>R.11 Standardize the intake process when a new employee is hired to ensure information is captured once and the appropriate stakeholders are notified.</p>
<p>The HR department has developed a clear procedure called the Attendance Support Program that allows the Board to address issues around absenteeism in a consistent and transparent manner. The department needs to commit to implementing this program to see the desired outcomes achieved.</p>	<p>R.12 Develop an implementation plan for the Attendance Support Program. Validate the program’s components, the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes, and buy-in from staff before further implementation.</p>

Information and Technology Services

The IT department is an experienced team that understands its role as a service provider. Over the next few periods, the IT department must focus on building a foundation so future plans and initiatives can be executed effectively and efficiently.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
<p>HPEDSB does not have an IT Strategic Plan that establishes priorities and objectives that align with the Board’s overall strategy. Without a plan, the organization may be making technology decisions that are not aligned with the Board’s priorities.</p>	<p>R.13 Develop an IT Strategic Plan.</p>
<p>There is no formalized IT governance body that links to the key decision-makers of the Board, which could result in ineffective technology decision-making.</p>	<p>R.14 Develop an IT governance framework.</p>
<p>There are gaps in IT competencies, including the lack of a dedicated security role and limited data management expertise in the department. This impacts the department’s overall ability to provide quality service to other departments and schools.</p>	<p>R.15 Perform an IT skills assessment such as SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age).</p>
<p>There is no cloud governance framework in place at this time, which increases the risk of data leakage and breaches.</p>	<p>R.16 Develop a cloud governance framework.</p>
<p>There are limited standards in place for schools with respect to managing service requests and technology purchases. The lack of consistent standards creates additional work for the IT department as they have to adjust their service approach to each school.</p>	<p>R.17 Establish clear processes and technology standards for schools in the form of a service level agreement.</p>
<p>There is limited evidence of a formal security strategy. Without a formal cybersecurity program, there is an increased risk of a security breach.</p>	<p>R.18 Formalize a cybersecurity program that includes policies, procedures, and guidelines.</p>
<p>HPEDSB lacks a formal data management strategy that defines how the organization will collect, store, govern, and analyze data. This could mean the Board is incurring unnecessary costs related to data</p>	<p>R.19 Develop a data management strategy.</p>

Current State Findings	Recommendations
management. There could also be missed opportunities in the areas of data analytics and business intelligence, limiting the amount of evidence-based decision-making.	

Curriculum and Student Services

Curriculum and Student Services work well as a team in the pursuit of improving student achievement. Realigning portfolios, clarifying responsibilities, and leveraging data can support these departments in achieving that goal.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
Superintendents have large portfolio responsibilities, which limits focus on certain portfolios and prevents Superintendents from being present at their assigned schools to support school administrators.	R.20 Management should consider modifying the roles and responsibilities of Superintendents and System Leads to ensure workloads are balanced and to create capacity for Superintendents to support schools.
In the absence of dedicated research personnel, staff leverage available data to inform decision making; however, schools are not being provided with a consistent stream of actionable data, which limits their ability to make informed decisions to improve student achievement.	R.21 Improve the use of data in curriculum areas for both Central Operations and schools to better inform school planning, resource allocation, and student achievement initiatives.
Due to a lack of systems integration, the financial performance of the International Services department remains unclear. Without this clarity, the value or return on investment of the program cannot be fully quantified.	R.22 Develop business processes and improve collaboration between International Student Services and the Finance department to better understand program finances.
The benefits and risks of managing an in-house homestay program need to be further examined. Without a clear understanding of the potential benefits and legal risks, the Board may either be more exposed to certain risks or may not be leveraging the program enough for non-grant revenue.	R.23 Consider developing a business case for the International Student Services program to allow for further exploration of the value proposition, financials, and legal implications.
The staff allocation process is managed and supported by HPEDSB senior leaders. There is a high opportunity cost of having senior leaders manage these operational processes versus focusing on more strategic work.	R.24 Delegate roles and responsibilities within the staff allocation process. R.25 Identify opportunities for automation within the staff allocation process to maximize efficiency.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
<p>The independence rubric used by the Student Services department helps inform discussion and decision-making around Educational Assistant allocations. It is a valuable tool that increases the objectivity of the process.</p>	<p>R.26 Identify opportunities to allow for continuous monitoring of student needs once Educational Assistants (EA) have been assigned and the school year begins.</p>
<p>There is a limited supply of available EAs in the workforce, creating challenges for the Student Services department to address student needs.</p>	<p>R.27 Consider building a pool of relief or occasional EA staff by leveraging other support workers throughout the community with positions such as Child and Youth Workers (CYWs), Developmental Service Workers (DSWs) and Social Service Workers (SSWs).</p>

Financial Services

The Financial Services department must invest in training their staff to help build competency and expertise in order to serve departments and schools better.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
<p>The current financial system has poor integration with the emPath Human Resource Information System (HRIS) and the School Employee Management Systems (SEMS), which limits data flow between HR, Payroll, and Finance as well as any automation or process improvement opportunities.</p> <p>Manual data entry and paper-based records are often used to complete key purchasing tasks. This limits the department's efficiency and creates an unnecessary workload.</p>	<p>[See R.10] Explore implementation of an ERP solution based on Ministry Direction for better integration of HR, Finance, Payroll and Purchasing functions.</p>
<p>There are a limited number of processes currently documented. With recent retirements and turnover, there has been a loss of organizational knowledge leading to inefficiencies as new staff redefine processes or learn the processes as they go along.</p>	<p>R.28 Document processes to ensure appropriate transfer of knowledge and identification of gaps.</p>
<p>There are training gaps within the department, which results in tasks escalating to the management level and work effort being duplicated.</p>	<p>R.29 Invest in training staff (both within Central Operations and in schools) and develop a service level agreement.</p>
<p>There is a lack of strategic alignment between the Board and the Foundation. This</p>	<p>R.30 Increase communication with the HPE Learning Foundation to ensure fundraising</p>

Current State Findings	Recommendations
could result in fundraising activities not matching the Board’s priorities.	initiatives align with the strategic priorities of the Board.
The staff of the Learning Foundation are currently School Board employees. However, it is unclear based on the current structure what the reporting relationship and supervision of the Foundation staff looks like.	R.31 Clarify operating and working relationships to reflect that the Learning Foundation and School Board are separate entities through a revised MOU and additional agreements.
There have been significant changes to the overall procurement process in recent years. Additional training is needed to ensure a clear understanding of and adherence to these processes. Without this, the department may experience inefficiencies and may be limited in the service it can provide to other departments and schools.	R.32 Develop an employee manual that outlines the process flow, best practices for initiating procurements and provides training to business areas. This may include the development of a service level agreement.
The department has a limited number of staff, which presents a risk to the Board in the event of an absence.	R.33 Management should consider increasing the capacity of the Purchasing area by introducing one additional full-time equivalent.

School Operations and Facilities Management

The Facilities department works well as a team, despite external pressures around recruitment. The department should look to proactively address these issues through future planning.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
HPEDSB is experiencing difficulties recruiting tradespeople due to the disparity in wage schedules. This creates a burden on existing staff and could increase costs for the Board if they outsource these trades functions.	R.34 Recruitment of qualified trades is a systemic challenge beyond HPEDSB that is not likely to be resolved in the near term. Management should develop a long-term recruiting plan that includes options to augment Facility Services’ capacity.
There is limited collaboration between the Facilities department and the IT infrastructure team, despite clear points of overlap. This results in duplication of effort and negatively impacts the service schools may receive.	R.35 Introduce standardized practices that allow for increased collaboration between the Facilities department and IT Infrastructure team.

Communications

Communications at HPEDSB has the opportunity to facilitate more collaboration between departments within Central Operations and between Central Operations and schools.

Current State Findings	Recommendations
<p>There are limited mechanisms available for schools to raise concerns or highlight opportunities for improvement. Without consistent feedback from schools, the Board is limited in its ability to identify opportunities to continuously improve.</p>	<p>R.36 Develop a strategic approach for communicating with schools.</p>
<p>The Board does not have a central repository where data can be easily accessed by Central Operations or staff. This limits collaboration between departments and between schools.</p>	<p>R.37 Provide opportunities for principals and teachers to collaborate school-to-school, focusing on improving student achievement and program implementation.</p>

1.0 Context

1.1 About HPEDSB

HPEDSB serves over 15,000 students at over 40 schools. Student achievement is supported by approximately 1,800 teaching and support staff, in addition to the contributions of volunteers and community partners. The school board district covers a geographic area of over 7,000 square kilometres in the Hastings and Prince Edward counties.

HPEDSB is one of the 72 publicly funded school boards in Ontario. Each school board is responsible for making key decisions such as:

- How to allocate funds and resources that are received from the Ministry of Education;
- Setting the annual budget;
- Whether to close or build new schools;
- Which programs to provide in schools (e.g., special education);
- What the local education policy should be (e.g., homework).

In addition to making these key decisions, Ontario's *Education Act* sets out the duties and obligations of each school board.

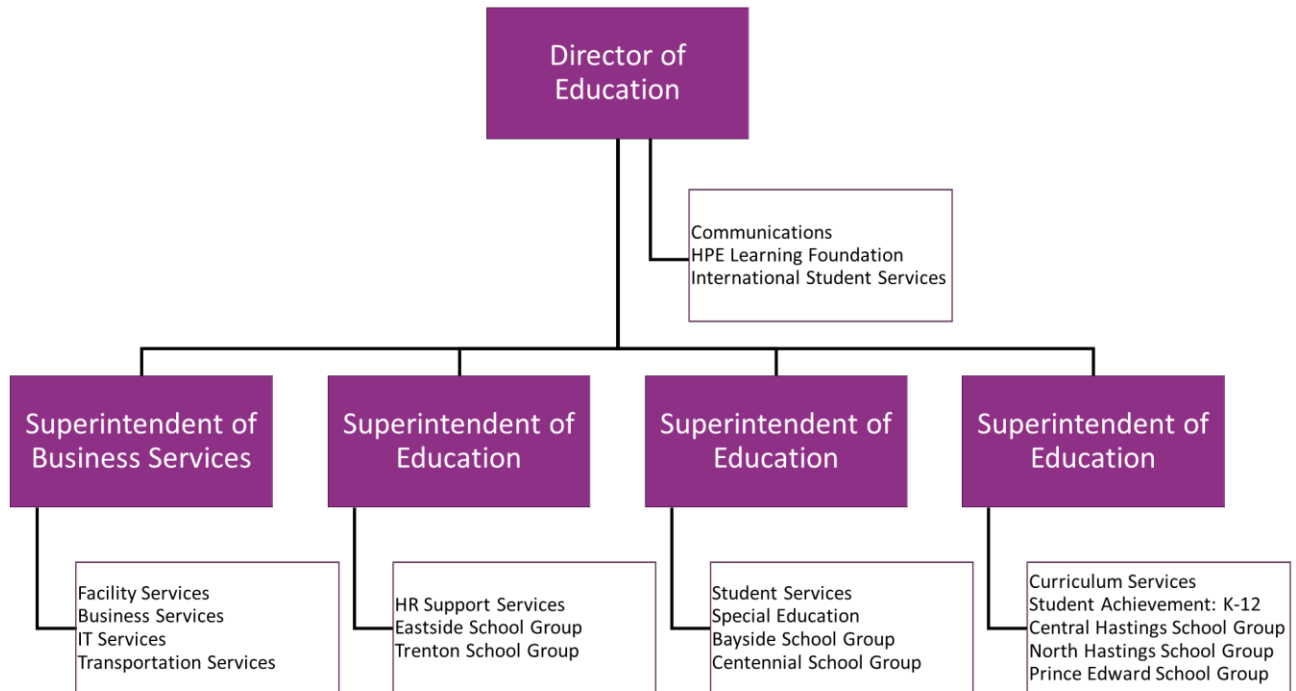
The Hastings and Prince Edward Learning Foundation serves as the Board's charitable arm. The Foundation works with volunteers, teachers, principals, school staff and donors to provide support for a variety of enhanced learning opportunities for students such as Student Nutrition Programs and the Student Emergency Fund.

The central operations of school boards provide the organizational support services that are needed for the school board to operate. This includes departments such as Facility Services, Information and Technology Services, Human Resources Support Services, Curriculum Services and Student Services.

1.2 Organizational Structure

HPEDSB is governed by a Board of Trustees, who are elected every four years through municipal elections. Trustees play an integral leadership role by establishing the school board's vision, mission, and strategic plan, and ensuring effective stewardship of the Board's resources.

The Senior Administration team is composed of the Director of Education and four Superintendents. This includes a Superintendent of Business Services and three Superintendents of Education. Each of the Superintendents of Education has multiple portfolio responsibilities as well as assigned school groups.



1.3 Key Priorities of the School Board

HPEDSB’s vision is to “lead with integrity and high expectations for all.” To help achieve that vision, HPEDSB has established several strategic priorities:

- Foster a Culture of Excellence and High Expectations for All
- Promote Safety and Well-Being
- Strengthen Community through Equity and Social Justice
- Improve Student Success and Achievement
- Ensure Responsible Communications

The School Board has made it its mission to “inspire curiosity, display compassion and empathy, nurture individuality, and foster a sense of community on our journey to higher achievement.”

These goals and priorities are implemented through the [2020 – 2025 Strategic Plan](#).

1.4 Key School Board Statistics

The following table highlights key statistics for the Board.

Statistic	2020-2021
Enrolment	
Elementary students	10,576
Secondary students	4,610
Staffing	
Elementary teachers	688
Secondary teachers	342
Educational assistants	363
Principals	49
Vice-Principals	30
Facilities	
Elementary schools	32
K – 12 schools	1
7 – 12 schools	4
Secondary schools	1
K – 10 schools	1

1.5 Functional Areas

The Optimus SBR team assessed the HPEDSB Central Operations in seven functional areas:

Functional Area	Description
Board Administration	A functional area dedicated to the Senior Administration team with the review focusing on how they operate and collaborate amongst each other. The Senior Administration team includes the Director of Education, a Superintendent of Business Services, a Superintendent of HR and two Superintendents of Education.
Human Resource Management	HR conducts several key functions for the Board including labour relations, compensation, recruitment, performance management, organizational development, health, safety, and wellness among other aspects.
Information and Technology Services	IT provides support for corporate systems, central departments, and learning technology.
Curriculum and Student Services	For the purposes of this review, the Curriculum and Student Services departments have been combined into one functional area. Curriculum Services is focused on the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of programs such as early years, elementary, and

Functional Area	Description
	secondary schools. Student Services is focused on special education programs and services.
Financial Services	The Finance department is responsible for ensuring resources are spent effectively and efficiently. Additional functions include accounting, payroll, and procurement.
School Operations and Facilities Management	Facility Services is responsible for ensuring schools are in an optimal condition for learning. This includes overseeing the construction, maintenance, sustainability, and operations functions for the Board.
Communications	Communications is responsible for overseeing a wide range of communication activities for the Board. This includes internal communication, community engagement, issues management, and media relations.

2.0 Project Overview

2.1 Purpose of this Report

This report summarizes the future state recommendations that are intended to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Central Operations in order to support student achievement.

This operational review report provides:

- An overview of the project approach;
- An overview of the methodology used to gain an understanding of the current state and develop future state recommendations;
- A summary of current state findings and recommendations for each functional area:
 - Board Administration
 - Human Resources Management
 - Information and Technology Services
 - Curriculum and Student Services
 - Financial Services
 - School Operations and Facilities Management
 - Communications

2.2 Project Context

Optimus SBR partnered with HPEDSB to conduct an operational review of Central Operations. The purpose of the review was to identify opportunities for improvement in HPEDSB Central Operations so that school board administration and operations are aligned to best support student achievement. Central Operation’s existing functions were examined to identify

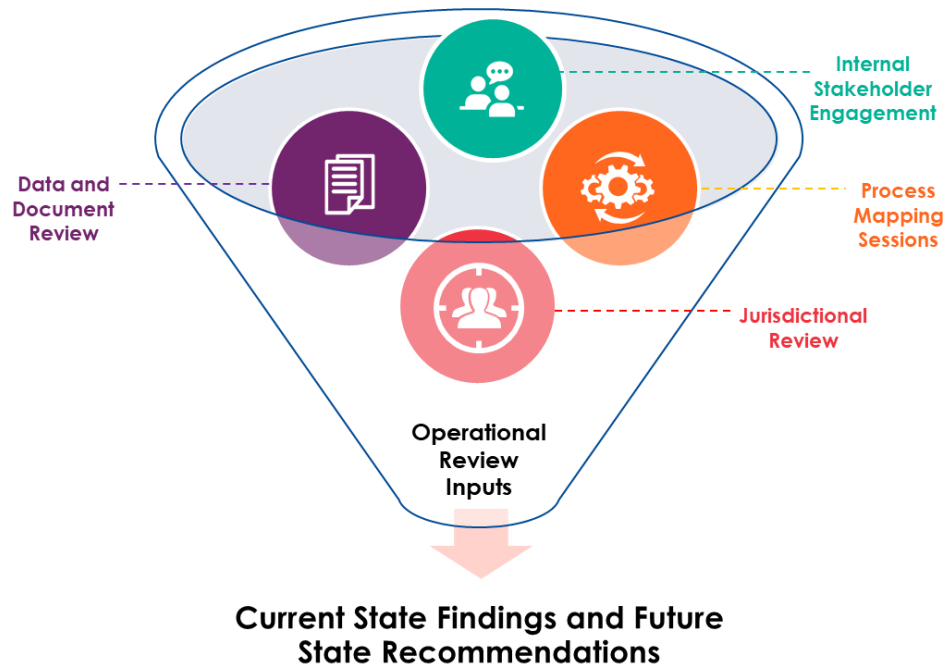
opportunities for increased effectiveness, efficiency, service experience, and optimal resource allocation.

2.3 Project Approach and Methodology

2.3.1 Project Methodology

To develop findings and recommendations, Optimus SBR conducted a variety of research and stakeholder engagement activities. Figure 1 below illustrates the approach used for this engagement.

Figure 1: Project Methodology



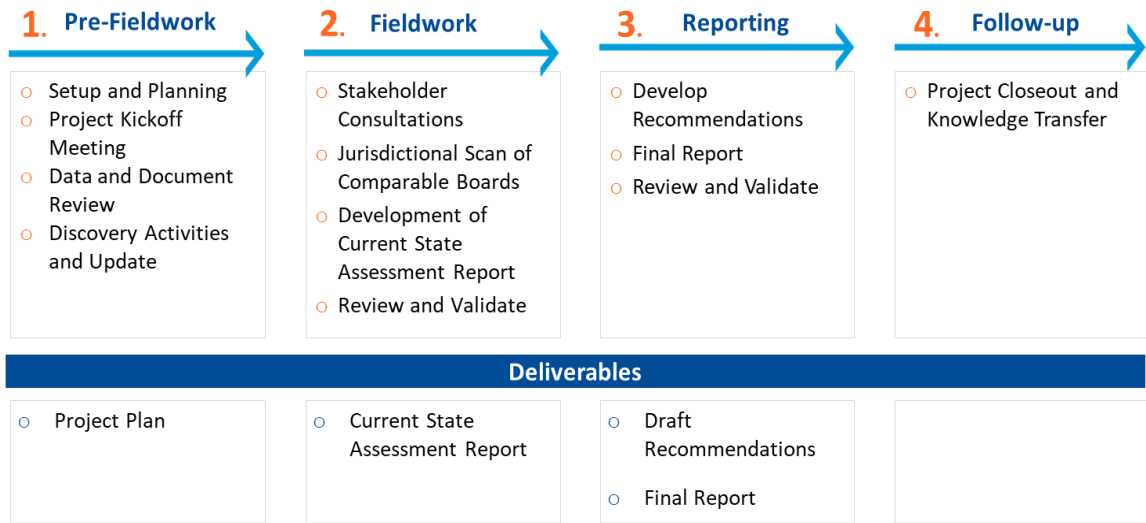
As illustrated above, the Optimus SBR team:

- **Reviewed data and documents** to develop a thorough understanding of HPEDSB's Central Operations. This included key planning documents about each functional area such as organizational charts, job descriptions, briefing notes, financial statements, policies, procedures, and business plans.
- **Engaged internal stakeholders** to obtain input on the strengths, challenges, gaps, and constraints of different functional areas. Perspectives were gathered from a wide range of internal sources including Superintendents, Managers, Coordinators, and School Administrators.
- **Developed process maps** for two workflows to support documentation and identification of opportunities for improvement.
- **Conducted jurisdictional research** to understand practices and approaches undertaken by comparable school boards, which informed the recommendations in this report.

2.3.2 Project Approach

The approach for this review included four steps, each having its own sub-set of activities built on one another.

Figure 2: Project Approach



2.3.3 In-Scope Functional Areas and Areas of Focus

Table 1 below provides an overview of areas of focus and review objectives within each of the in-scope functions. The areas of focus were selected during Phase 1: Pre-Fieldwork based on the preliminary document review and several discovery interviews. The areas of focus were identified and prioritized based on perceived importance to the Board and anticipated challenges with the current state.

Table 1: Areas of Focus

Functional Area	Area of Focus	Review Objectives
Board Administration	Reporting and Organizational Structure	To assess the Senior Administration structure to better understand strengths, challenges, and how the structure can be optimized to support student achievement.
Human Resources Management	Scope and Structure of HR services	To assess whether there is an appropriate division of roles and responsibilities between the HPEDSB HR Department and schools.
	Payroll and HR interface	To assess the process flow between Payroll and HR and the gaps that may exist within that process.
	Attendance Support	To determine if the current policies and processes related to attendance support effectively address absenteeism.

Functional Area	Area of Focus	Review Objectives
Information and Technology Services	IT Strategic Planning	To understand the current state of IT strategic planning and strategic thinking within the IT department.
	Cloud Governance Framework	To assess the Board's cloud governance capabilities and to identify which components need to be developed for a formal cloud governance framework.
	IT Project Intake and Prioritization	To understand how the change request process currently works and to assess how much planning or prioritization is taking place to address these requests.
	IT Security and Risk Management	To review the Board's current state position as it pertains to IT security and risk.
	Data Management and Digitization	To assess where the gaps may be regarding the Board's data management practices.
Curriculum and Student Services	Portfolio Management	To review how curriculum and academic portfolios are distributed and managed across Central Operations.
	International Student Services	To assess the benefits and risks associated with overseeing this program within Central Operations.
	Staff Allocation Planning	To review HPEDSB's staff allocation process and to identify where inefficiencies may occur.
Financial Services	Finance, Payroll, and HR systems	To understand how the systems are currently used and to identify any gaps in functionality or opportunities for improvement.
	Finance and Payroll structure	To assess if roles and responsibilities need to be clarified, particularly where HR and payroll processes intersect.
	HPE Learning Foundation	To assess the reporting relationship and structures between the School Board and its charitable arm.
	Procurement processes	To evaluate the structure and processes used to support purchasing for the entire School Board.
School Operations and Facilities	Maintenance and Operations Recruitment	To evaluate any gaps in departmental skills, training, and recruitment.
	Management of Capital Projects	To review the capital planning process to determine if proper processes, allocation of funds, and resources are in place to manage large-scale capital projects.

Functional Area	Area of Focus	Review Objectives
Communications	Communications	To identify any opportunities for improvement regarding communicating with schools and staff, with a particular focus on virtual channels.

2.4 Analysis Framework for Central Operations

Central Operations across Ontario school boards have been designed to balance the public service mandate of a school board with the business oversight to keep it functioning. Central Operations allows the Board to focus limited resources on the programs that will have the most impact on student achievement and allow school administrators to focus their time more directly on student achievement.

Overall, Central Operations has three main high-level objectives:

- **Enabling schools:** Schools are supported and enabled with high-quality and expert services that positively contribute and enable them to support student achievement.
- **Resource stewardship:** The organizational and service model is efficient and supports proper stewardship of the school board’s resources including compliance with legislation and organizational policies.
- **Service experience:** Schools have a positive and productive service experience, based on shared values, expectations, and respect.

As part of the review, Optimus SBR looked for evidence of how HPEDSB’s people, processes and technology were meeting these objectives and made recommendations on how to improve performance against each of these.

Prioritization of recommendations was based on expected benefit and expected effort. The methodology also allows for the identification of short-term recommendations that may be considered quick wins versus longer-term and more strategic recommendations.

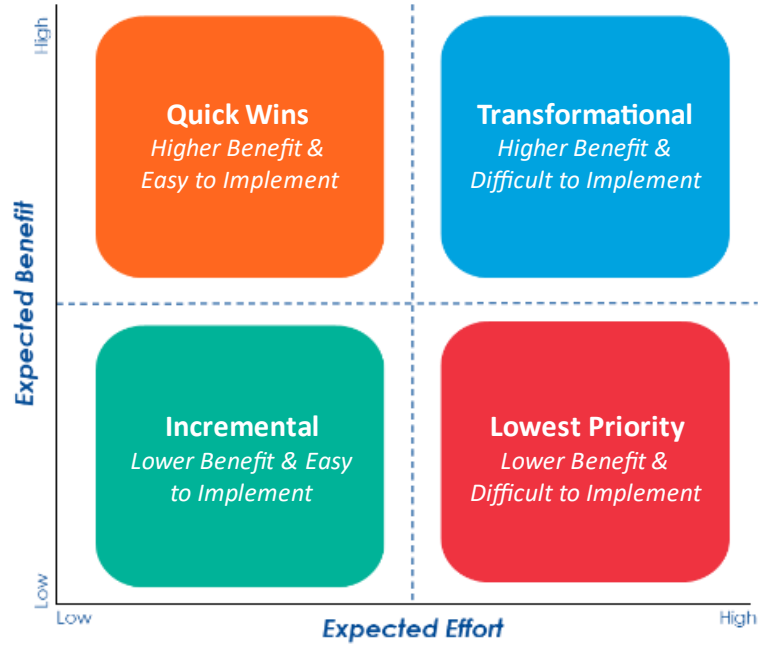
PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA

Expected Benefit

1. Risk mitigation
2. Expected functional impact
3. Operational impact
4. Likelihood of success or adoption

Expected Effort

1. Complexity
2. Directional cost
3. Work effort
4. Timeframe



The current prioritization and timing of recommendations are based on Optimus SBR’s assessment and are expected to be changed or updated by HPEDSB over time depending on its own view of priorities. If resource capacity is not available to implement the recommendations outlined in this report, the Board could explore several options including prioritizing a certain recommendation above a current priority or bringing in a temporary resource or contract to support implementation.

For the purposes of this report, recommendations with expected low effort (quick wins and incremental) are projected to be completed within the next year. While recommendations with expected high effort (transformational)¹ are projected to be completed within the next two to five years.

3.0 Organization-Level Findings and Recommendations

3.1 Current State Findings

HPEDSB Central Operations is a team of dedicated and engaged staff who are committed to seeing students succeed. Adjustments in culture, processes and planning can help Central Operations achieve that goal.

¹ **Note:** recommendations considered to be “lowest priority” with high expected effort and low expected benefit were not considered for this report.

Focus Area	Key Findings
<p>Organizational Strengths</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and staff are committed to helping students learn, achieve their goals and graduate. Stakeholders spoke about how this commitment informed their work, whether it involved directly or indirectly working with teachers or students. Staff recognized that their work directly contributes to student achievement. • Superintendents and System Leads are committed to student achievement and work in a collaborative model where individual strengths are leveraged to ensure strategic priorities are met. • Many stakeholders, particularly on the leadership side, spoke about how proud they were of the accomplishments of their specific teams. Despite recent challenges such as COVID-19, staff turnover and process inefficiencies, the team has worked hard to support schools and students. • Central Operations values its staff, and many spoke about the importance of continuing to invest in the growth and development of staff. Investing in staff has become especially important given the recent retirements of senior leaders in Central Operations. • The Board recently completed a multi-year financial recovery plan. The Board is now in a financial position to make strategic investments to improve operations.
<p>Organizational Opportunities for Improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholders mentioned several organizational challenges related to culture such as a high resistance to change and a limited customer service orientation. • The organization has recently had several experienced members retire or leave the organization. Due to limited documentation, organizational knowledge has been lost. • Roles and responsibilities are unclear or not being followed at times, resulting in shifts in workload and areas of duplication. This can be attributed to the need for training, improved competencies, improved communication, and structural changes if/as appropriate. • It was reported that project management and planning capability and capacity are generally lacking to support the implementation of improvement initiatives.

3.2 Recommendations

During the current state assessment and in developing recommendations for each functional area, several themes emerged that relate to the Board as a whole. The following recommendations were selected as key enablers for the implementation of functional-area specific recommendations:

- **R.1** Adopt best practices in change management.
- **R.2** Enhance the organization’s culture to support collaboration between Central Operations and schools and enhance the customer service orientation within Central Operations.
- **R.3** Ensure policies, procedures, and processes are documented and updated periodically to support knowledge transfer and enhance accountability.

- **R.4** Develop a project management focus and capability to ensure consistency, rigour, and discipline for larger projects and to help the Board ensure that people and financial resources are properly allocated to projects.

R.1 Adopt best practices in change management.

RATIONALE

For the recommendations outlined in this report to be impactful and lasting, the Board must have a culture in place that allows these changes to take place and the impacts to be realized. This means building a culture of continuous improvement, resilience, and agility and incorporating best practices in change management into implementation efforts. The organization must develop an understanding and openness to change and incremental improvement.

Adopting change management practices is especially important in an organization where staff have shown resistance to change in the past. The Board must equip and support staff through transitions, otherwise, the desired future state will not be achieved.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** A larger capacity to change will allow the Board to make the necessary changes and implement key initiatives that will allow them to have a positive impact on schools.
- **Service experience:** Effective change management practices will allow the Board to adapt quickly and respond to the changing needs of schools.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

Many of the recommendations in this report challenge the status quo and require the breaking of habits and the adoption of new practices. The following high-level steps can be used to ensure change management practices are adopted:

1. Identify a resource to lead change management in the organization.
2. Select or develop a framework (e.g., Prosci AKDAR) that helps define what change management means to HPEDSB.
3. Develop or adopt tools and standards to set expectations for how change management should be incorporated into HPEDSB projects.
4. Train staff who will be executing projects in best practices.

R.2 Enhance the organization's culture to support collaboration between Central Operations and schools and enhance the customer service orientation within Central Operations.

RATIONALE

It is recommended that a culture is established within Central Operations that is service-oriented and committed to continuous improvement and learning. This also means a culture where

departments and staff see their contribution to service outcomes as the primary objective of their role. A collaborative culture and effective relationships are necessary components for any organization, but especially important for a school board when the functions of Central Operations and schools are different. A service-oriented culture will help ensure that departments within Central Operations are considered a valued partner to schools.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Viewing schools as clients will help reorient Central Operations so they properly equip schools with the necessary tools and knowledge to resolve issues and enhance student achievement.
- **Service experience:** Having the right mindset will help ensure schools have a positive and productive service experience when dealing with Central Operations.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

Central Operations leadership needs to clearly define and set expectations of service-oriented behaviours (e.g., increase personal interactions or reduce the number of intake forms) and support cultural change through training and change management activities. While it is a slow process to transform culture there are several best practices that can help to reinforce the change over time, including:

- Establish a structured program to celebrate the accomplishments of staff in service excellence.
- Solutions Lab: A formal structure and process to analyze successes, failures, and issues, and to spread learning across the organization, promoting a supportive culture that is focused on continuous improvement.
- Creating a culture committee can help to establish an open, transparent communication channel to share information about organizational-wide opportunities for change, building trust and understanding.
- Documenting a formal customer service strategy to define and deliver the best client and staff experiences as the foundation for a positive culture. This includes reframing how people think about customer service in terms of staff, infrastructure, internal processes, communication, and procedures. Activities can include identifying chronic customer service issues, suggesting creative solutions, and assigning accountabilities to specific teams.
- Once teams have established key performance indicators (KPIs), these can be tracked and reported to the team in a highly visible way (e.g., using dashboards). This serves as a transparent way to highlight performance against targets, celebrate success, and identify when KPIs are not being met which allows staff to reflect and adjust.
- Leaders and contributors at every level should model behaviours that promote partnership, collaboration, and customer service. Behaviours should be defined and monitored through the Performance Management Program. Individual plans should be developed with specific objectives and actions defined that contribute to improving culture.

Enhancing service experience and culture can be formalized through service level agreements at the department level. This idea is expanded on in later sections of this report (see R.8, R.17, R.29 and R.32 for more details).

R.3 Ensure policies, procedures, and processes are documented and updated periodically to support knowledge transfer and enhance accountability.

RATIONALE

To address concerns related to recent retirements and unanticipated staff turnover, the Board should ensure there are knowledge transfer mechanisms in place to allow new staff to take on key roles. In addition, roles and responsibilities are not well defined for certain processes or portfolios (i.e., Indigenous education and budgeting for Ministry-funded initiatives). Documenting policies, procedures, and processes will help define accountabilities and may help to identify opportunities to improve the process.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Better documentation can reduce turnover-related costs as it can streamline the onboarding process.
- **Resource stewardship:** Documented policies, procedures, and processes can help reduce inefficiencies that stem from duplication and coordination.
- **Service experience:** Clearly outlining where schools need to be involved in the process can reduce confusion and improve the overall service experience.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

To implement this recommendation, the Board should consider taking the following steps:

1. Create an inventory of all the processes in the organization and assign a process owner to be responsible for keeping it current.
2. Prioritize the processes that need to be documented through a standard operating procedure or process map diagram.
3. Record or map the processes by gathering input from all stakeholders involved.
4. Identify and implement quick win opportunities for improvement.

R.4 Develop a project management focus and capability to ensure consistency, rigour, and discipline for larger projects and to help the Board ensure that people and financial resources are properly allocated to projects.

RATIONALE

Project management capability and capacity is inconsistent across the organization and generally limited to supporting the implementation of improvement initiatives. A consistent project management approach for the organization is needed. This applies not only to the

implementation of the initiatives outlined in this report, but also implementation of future strategic plans and operating plans.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** A consistent approach can enhance collaboration with schools as it increases the transparency and visibility of a project.
- **Resource stewardship:** There is an increased likelihood that projects are delivered within the required time and budget.
- **Service experience:** A consistent approach helps get buy-in and support from key stakeholders.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

To adopt a consistent approach, the Board should consider implementing several best practices. Over the next year, HPEDSB can focus on the following actions:

1. Define the project management policies that govern HPEDSB. This includes the role of designated project managers and how it links to other departments.
2. Develop and communicate the project management lifecycle for HPEDSB (including the definition of a project). This should build on existing HPEDSB practices, and clearly outline how projects will be managed from initiation to completion.
3. Developing standardized project management tools and templates.
4. Implement a knowledge management process for the ongoing management and organization of all information, tools, standards, processes, and procedures.

Over the longer term, HPEDSB can develop the reporting and analysis components, which include:

1. Implementing a project portfolio management tool that can support the collection and analysis of projects for “Lessons Learned” and continuous improvement in project management practices.
2. Develop reports to provide an overview and status of all projects at HPEDSB.
3. Develop and implement metrics to measure projects against strategic objectives.

4.0 Board Administration

4.1 Current State Findings

The Senior Administration team is dedicated and passionate about student achievement. With limited capacity, the team is challenged to provide the right level of leadership and oversight across portfolios.

Focus Area	Key Findings
Reporting and Organizational Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership demonstrated a clear understanding of how their work impacts student achievement. Linkages to student achievement help keep staff motivated and engaged. • HPEDSB Superintendents have large portfolio responsibilities, which has led to some portfolios (i.e., Indigenous education) not receiving the required attention. • Multiple departments within Central Operations are involved in the budgeting and reporting process for Ministry-funded initiatives. The lack of clear roles and responsibilities is leading to confusion internally.

4.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and service experience of Board Administration:

- **R.5** Management should consider introducing a new Superintendent role to the Senior Administration team.
- **R.6** Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities regarding the allocation of funds and reporting of Ministry-funded initiatives.

R.5 Management should consider introducing a new Superintendent role to the Senior Administration team.

RATIONALE

HPEDSB Superintendents have large portfolio responsibilities, which has created a reliance on System Leads or support staff and has led to some portfolios not receiving the required attention. Staff expressed concern over workload and competing priorities both for themselves and their colleagues. Other comparable boards (in size or prorated size), have an additional academic Superintendent on their Senior Administration team in addition to a Superintendent of HR and a Superintendent of Business Services.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** A new Superintendent may raise the level of focus and quality for each portfolio, resulting in greater student outcomes for each academic portfolio.
- **Enabling schools:** Increase in outcome and performance-focused interactions with schools.
- **Service experience:** School groups will be more equally distributed across the Senior Administration team, increasing the likelihood of positive interactions between Central Operations and schools.
- **Service experience:** Clearly defined roles and responsibilities leading to individuals being more effective in their own roles.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

If a new Superintendent is added to the Senior Administration team, HPEDSB should review all portfolios to look for how best to allocate portfolio responsibilities across the team for greater synergy and economies of scale in operations. Based on the jurisdictional review, the gap in the Senior Administration team is in the academic area. Therefore, the Board may want to consider making the focus of this new role on student learning portfolios rather than business or operational portfolios.

HPEDSB should ensure proper onboarding materials and processes are in place to best support the new Superintendent. This will support a seamless transition for both the Board and the new Superintendent.

Over time, HPEDSB should have more flexibility to regularly re-balance portfolios to ensure there is congruence across the Senior Administration team.

R.6 Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities regarding the allocation of funds and reporting of Ministry-funded initiatives.

RATIONALE

Multiple central departments are involved in budgeting, operations, and reporting of Ministry-funded initiatives. Accountability and processes are not always clearly defined, which is time-consuming for staff trying to work through the process.

The accountabilities and processes regarding budgeting and reporting on Ministry-funded initiatives were identified as a gap. This lack of clarity in accountabilities and processes result in additional workload for staff and prevents collaborative discussion between and among departments on items such as allocation of funds and reporting requirements for the Ministry.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Clearly defined roles will allow staff to focus on strategic tasks that impact schools more directly versus administrative tasks.
- **Resource stewardship:** Clearly defined roles can streamline the budgeting and reporting process, creating efficiencies in how time is spent and how funds are allocated to initiatives.
- **Service experience:** A consistent and well-defined process can increase transparency and reduce the risk of human error when reporting to the Ministry.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

The HPEDSB Senior Administration team should document roles, responsibilities, and processes to ensure there is agreement and alignment. Based on jurisdictional findings, other Boards tend to take a more centralized approach with the Superintendent of Business Services assigning the funds to the Superintendent responsible. From a reporting standpoint, Superintendents report

back to the Finance departments where figures are validated and then reported back to the Ministry from the Superintendent of Business Services.

Another Ontario school board uses a more decentralized process for the budgeting portion of the process. When an initiative comes in, their Senior Administration team reviews the requirements and is provided with the autonomy to work with the funds their areas have been given. The team meets regularly to discuss progress and provide updates. On the reporting side, the process is generally centralized with a dedicated point of contact for the Ministry.

5.0 Human Resources Management

5.1 Current State Findings

The HR department has undergone significant changes in recent years. In this time of transition, it is important for the department to define and establish a corporate philosophy for their role in the Board.

Focus Area	Key Findings
Scope and Structure of HR Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The HR department has undergone several personnel and structural changes over the past couple of years. The new staff have responded well to this change and are actively seeking opportunities to improve. There is a need for greater clarity about HR’s responsibilities as it relates to providing services to schools. Incongruent expectations between HR and school administrators are forcing school administrators to spend more time on operational tasks. HR staff focus primarily on day-to-day transactional work versus more strategic work. By creating process efficiencies enabling the ability to shift time and effort to strategic activities, the department may be able to proactively solve issues and prepare HPEDSB for future challenges.
Payroll and HR Interface	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The systems and business processes used by HR and Payroll require manual data entry at several points in the process. Payroll is not notified early enough in the onboarding process, which can lead to delays in paying staff.
Attendance Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The HR department has developed a clear procedure that allows the Board to address issues around absenteeism in a consistent and transparent manner. The department needs to commit to implementing this program to see the desired outcomes achieved.

5.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Human Resources Management:

- **R.7** Maintain the current structure over the next year to allow staff to adjust to the recent changes within this department. Over this short-term period, management should consider establishing measures to determine the effectiveness of this new structure.
- **R.8** Clarify the roles and responsibilities for Central Operations HR and schools for key HR functions such as recruitment, discipline, and performance management. The roles and responsibilities should be documented in the form of a service level agreement.
- **R.9** Senior leaders within the HR department should consider identifying and delegating operational tasks throughout the department to ensure time and resources can be focused on implementing strategic initiatives such as organizational training, development, and recruitment strategies.
- **R.10** Explore implementation of an ERP solution based on Ministry Direction for better integration of HR, Finance, Payroll and Purchasing functions.
- **R.11** Standardize the intake process when a new employee is hired to ensure information is captured once and the appropriate stakeholders are notified.
- **R.12** Develop an implementation plan for the Attendance Support Program. Validate the program's components, the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes, and buy-in from staff before further implementation.

R.7 Maintain the current structure over the next year to allow staff to adjust to the recent changes within this department. Over this short-term period, management should consider establishing measures to determine the effectiveness of this new structure.

RATIONALE

The HR department has undergone several changes in both personnel and structure over the past year. This new structure is reported to be better suited to support the School Board. There may be opportunities to refine the structure, however, more data and feedback is needed to make a proper evaluation.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Service experience:** Over time, the HR department should have increased capacity to plan, think strategically, and identify gaps to service schools more effectively.
- **Service experience:** Once HR has fully adapted to this new structure and has made positive adjustments along the way, they will be in a better position to respond to the needs of the Board.
- **Enabling schools:** An HR department that can provide service efficiently and effectively allows School Administrators to focus on key activities instead of HR administrative work such as finding substitute teachers.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick win

To fully leverage the new structure, HR should consider developing a document that outlines the new structure and who is responsible for which portfolio. This could include frequently asked questions and who to go to when dealing with common issues. Once distributed to the Board, HR

will be in a better position to identify where gaps are and if the structure needs to be further adjusted.

Within the next six to twelve months, HR should distribute a survey to School Board departments, both within and outside Central Operations. This will help HR gauge opinions on the level of service the department is providing and assess what is working well and where the opportunities for improvement are. HR needs to ultimately shift its focus to a more service-oriented mindset.

After a short period of time and with additional data, HR should be in a position to evaluate its recently changed structure and adapt where necessary.

R.8 Clarify the roles and responsibilities for Central Operations HR and schools for key HR functions such as recruitment, discipline, and performance management. The roles and responsibilities should be documented in the form of a service level agreement.

RATIONALE

The split of roles and responsibilities between Central Operations (HR department) and schools need to be further defined. Recruitment, discipline, and performance management were some activities that were identified as being unclear who the lead was as well as what the appropriate roles are for schools versus Central Operations. Both entities seem to have different expectations for how much direct involvement and accountability Central Operations should have versus accountability lying with school administration.

The HR department does not have service standards that outline expectations for responding to inquiries. It was reported that the department has challenges responding to requests promptly and that basic issues were resolved over several exchanges.

There was significant concern that the level of support is having an impact on school administrators' capacity to focus on student achievement. Exacerbated by COVID-19, school administrators have been spending an increasing amount of time trying to bring in supply teachers. In some cases, school administrators are taking on teacher-related tasks due to inefficiencies in the day-to-day staffing process.

Other school boards are experiencing similar challenges related to recruitment. Some school boards have decided to take on more processes centrally to alleviate that burden on school administrators, particularly when it comes to finding emergency teaching support. HPEDSB will need to explore with schools what the right balance of support is.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Clear expectations on key HR functions allows HR to be in a better position to empower and support schools for the functions schools are responsible for.
- **Service experience:** Clarity on roles and responsibilities will improve working relationships and build trust between Central Operations and school administration.
- **Service experience:** Clear expectations as to who does what will help identify any structural gaps that may exist in the system.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

The HR department should facilitate discussions with school administrators on what the needs are and where support is needed. For key service areas (i.e., recruitment, discipline, attendance support), HR should develop service standards and service level agreements that outline what HR is responsible for and what school administrators are responsible for. These agreements should be implemented across the School Board regardless of the size and resources of each school. These service level agreements can also be developed with other internal departments.

To help define service standards, the HR department should consider taking the following steps:

1. Identify and define the most common types of department requests and services.
2. Depending on the information and data available, assess the current level of service demand (e.g., volumes).
3. Draft, refine, and communicate the standards (e.g., response time).

R.9 Senior leaders within the HR department should consider identifying and delegating operational tasks throughout the department to ensure time and resources can be focused on implementing strategic initiatives such as organizational training, development, and recruitment strategies.

RATIONALE

The focus of the department is primarily on day-to-day transactional work with a perceived lack of capacity to focus on strategic initiatives such as training, development and improving approaches to the recruitment of staff. For example, Optimus SBR learned that on occasion HR staff go to schools to have disciplinary related conversations with teachers. This takes them away from focusing on strategic initiatives.

Without prioritizing strategic initiatives, the department may find itself in a cycle of trying to catch up to the issues that arise. An increased focus on strategic initiatives will assist in resolving significant pain points across the School Board. This will also help the department achieve strategic objectives and develop a modernized approach to human resources.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Service experience:** Taking a “big picture” view of the HR issues the Board faces arms the department with the necessary knowledge and insight to serve schools better.
- **Resource stewardship:** Turnover is costly for any organization. Approaching recruitment and retention issues more strategically can be more effective than dealing with it on a day-to-day basis.
- **Resource stewardship:** Delegating certain functions within HR can empower support staff and lead to development opportunities, which is important for engagement and retention.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

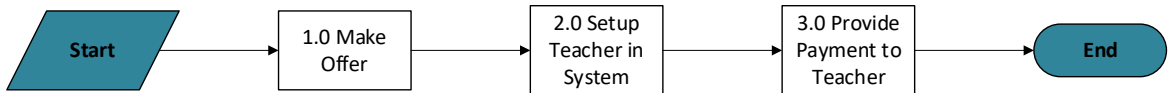
Priority: Quick Win

The HR department has an action plan that is aligned with the Board’s 2020-2025 Strategic Plan. The action plan identifies the lead, specific actions, timelines and how the actions will be measured or monitored. To focus on these actions outlined in the plan, HR staff should evaluate where their time and effort is allocated and identify where there are opportunities for delegation. This may include defining the roles and responsibilities for Central Operations HR and schools, as mentioned in R.8. If needed, the department can assess where short-term staffing or external consultants can support the development and implementation of strategic initiatives or implementation of process improvement initiatives that will lead to greater efficiency in the department.

Process Mapping

As part of this operational review, Optimus SBR developed process maps for specific workflows within Central Operations. The onboarding of an occasional teacher (OT) was one such workflow that was developed in collaboration with the HR and Payroll departments. Below a high-level overview of the process (a detailed map can be found in Appendix 12.3.1)

Figure 3: Onboarding for Occasional Teacher (Level 0)



R.10 Explore implementation of an ERP solution based on Ministry Direction² for better integration of HR, Finance, Payroll and Purchasing functions.³

RATIONALE

Systems and processes are reported to be inefficient and limited in functionality. Manual and duplicative data entry is reportedly a regular occurrence due to systems not properly interfacing. In addition, standalone software programs focused on specific functions within the department are not integrated. As an example, Optimus SBR learned through the process mapping exercise

² At the time of writing, OECM is preparing to spearhead the procurement of an ERP project that suits the needs of the Ontario school board sector. This is being conducted based on consultations and discussion with the Ministry of Education, the Educational Computing Network of Ontario (ECNO) and with support from the Council of Ontario Senior Business Officials.

³ There may be other functions or modules that could be included in the ERP. For the purposes of this report and based on the scope of this project, the targeted functions include HR, Finance, Payroll, and Purchasing.

that reports are often generated in one system in Crystal Report format. The report must then be converted to Excel and then uploaded to another system to complete the handoff to Payroll. In addition, notifications of when these reports are uploaded are done via email, not automatically through the system. An ERP solution should prevent reports from having to be exported and imported into different systems.

Based on jurisdictional research, Optimus SBR learned of another Ontario School Board that recently implemented a new integrated ERP. This ERP included modules related to HR, Purchasing, and Payroll to allow for integration between the different functions. For the jurisdiction in question, one of the deciding factors in finding a vendor was having that integration with an HR system. It is recommended that HPEDSB explore this recommendation with a similar lens to ensure synergies exist between HR and other departments.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Increasing efficiency and effectiveness of processes helps reduce costs.
- **Service experience:** Greater system integration and automation can reduce the number of errors in the process.
- **Service experience:** Increases capacity for the HR team to focus on strategic initiatives that impact schools more directly.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

To prepare for a new ERP system, HPEDSB can apply the following high-level steps:

1. Identify and review current state processes.
2. Compare current state processes to future state workflows to confirm alignment or identify gaps.
3. Identify related systems, data stores and points of integration to other systems to prepare for the eventual migration of systems, data, and interfaces.
4. Identify the key stakeholders involved.
5. Ensure the stakeholders who need to participate in the implementation of the system are properly supported (i.e., backfilling certain business-as-usual activities with other positions).

An Ontario school board, with an ERP already in place, emphasized the importance of planning how the system will be maintained and kept up to date after it has been implemented. This board has two staff dedicated to providing technical assistance. One option that was explored by this board was to have functional analysts within each business area that has a module in the ERP to provide subject matter expertise. HPEDSB will need to establish the required structures and resources to ensure the ERP can provide long-term value and will need to ensure there is strong support, either internally or from the vendor, to deal with updates and maintenance.

R.11 Standardize the intake process when a new employee is hired to ensure information is captured once and the appropriate stakeholders are notified.

RATIONALE

The current state process map for when a new OT joins the Board has several points of manual entry and duplication. In the short term (while the option of an ERP is being explored), the HR department has an opportunity to implement a standardized form that allows new OTs to provide their information once, without back and forth throughout the process. This standardized form can also be used to support staff in entering the information into the appropriate systems. There are currently two separate systems where information needs to be captured and entered in manually. These systems are not integrated.

There is also an opportunity to inform the Payroll area of the hiring of a new OT during this employee intake phase. Optimus SBR learned the validation of information is a concern from the Payroll side as it leads to inefficiencies. For example, void cheques are often provided by the new OT to ensure accurate banking information. However, Payroll occasionally needs to verify that the information is correct with the new employee. Providing this information earlier in the process allows Payroll to verify ahead of time.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Service experience:** This recommendation can result in a reduction of duplicative tasks, allowing new employees to be paid on time.
- **Service experience:** Capturing information only at the point of intake can increase client satisfaction.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

Standardizing the intake process is a short-term recommendation that can be implemented regardless of whether HPEDSB moves forward with an ERP (see R.10). A standardized form can be created by developing an inventory of all the information that is collected during that initial information intake with a new employee.

The HR department can also establish checklists or adjust their documentation to ensure Payroll is properly notified at the early stages.

R.12 Develop an implementation plan for the Attendance Support Program. Validate the program's components, the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes, and buy-in from staff before further implementation.

RATIONALE

Attendance of staff creates challenges for HPEDSB and attendance support practices are still being implemented. Opportunities to proactively support staff facing legitimate challenges to their attendance are not always used. For example, it was reported that conversations between school

administrators and teachers about important medical challenges that will require numerous medical appointments are infrequent. As a result, proactive planning does not occur.

HPEDSB has developed an Attendance Support Program that is partially implemented; however, the COVID-19 pandemic has stalled the implementation of the program. The program does include several key components that could prove to be effective in combating absenteeism, such as periodic review of staff attendance data and training for school administrators and staff.

A focused roll-out of this program will help HPEDSB determine if it is effective in improving attendance throughout the Board.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Full implementation of the program can help reduce absenteeism, enabling teachers to spend more time in classrooms.
- **Resource stewardship:** Full implementation of the program can help reduce the cost of absenteeism.
- **Resource stewardship:** By learning while implementing, HPEDSB can evaluate if the program is effective before investing significant resources into the program.
- **Enabling schools:** Students benefit from consistent staffing.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

To align with best practices, the HR department should develop an implementation plan that includes objectives, accountabilities, and a timeline. Role modelling and visible support by the senior leadership are critical in the successful implementation of an attendance support program.

Attendance support initiatives must be endorsed by the highest level of management. All levels of the Board need to be committed to implementing the policy or program. School administrators and managers should not feel that their attendance support efforts will be wasted because of a lack of follow-through. Successful attendance support also requires the involvement of the employees who must understand the high cost of absenteeism, current absenteeism rates and employer goals for improvement. The purpose of providing this information is to make regular attendance a personal priority for all staff. With regular attention paid to the attendance support program and reinforcement of its importance at every level of the organization, it will remain a priority.

Internal communications must be carefully managed to ensure staff can provide feedback and that unions are engaged in the rollout. HPEDSB should also consider how the program could adjust in a post-pandemic environment where contradictory messages are prevalent (i.e., “stay home if you have any symptoms” and “we need full attendance”).

It is also important to develop role clarity around the process, particularly with regards to the role of leadership and school administrators as managers and the role of HR as program champions and occupational health and safety representatives. Training of leadership and school administrators is needed once the roles and responsibilities have been solidified. Communication to all staff on the program and attendance expectations will be critical to the successful rollout.

6.0 Information and Technology Services

6.1 Current State Findings

The IT department is an experienced team that understands its role as a service provider. Over the next few periods, the IT department must focus on building a foundation so future plans and initiatives can be executed effectively and efficiently.

Focus Area	Key Findings
IT Strategic Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HPEDSB does not have an IT strategic plan that establishes priorities and objectives that align with the Board’s overall strategy. Without a plan, the organization may be making technology decisions that are not aligned with the Board’s priorities. • There is no formalized IT governance body that links to the key decision-makers of the Board, which could result in ineffective technology decision-making. • There appear to be gaps in IT competencies, including the lack of a dedicated security role and limited data management expertise in the department. This impacts the department’s overall ability to provide quality service to other departments and schools.
Cloud Governance Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no cloud governance framework in place at this time, which increases the risk of data leakage and breaches.
IT Service Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are limited standards in place for schools with respect to managing service requests and technology purchases. The lack of consistent standards creates additional work for the IT department as they have to adjust their service approach to each school.
IT Security and Risk Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is limited evidence of a formal security strategy. Without a formal cybersecurity program, there is an increased risk of a security breach.
Data Management and Digitization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HPEDSB lacks a formal data management strategy that sets out how the organization will collect, store, govern, and analyze data. This could mean the Board is incurring unnecessary costs related to data management. There could also be missed opportunities in the areas of data analytics and business intelligence, limiting the amount of evidence-based decision-making.

6.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Information and Technology Services:

- **R.13** Develop an IT Strategic Plan.
- **R.14** Develop an IT governance framework.

- **R.15** Perform an IT skills assessment such as SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age).
- **R.16** Develop a cloud governance framework.
- **R.17** Establish clear processes and technology standards for schools in the form of a service level agreement.
- **R.18** Formalize a cybersecurity program that includes policies, procedures, and guidelines.
- **R.19** Develop a data management strategy.

R.13 Develop an IT Strategic Plan.

RATIONALE

HPEDSB does not have an IT strategic plan that established priorities and objectives that aligns with the Board's overall strategy. Misalignment between the department and the organization at large may be resulting in ineffective technology decision-making and a lack of operational efficiency.

An IT strategic plan that aligns with the Board's strategy is a best practice based on findings developed through the jurisdiction review. Other school boards in Ontario have a plan in place that outlines the department's priorities and key concepts of those priorities. The plan also includes short and long-term goals as well as short and long-term initiatives.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Enables sound decision-making for technology investments.
- **Service experience:** A strategic plan will help align technology needs with the business needs of the organization.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

The IT Strategic Plan should reflect the relevance of technology to each of HPEDSB's strategic priorities. It is recommended that the strategic plan follow a structured framework built around four fundamental layers that encompass the delivery of services to the Board and student population (bottom-up):

1. **Infrastructure Layer** - This layer underpins the entire technology stack and ensures both governance and technology enablers are in place to support the delivery of business systems/services.
2. **Business Solutions Layer** - All core "Enterprise" and "Expert" systems are supported within this layer. *Enterprise Systems* are used throughout the organization (e.g., SIS) and *Expert Systems* are typically used by a smaller group and are more specialized (e.g., Staff Planning).
3. **Integration & Data Layer** - This is where business intelligence (BI) and data analytics tools are used to connect systems and provide data.

4. **Academic Facing Layer** - All student, parent and teacher portals and the Board website would fall within this layer. This is a critical layer that must align with the fundamental layers mentioned above.

Using this framework, a series of interviews can be conducted with administration, academic staff, and IT using defined elements within each layer. This helps drive the development of the IT strategy.

R.14 Develop an IT governance framework.

RATIONALE

There is no formalized IT governance body such as an IT Steering Committee. Important IT decisions are not always made in collaboration with Senior Administration or business users who may be impacted by the decisions. Since IT impacts all areas of the Board in some capacity, there are often trade-offs and competing priorities that IT must face. Priorities should be set in partnership with Senior Administration and other business leaders.

It should be noted that there is currently an Information Technology Advisory Committee (ITAC) in place to discuss complex business problems and future processes. This committee is strategic in nature but misses some of the change management and implementation components that are needed for proper oversight. The project intake and prioritization process within this committee are also not well defined. Formalizing this process and integrating it with a proper IT governance framework will help ensure technology decisions are aligned with business goals or objectives.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** A governance framework will help determine which technology projects should be prioritized based on impact on student achievement.
- **Resource stewardship:** A governance framework allows for greater oversight over how funds are allocated towards technology projects.
- **Resource stewardship:** A governance framework helps ensure effective resource utilization within IT.
- **Service experience:** A governance framework helps build consensus and buy-in from senior leadership and key stakeholders.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

The steering committee is typically led by an individual who has skills and experience in the IT field, but it is imperative that business areas have representation on the Steering committee. The governance framework should allocate responsibilities or include accountabilities for each of the following key activities:

- Setting and approving the Board's IT Strategic Plan
- Approving technology-related policies and standards
- Determining prioritization of technology-enabled investment programs that are aligned with Board objectives

- Establishing and following the Board’s technology architecture and standards
- High-level monitoring of IT assets (e.g., hardware, software, and resources)

Using the outcomes of this recommendation in addition to the development of an IT Strategic Plan (see R.13), the Board will be in a better position to review department skill requirements and determine an appropriate structure.

R.15 Perform an IT skills assessment such as SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age).

RATIONALE

There are gaps in IT skillsets across the department. For example, the organization does not have a role dedicated to security. HPEDSB leverages the Education Computing Network of Ontario (ECNO) to supplement security needs. However, the scope of the support is limited to training and testing.

Optimus SBR was also made aware of a recent initiative to livestream Board of Trustees meetings. Over the past two years, the IT department has been providing the technical support to livestream these meetings. Gaps in skillsets were recently identified resulting in the department outsourcing the technical support to a third party.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Having the necessary competencies in-house can reduce outsourcing-related costs.
- **Service experience:** The outcomes of the skills assessment will allow staff to service schools more effectively.
- **Service experience:** IT roles and skills are aligned to best support the Board.
- **Service experience:** Increased alignment between IT systems and business needs of the Board.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Incremental

All job descriptions within IT should be assessed and mapped to current roles using the SFIA framework, including the assessment of unionized IT roles. Skills required to support the Board’s strategic initiatives should be defined and mapped to the job descriptions. The analysis should identify all skills gaps and define a strategy to address the gaps. An appropriate budget should be allocated to the training and development of staff. SFIA will provide the Board with a common language to define skills and expertise in a consistent manner. Additionally, the framework will allow for the development of customized job roles as required.

SFIA defines a comprehensive set of over 125 IT skills, ranging from IT Security to service desk support. SFIA skills are generic and can be customized and combined to define roles and levels appropriate to the Board. This process will mitigate the risk of missing or outdated IT skills required to support the business.

R.16 Develop a cloud governance framework.

RATIONALE

The Board has limited cloud governance in place at this time despite several applications operating in the cloud. This includes little to no evidence of formal cloud policies around areas such as acceptable use of protection of digital assets. Without a formal cloud governance framework, unsanctioned cloud applications may be initiated, increasing the risk of data leakage and breaches.

Cloud governance ensures that asset deployment, systems integration, and data security are properly planned, considered, and managed. For example, cloud governance helps establish cloud triggers, which determine when to move or not move workloads to the cloud.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** A cloud governance framework can reduce the risk of the Board accumulating security-related costs.
- **Resource stewardship:** A framework can provide the Board with greater visibility into the organization's overall cybersecurity strength as it relates to the cloud.
- **Resource stewardship:** A framework can reduce or mitigate the risk of a cybersecurity breach.
- **Service experience:** A framework can equip IT staff with the skills and tools required to support cloud services.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

The process of developing a cloud governance framework should include a review of all cloud opportunities. This includes reviewing all current and planned applications to evaluate their fit to the cloud. A governance framework will also help set a clear roadmap for continued cloud services adoption addressing Software as a Service (SaaS), Platform as a Service (PaaS), and Infrastructure as a Service (IaaS) options.

Using the outcomes of this recommendation, the Board will be in a better position to review department capabilities that will be required to support the continued cloud journey (see R.15).

R.17 Establish clear processes and technology standards for schools in the form of a service level agreement.

RATIONALE

There are processes and technology standards in place at schools, which is preventing the IT department from providing quality service. These standards and processes are inconsistent across many key areas including service requests, school training and technology purchasing.

Schools use an inconsistent approach to submitting IT tickets or service requests to the department. Only "40-50%" of requests are made through the eBase service management

platform. The majority of requests are reportedly done in-person, through text, or stickies. Limited utilization of the platform greatly diminishes the department's ability to track and report on department workload and organizational risks.

The transition to the Aspen Information System has been disruptive for schools. The steep learning curve, limited training, and lack of business processes were all mentioned as factors that made the transition challenging. As a result, IT has been overloaded with requests to provide training and resolve issues. Without clear standards around school training that align with the business processes, future technology implementations may experience similar challenges.

Schools are currently responsible for purchasing their own smartboards. Without standards in place, there is a wide variety of smartboards used across the School Board. Multiple platforms and devices make it challenging for IT to provide quality support and service. The lack of standards indicates that students' needs in classrooms may not be fully assessed.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Having clear standards and processes in place helps set parameters for schools as they make technology-related decisions.
- **Service experience:** The IT department can have increased visibility of the requests and service requirements for technology across the School Board.
- **Service experience:** Clear expectations can result in a higher level of service delivery and increased end-user satisfaction.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

Similar to R.8, the IT department should facilitate discussion with school administrators to help set clear expectations and boundaries. IT may also want to establish what the standards may look like initially based on their current state resourcing situation and department objectives in working with schools. Having an IT governance framework in place (see R.14) will help determine what the standards in schools need to be so that there is consistency in the systems and tools used.

As a next step, IT should develop service standards and service level agreements that outline what IT is responsible for and what schools are responsible for. These agreements should be implemented across the School Board regardless of the size and resources of each school. These service level agreements can also be developed with other internal departments.

Once that future vision is set, IT will need to effectively communicate these standards to schools. This communication and rollout should be supported and reinforced by leadership to ensure schools are aligned with the new standards.

R.18 Formalize a cybersecurity program that includes policies, procedures, and guidelines.

RATIONALE

There is limited evidence of a formal security strategy being used at HPEDSB. In addition, the Board does not have an incident response plan that supports the overarching security program and by extension the business continuity plan. The program should consist of a set of activities, projects, and initiatives that supports the Board's information technology roadmap.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** A formal program can reduce the impact of a cybersecurity breach.
- **Resource stewardship:** A third-party assessment will identify risks and vulnerabilities on an annual basis to ensure security is up to date.
- **Resource stewardship:** A formalized program can lower the costs of cyber insurance.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

The Board should bring in cybersecurity expertise to assist with the development and the initial assessment. In light of the increasing volume and sophistication of cyber threats, the Board needs to procure a cybersecurity firm to provide a security assessment based on best practices outlined by organizations such as the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

The purpose of the assessment is to help the Board identify risks and determine their cybersecurity maturity. It is recommended that the assessment be performed as an initial step in a formal cybersecurity program.

The assessment will provide the Board with a repeatable and measurable process to inform management of risks and cybersecurity preparedness. The cybersecurity maturity process should include domains, assessment factors, components, and individual declarative statements across defined maturity levels to identify specific controls and practices within the Board.

R.19 Develop a data management strategy.

RATIONALE

HPEDSB lacks a formal data management strategy that sets out how the organization will collect, store, govern and analyze data.

There is a lack of clarity regarding data ownership across the Board. In situations where data is incorrect or misaligned, the accountability often falls back on the IT department. For example, HPEDSB follows a decentralized model for the management of OnSIS⁴, which means schools take

⁴ Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) is a web-based application, which integrates and collects board, school, student, educator, and course data. OnSIS data is used to determine student funding.

ownership of the data with support from IT. However, due to limited functionality with Aspen, schools have increasingly required support from IT. This has led to the responsibility of OnSIS data to fall back onto IT, even though IT does not own the business process. Clearer responsibilities can be developed to delineate ownership.

There is also a lack of visibility on the data that the Board manages, which poses a threat. There is no commonly used file structure when data repositories are used, nor is there a commonly used data repository. Google Drive and Microsoft OneDrive are both used without a clear understanding of which repository holds which pieces of information. This also creates a potential risk of sensitive data being placed in online locations where inappropriate access could be possible.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Clearly defined accountabilities for data ownership and related processes helps schools make decisions around the data and tools they need to inform student achievement.
- **Resource stewardship:** A strategy can enhance data security and enhance data compliance reducing potential costs related to breaches.
- **Service experience:** The strategy can help align data needs with the organization's business needs.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

As part of the development of a data management strategy, HPEDSB should perform an analysis of unstructured data. There is no commonly used file structure when data repositories (e.g., Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive) are used, leading to a lack of understanding of what type of information is held in what location and where to retrieve what is needed. This also creates the potential risk of sensitive data being placed in online locations where inappropriate access could be possible. Conducting this analysis will help inform gaps that need to be addressed in the strategy.

Another component to consider as part of developing a strategy is the inclusion of a data backup policy. There is currently no archiving of data and internal stakeholders estimate that a significant amount of stale data resides on production storage (e.g., data that has not been accessed in more than one year). A data backup policy will help reduce costs associated with disaster recovery, data backup, and replication.

Upon completion of the data management strategy, HPEDSB can explore the option of developing a digitization plan for all of its paper records. Multiple stakeholders spoke about the use of paper copies and filing. To digitize paper records, HPEDSB needs to first develop a data management strategy otherwise there will continue to be confusion around where the store digital records. A data management strategy helps an organization make key decisions such as what is sensitive, what is not, and what to archive. A digitization plan is a transformational activity that must take place over a longer period of time.

7.0 Curriculum and Student Services

7.1 Current State Findings

Curriculum and Student Services work well as a team in the pursuit of improving student achievement. Realigning portfolios, clarifying responsibilities, and leveraging data can support these departments in achieving that goal.

Focus Area	Key Findings
<p>Portfolio Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superintendents and System Leads work collaboratively across and within portfolios to ensure priorities are addressed. • Superintendents have large portfolio responsibilities, which limits focus on certain portfolios and prevents Superintendents from being present at their assigned schools to support school administrators. • The curriculum area at HPEDSB has been entrepreneurial in its approach to using data to inform decision-making in a few key functions such as staff allocation planning. This adds greater transparency and consistency to the staff allocation process. • In the absence of dedicated research personnel, staff leverage available data to inform decision making; however, schools are not being provided with a consistent stream of actionable data, which limits their ability to make informed decisions to improve student achievement.
<p>International Student Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite significant changes to the team’s structure and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the department has been able to maintain demand and interest for the program. The team has been effective in managing the program despite these challenges. • Due to a lack of system integration, the financial performance of the International Services department remains unclear. Without this clarity, the value or return of investment of the program cannot be fully quantified. • The benefits and risks of managing an in-house program need to be further examined. Without a clear understanding of the potential benefits and legal risks, the Board may either be more exposed to certain risks or may not be leveraging the program enough for non-grant revenue.
<p>Staff Allocation Planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The staff allocation process, which involves working with Excel and conducting calculations, is managed and supported by HPEDSB senior leaders. There is a high opportunity cost of having senior leaders manage these operational processes versus focusing on more strategic work. • The independence rubric used by the Student Services department helps inform discussion and decision-making around Education Assistant (EA) allocations. It is a valuable tool that increases the objectivity of the process. • There is a limited supply of available EAs in the workforce, creating challenges for the Student Services department to address student needs.

7.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Curriculum and Student Services:

- **R.20** Management should consider modifying the roles and responsibilities of Superintendents and System Leads to ensure workloads are balanced and to create capacity for Superintendents to support schools.
- **R.21** Improve the use of data in curriculum areas for both Central Operations and schools to better inform school planning, resource allocation, and student achievement initiatives.
- **R.22** Develop business processes and improve collaboration between International Student Services and the Finance department to better understand program finances.
- **R.23** Consider developing a business case for the International Student Services program to allow for further exploration of the value proposition, financials, and legal implications.
- **R.24** Delegate roles and responsibilities within the staff allocation process.
- **R.25** Identify opportunities for automation within the staff allocation process to maximize efficiency. Identify opportunities for automation within the staff allocation process to maximize efficiency
- **R.26** Identify opportunities to allow for continuous monitoring of student needs once Educational Assistants (EA) have been assigned and the school year begins.
- **R.27** Consider building a pool of relief or occasional EA staff by leveraging other support workers throughout the community with positions such as Child and Youth Workers (CYWs), Developmental Service Workers (DSWs) and Social Service Workers (SSWs).

R.20 Management should consider modifying the roles and responsibilities of Superintendents and System Leads to ensure workloads are balanced and to create capacity for Superintendents to support schools.

RATIONALE

Superintendents have a large portfolio of responsibilities, which limits attention and focus to certain portfolios. Large portfolio responsibilities also prevent Superintendents from being present at their assigned schools to support, interact with, and mentor school administrators. Being present in schools is a core responsibility for Superintendents that allows Central Operations to gain an awareness of individual school needs. Optimus SBR spoke to one school board that targets direct contact with school administrators at their schools every four to six weeks.

There is also a lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities between portfolios and initiatives for both Superintendents and System Leads. Indigenous education was identified as one portfolio that could benefit from a more concentrated focus with clearer accountabilities. Challenges are most likely to arise when portfolios overlap across departments such as between Student Services and Student Achievement areas. The inefficiencies are likely to occur when it is difficult to determine who should be involved in certain initiatives and the division of responsibilities.

In discussions with other jurisdictions, Optimus SBR learned that other school boards often adjust portfolio assignments on an annual basis. In some cases, portfolios are re-assigned during a school year to adapt to a changing environment.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Clearly defined roles and additional capacity at the Superintendent and System lead could increase the level of interaction between Central Operations and schools.
- **Enabling schools:** Clearly defined roles and responsibilities may raise the level of focus and quality for each portfolio, resulting in greater student outcomes for each academic portfolio.
- **Service experience:** Additional capacity at the Superintendent level can increase Superintendent presence in schools, allowing Central Operations to develop a greater awareness of advocacy needs within individual school contexts.
- **Service experience:** Greater awareness of the unique characteristics (demographic, administrative) of each school can lead to more directed support for schools.
- **Service experience:** Superintendents can use school visits to help align central priorities for student achievement with school success plans and to build a culture of data-driven decision-making.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

Leadership will need to work closely with the stakeholders affected, particularly the Superintendents and System Leads to develop a cohesive structure and system. If and when roles and responsibilities are revised for Superintendents, the number of responsibilities of System Leads should be revisited. The Board must ensure there is a flexible process for adjusting portfolio responsibilities when needed to meet potential Ministry initiatives and to achieve HPEDSB strategic objectives.

It is also recommended that a benchmark be established for Superintendents to be present in schools. One school board expects Superintendents to be in schools once every six weeks, while another board requests their Superintendents to be in schools a minimum of six times a year.

Re-defining roles and responsibilities could be a sensitive topic for the stakeholders involved. Proceed with caution and with the appropriate care and attention.

R.21 Improve the use of data in curriculum areas for both Central Operations and schools to better inform school planning, resource allocation, and student achievement initiatives.

RATIONALE

HPEDSB currently uses a School Needs Index to help inform staff allocating planning. The Index ranks each school based on measures of factors that affect student achievement. Each school is analyzed using the same set of data collected to ensure the process is more objective than subjective. This is a positive demonstration of evidence-based decision-making within Central Operations, however, there is still significant opportunity for improvement in terms of how the Board uses data.

The School Needs Index uses data that may be out-of-date due to many factors including the impact of the pandemic in cancelling the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments over the past two years. Most of the calculations are done on a spreadsheet, meaning most of the data used to make these calculations are entered manually. Optimus SBR also learned from stakeholders that gathering data within the organization is a time-consuming exercise that requires coordination with other departments.

The School Needs Index is used to help inform allocation planning and differentiated staffing; however, when a school has received additional staffing, they are not required to report on both how they will use their additional allocations and what impact the staffing allocation has had on student achievement. Having schools track and demonstrate the impact of their additional staffing would provide valuable evidence in how effectively the differentiated staffing model is working.

There is an opportunity to expand the use of data to inform other key activities within the curriculum area such as how learning coaches are allocated to schools. In addition, providing schools with student achievement data, and training on how to use the data could be expanded. Other school boards in Ontario are beginning to prioritize this portfolio by introducing new roles within academic departments dedicated to research and providing data to schools. School administrators at HPEDSB are receiving limited data from Central Operations, but in many cases, they are unsure how to use the data provided. HPEDSB should shift their focus and spend time helping principals and teachers figure out how data could help them more holistically support student achievement.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Schools are provided with valuable and actionable insights that allow for effective monitoring of student performance so adjustments can be made.
- **Enabling schools:** An increase in evidence-based decision-making for activities that improve student achievement.
- **Resources stewardship:** Increased use of metrics and benchmarks to measure the impact of resources (people and products) on schools.
- **Resource stewardship:** Data-driven decisions can encourage the efficient use of human other resources centrally and in schools.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

HPEDSB should place a greater emphasis on the use of data to inform decision-making in curriculum areas both in Central Operations and in schools. The roadmap to better data analysis and insights is long-term and requires proper coordination with key departments such as IT (see R.19). HPEDSB will also have to manage multiple organizational initiatives in parallel to ensure the platforms and data flows are properly integrated as the Board becomes more mature in data management.

The use of data in the curriculum area and student services is no longer a part-time project. The data that can be tracked and analyzed by students and teachers is too valuable to be ignored. From a quick win perspective, HPEDSB can start by ensuring data analysis is a focused portfolio

within the curriculum area and supported by portfolio leads. With key portfolio leads identified, the Board must ensure that those roles have full access to the data they need to build the right dashboards, tools and platforms that will help improve decision-making. Over time, HPEDSB will need to be cognizant of the culture shift towards data-driven decision-making and build capacity in the system to transition to a culture of data-driven decision-making.

Additional training and support for principals and teachers may be needed to support data-driven decision-making and extract the full value of data. Not only does that data need to be analyzed and distilled into actionable insights, but the principals and teachers need to be able to understand what the implications are of those insights and how to adjust.

R.22 Develop business processes and improve collaboration between International Student Services and the Finance department to better understand program finances.

RATIONALE

Due to a lack of system integration, the underlying financial situation of the International Student Services department remains unclear. Stakeholders both within and outside the department lack clarity in terms of how revenue and costs are allocated, which has prevented further analysis. This lack of clarity does not allow the department or the Board to gain insight into the program's performance and financial sustainability.

The workflow between International Student Services and Finance is reported to be inefficient, and time-consuming. The Board may be incurring avoidable costs due to the inefficiency in the process and limited collaboration. For example, deferred revenue is often collected months in advance prior to students arriving from abroad. This results in the Finance department conducting over 100 wire transfers per year.

A more integrated working relationship between the two departments will help create a clearer picture of the value the program delivers and where the opportunities may be.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** A better understanding of the program's finances helps the Board understand its value proposition and return on investment.
- **Resource stewardship:** Clear understanding of the true costs of the program to determine its financial position.
- **Resource stewardship:** Clear understanding of future opportunities or potential risks the Board may be exposed to.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

To implement this recommendation, the Board should consider formalizing business processes that highlight where the points of overlap are between the two departments. This can be in the form of a document or even a process map diagram. This will help define expectations and assign roles and responsibilities for each of the stakeholders involved. This recommendation can begin

through enhanced communication between the two departments, leading to more formal use of a business process.

Building the relationship is a tactical implementation step while building the decision-making matrix will take time, effort, and cooperation. Less formal approaches (e.g., better communication, a mutual understanding of expectations etc.) can start the process of using a more formal decision-making tool.

R.23 Consider developing a business case for the International Student Services program to allow for further exploration of the value proposition, financials, and legal implications.

RATIONALE

The International Student Services department provides benefits to the community by bringing diversity to the schools and raising awareness of different cultures for resident students. There appears to be an opportunity to leverage the strengths and existing infrastructure of the International Student Services program. However, further exploration is needed to determine the extent of the costs and benefits of the program.

Optimus SBR spoke to another Ontario school board that manages its own homestay program. Marketing and recruitment were identified as the key advantages of running the program in-house. International families have the opportunity to interact and build trust with a school board representative who knows the program and knows the area versus a third-party provider. An in-house homestay program also allows the school board to have greater control and oversight over the program. Personal relationships are developed between staff and international students allowing staff to mediate or intervene should issues arise. The school board also has more control over which homestay families get selected.

Liability and risk must be managed, regardless of whether the homestay program is managed in-house or outsourced. Similar to the other school boards, it is recommended that HPEDSB seek legal advice and determine their internal risk tolerance before making changes.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Service experience:** A business case can help highlight the benefits of expanding the program as well as the risks associated with running the program. It also allows the Board to build a program around the identified benefits and risks and improve experiences for international students

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

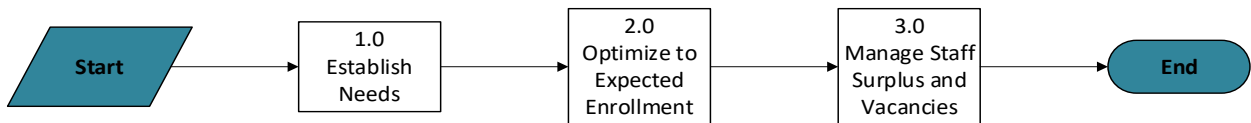
HPEDSB should seek legal advice on the liabilities and risks that it may be exposed to for the international program as part of the broader business case. This includes exploring the risks associated with both an in-house and outsourced homestay model. Based on the legal advice provided, HPEDSB will be better in a position to determine its own tolerance for the different types of risk.

As part of this business case, the program should also develop projections of how the program could be increased if marketing efforts were enhanced. If expansion of the program is explored, HPEDSB should consider developing the required agreements or code of conduct with homestay families. These agreements provide additional safeguards if issues arise.

Figure 4: Staff allocation process for elementary schools (Level 0)

Process Mapping

As part of this operational review, Optimus SBR developed process maps for specific workflows within Central Operations. The staff allocation process map for elementary schools was developed in collaboration with the Business Services, Finance, and HR departments. Below is a high-level overview of the process (a detailed map can be found in Appendix 12.3.2).



R.24 Delegate roles and responsibilities within the staff allocation process.

RATIONALE

The staff allocation process is currently managed by a subset of senior leaders within the Business Services department, despite most of the tasks being largely administrative such as completing calculations in Excel and coordinating with different stakeholders. Due to the sensitive nature of the inputs required to inform the staffing process, there is a reluctance to delegate parts of the process to other staff or departments. However, there is a high opportunity cost of having senior staff members lead or conduct the process. Time and effort would be better spent on strategic activities.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Delegating administrative tasks increases capacity for senior leaders so time and effort can be spent on strategic tasks.
- **Enabling schools:** Delegating roles further can lead to a more streamlined process and helps schools develop shared responsibility for the process.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

The delegation of this function can manifest itself in many forms and structures. The use of dedicated resources for this process varies among other Ontario school boards. Larger boards tend to have dedicated staff who oversee the process and are a part of a standalone planning department. Smaller boards that are more aligned to HPEDSB's size, incorporate the staff allocation-related tasks into various roles within the Business Services and Finance department.

Regarding the role of Finance in this process, Optimus SBR spoke to one school board that has a specific planning department that is not a part of the Finance department. Finance's primary role in the process is to communicate and advise on the level of risk that may be attributed to certain decisions. Due to collective agreements, the ability to adjust teacher placements in September is largely limited which presents a risk if the enrolment projections turn out to be inaccurate. It then becomes Finance's role to communicate those risks in the planning process and to help advise the process at certain points, rather than leading it.

It is also important to consider delegating certain tasks to the HR department. In the current state process, the HR department is largely responsible for working with the various union groups and joint committees once enrolment projections are set. Based on findings from other jurisdictions, there is an opportunity for HR to take on a larger role in this process if it aligns with HPEDSB's approach to portfolio management.

R.25 Identify opportunities for automation within the staff allocation process to maximize efficiency.

RATIONALE

The staff allocation process is manual and inefficient. Calculations and analysis are primarily done through Microsoft Excel over several spreadsheets and workbooks. There are at least four separate Excel spreadsheets that are used over the course of the process. The nature of the work also requires several constraints, requirements, and parameters to be set around the calculations. Creating checks and balances within Excel is time-consuming and prone to error.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Increased automation can increase available capacity for school administrators.
- **Resource stewardship:** Increased automation can increase available capacity for central leaders and staff involved in the process.
- **Service experience:** Potential for errors or re-work may be diminished.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

Implementing this recommendation may include procuring software that can help automate certain tasks and allow for seamless data flow between stakeholders. Another school board in Ontario has already begun exploring software that could enhance and automate the planning process. This could reduce the workload burden on existing staff or reduce the need for additional staff to support the process.

R.26 Identify opportunities to allow for continuous monitoring of student needs once Educational Assistants (EA) have been assigned and the school year begins.

RATIONALE

The Independence Rubric used by the Student Services department helps inform discussion and decision-making around EA allocations. However, the rubric is only partially used to create direct allocations because of the environmental factors that need to be considered. For example, with COVID, some student needs require additional support. The Independence Rubric does provide a framework for planning and acts as an effective communication tool for the department. The Student Services department continuously refines and adjusts the rubric to ensure accurate data and calculations are being used.

Once the school year begins, further adjustments need to be made to EA allocations. Student needs are reviewed during the first few weeks of the school year to confirm if all students within the Independence Rubric attended class as forecasted. The next step involves identifying where new students have arrived from outside the Board or moved schools within the Board to determine if additional EA support is needed. During this early part of the school year, the department is heavily reliant on a few key members of the department to ensure student needs are being met. There is an opportunity to further automate the process to ensure needs are being addressed more efficiently and without burdening staff.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** This recommendation could include having individual schools more integrated into the feedback process and allowing for more accurate assignments in the early stages of the school year.
- **Service experience:** A more streamlined and transparent process can increase response time to student needs.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

The Student Services department should undertake a review of its beginning of the school year process to evaluate where the gaps are in terms of adjusting EA allocations. There may be opportunities to further automate and allow for direct feedback from Learning Support Coordinators (LSC) so changes can be made faster. This may include shifting workloads away from Excel spreadsheets to specific software to allow for seamless data flow between stakeholders.

R.27 Consider building a pool of relief or occasional EA staff by leveraging other support workers throughout the community with positions such as Child and Youth Workers (CYWs), Developmental Service Workers (DSWs) and Social Service Workers (SSWs).

RATIONALE

To meet the special education needs of students, it is recommended that the Student Services department, in collaboration with the HR department, ensure a pool of occasional EA staff is available to support when needed.

HPEDSB does have a backfill list of staff who have been interviewed, are trained and ready when needed. However, this list is limited, and staff are restricted to certain geographic areas due to collective agreements. In some cases, CYWs and SSWs hold the required accreditation and skillset

to serve as EAs on an as-needed basis. This is an opportunity for HPEDSB to develop a strong foundation to ensure the risk of students’ needs not being addressed is reduced.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Increased flexibility in utilizing EAs, allowing for optimal allocation.
- **Service experience:** Current EAs can be distributed where they are most needed.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

At this stage, developing a recruitment strategy in collaboration with HR can be completed within a short timeframe. The strategy will need to outline the requirements and qualifications of other disciplines that could serve as EAs. The execution of the strategy will need to be managed by both departments as other priorities and recruitment challenges arise. There may be a pool of various student support workers throughout the area that could potentially be added to a relief pool.

8.0 Financial Services

8.1 Current State Findings

The Financial Services department must invest in training their staff to help build competency and expertise in order to serve departments and schools better.

Focus Area	Key Findings
Finance, Payroll, and HR Systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current financial system has poor integration with the emPath Human Resource Information System (HRIS) and the School Employee Management Systems (SEMS)⁵, which limits data flow between HR, payroll, and finance as well as any automation or process improvement opportunities. • There are a limited number of processes currently documented. With recent retirements and turnover, there has been a loss of organizational knowledge leading to inefficiencies as new staff redefine processes or learn them as they go along.
Finance and Payroll Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are training gaps within the department, which results in tasks rising to the management level and work effort being duplicated.

⁵ SEMS is used to enter and verify absences for staff.

Focus Area	Key Findings
<p>The Hastings and Prince Edward Learning Foundation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Learning Foundation operates and interacts with many community partners, which extends the overall reach of the School Board and increases the potential for positive community impact. • The staff of the Learning Foundation are currently School Board employees. However, it is unclear based on the current structure what the reporting relationship and supervision of the Foundation staff looks like. • There is a lack of strategic alignment between the Board and the Foundation. This could result in fundraising activities not matching the Board’s priorities.
<p>Procurement Processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Purchasing department has a strong working relationship with the other departments and schools. Building trust encourages collaboration across the School Board. • Manual data entry and paper-based records are often used to complete key purchasing tasks. This limits the department’s efficiency and creates an unnecessary workload. • The department has a limited number of staff, which presents a risk to the Board in the event of an absence or departure of current personnel. • There have been significant changes to the overall procurement process in recent years. Additional training and documentation are needed to ensure a clear understanding of these processes and delineation of roles and responsibilities. Without it, the department will continue to experience inefficiencies and may be limited in the service it can provide to other departments and schools.

8.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of Financial Services:

- [See **R.10**] Explore implementation of an ERP solution based on Ministry Direction for better integration of HR, Finance, Payroll and Procurement functions.
- **R.28** Document processes to ensure appropriate transfer of knowledge and identification of gaps.
- **R.29** Invest in training staff (both within Central Operations and in schools) and develop a service level agreement.
- **R.30** Increase communication with the HPE Learning Foundation to ensure fundraising initiatives align with the strategic priorities of the Board.
- **R.31** Clarify operating and working relationships to reflect that the Learning Foundation and School Board are separate entities through a revised MOU and additional agreements.
- **R.32** Develop an employee manual that outlines the process flow, best practices for initiating procurements and provides training to business areas. This may include the development of a service level agreement.
- **R.33** Management should consider increasing the capacity of the Purchasing area by introducing one additional full-time equivalent.

[See R.10] Explore implementation of an ERP solution based on Ministry Direction⁶ for better integration of HR, Finance, Payroll and Purchasing functions.⁷

RATIONALE

The current financial system has poor integration with the emPath HRIS and SEMS, limiting data flows between HR, Payroll, Finance and Purchasing. This limits the potential for automation and time efficiency gains. The lack of system integration combined with the detailed Ministry reporting requirements, results in wasted time as separate tracking sheets, additional quality assurance and rework time is needed. The finance system also does not link to other reporting dashboards, which limits performance monitoring capabilities for principals.

Purchasing staff often have to use paper-based processes or manual entry to complete key tasks. For example, the finance system does not have an automatic notification function that signals when issued purchase orders are not received by a school or department. To complete these checks, the system must be manually searched from time to time to confirm that purchase orders have been received and that there are no stale-dated orders.

The integration of these functions in an ERP also enhances workflow, increases the efficiency of the Accounts Payable function, and reduces the risk of inappropriate payments by tying together the approval process and underlying paperwork in one system (requisition, purchase order, confirmation of receipt and the invoice).

Contract management is currently done manually on an Excel spreadsheet. This may be impeding the Board's ability to achieve value for money on its contracts due to contract leakage (e.g., warranty claims). Managing contracts via Excel also limits the Board's ability to receive early warning of contract expiry, which could in turn trigger an emergency procurement or abbreviated procurement process that may not result in the most advantageous purchase terms.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Efficient and effective processes help reduce costs.
- **Service experience:** Greater system integration and automation can reduce the number of errors in the process.
- **Service experience:** Increases capacity for the HR team to focus on strategic initiatives that impact schools more directly.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

See R.10 for implementation considerations.

⁶ At the time of writing, OECM is preparing to spearhead the procurement of an ERP project that suits the needs of the Ontario school board sector. This is being conducted based on consultations and discussion with the Ministry of Education, the Educational Computing Network of Ontario (ECNO) and with support from the Council of Ontario Senior Business Officials.

⁷ There may be other functions or modules that could be included in the ERP. For the purposes of this report and based on the scope of this project, the targeted functions include HR, Finance, Payroll, and Purchasing.

R.28 Document processes to ensure appropriate transfer of knowledge and identification of gaps.

RATIONALE

Documentation of processes in the form of checklists or workflow diagrams is generally limited or incomplete. The department faces risks when staff leave the department and take that knowledge with them. This lack of process clarity and documentation also creates a lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Documenting processes helps clarify roles and responsibilities, which can lead to a reduction in confusion and frustration among staff and improve process efficiency.
- **Service experience:** Improved access and retrieval of information both for staff and clients.
- **Resource stewardship:** Supports succession planning and knowledge sharing to help reduce costs of turnover.
- **Service experience:** Documented processes can make gaps or inefficiencies more pronounced or easily identifiable.
- **Resource stewardship:** In the long-term, documented processes increase the viability and impact of automation initiatives.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

The Board should conduct an exercise to document current processes. Steps may include:

- Creating an inventory of all existing process documentation
- Compare this inventory with departmental responsibilities to identify which processes are missing
- Prioritize undocumented processes based on risk, urgency, or frequency of task
- Facilitate a process mapping exercise that captures the current state workflow so that gaps and opportunities can be easily identified

The development of process maps should be engaging and inclusive. All impacted staff, including those outside the Finance department, should contribute.

As part of the process review, staff roles and accountabilities should be communicated appropriately to ensure full understanding across teams. Process documentation should also be reviewed on an annual basis to ensure processes are being followed as prescribed and to identify if any further improvements need to be made.

R.29 Invest in training staff (both within Central Operations and in schools) and develop a service level agreement.

RATIONALE

Roles, responsibilities, and processes within the Finance department are hindered due to a lack of training when the required skillsets are not available. When mistakes are made, tasks are escalated to the management level and work must be duplicated. Management time and effort could be better spent on more strategic activities.

This issue extends to training at the school level. Stakeholders voiced concern that schools may not have the expertise to perform key budgeting functions. In some situations, these functions may be delegated to support staff.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Service experience:** Increased training can help staff build a better understanding and increased awareness of system usage and functionality, so they provide service better.
- **Resource stewardship:** Increased capacity for management to focus on strategic initiatives.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Incremental

As a first step, the department should consider developing a service level agreement to ensure roles and responsibilities are clearly defined (see R.8 for additional implementation considerations). This will help identify and prioritize training gaps.

To ensure that staff have an appropriate level of comfort and competency on current and future systems, the Board should consider conducting a training needs assessment where staff perceive gaps in their knowledge around system usage and functionality. Once training needs have been identified and prioritized, a training plan can be developed and implemented. The Board should consider experience-based training that includes hands-on experience and scenarios.

R.30 Increase communication with the HPE Learning Foundation to ensure fundraising initiatives align with the strategic priorities of the Board.

RATIONALE

For the Foundation's role to be effective, HPEDSB's strategic priorities need to be articulated clearly so that fundraising activities, operational accountabilities, and risk management can be in sync. HPEDSB has had three different Directors of Education in the past three years. Due to this turnover in the leadership position, a strong relationship has not evolved to date between the Board and the Learning Foundation. Stronger communication between both the Board and the Learning Foundation is needed to create that alignment. Some boards and foundations that Optimus SBR spoke to as part of the jurisdictional review, attributed their success to the working

relationship with their counterpart organization rather than having proper governance structures in place.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Increased collaboration creates greater accountability and oversight of resources to ensure donations are being directed towards areas of greatest student need.
- **Resource stewardship:** Increased collaboration will help ensure Learning Foundation resources are being well spent and that performance benchmarks are being met.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

The HPE Learning Foundation has developed a framework to initiate discussion around the programs or projects for which HPEDSB would like funding. This document can serve as a starting point for developing a future vision of the Foundation. Through discussions, both organizations can explore what the communication looks like based on the future direction. There may also be a need to establish formal communication mechanisms between the two organizations to discuss ongoing and planned work, changes, risks, and issues.

R.31 Clarify operating and working relationships to reflect that the Learning Foundation and School Board are separate entities through a revised MOU and additional agreements.

RATIONALE

The staff of the Learning Foundation are currently employed by HPEDSB, which means the Board covers salaries and benefits for Learning Foundation positions. This is an arrangement formalized in an MOU between the Board and the Learning Foundation. The Board is responsible for the actions of its staff and there is concern that, because of this arrangement, it is responsible for Foundation staff as well, despite their being part of a separate entity. However, it is unclear based on the current structure what the reporting relationship and supervision of the Foundation staff looks like.

The MOU also states that the Board will provide back-office support which includes office space, accounting, purchasing, IT and HR services. The Board may want to consider developing separate agreements with the Foundation such as lease agreements and service agreements that clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities of each organization. Having separate agreements for each of the services provided by the Board ensures specific checks and balances are in place for each service, rather than relying on a broader MOU, as well as increased transparency.

Through its work with other school boards and jurisdictional research, Optimus SBR has heard a variety of perspectives on how foundations should operate in relation to school boards. Some view both organizations to be linked in their goals and objectives, thus requiring more interconnectedness. Due to the variety in approaches across the province, HPEDSB has a unique opportunity to determine its own approach to governing the Learning Foundation based on its strategic priorities and future vision.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Service excellence:** Increased clarity from a governance and operational perspective with associated documentation to support this structure would increase transparency.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

Regardless of which approach HPEDSB takes to structuring the Learning Foundation, an initial step should be to increase communication between the two organizations, as stated in R.30. A future vision and strategy need to be developed so that the fundraising activities of the Learning Foundation match the Board's strategic priorities.

R.32 Develop an employee manual that outlines the process flow, best practices for initiating procurements and provides training to business areas. This may include the development of a service level agreement.

RATIONALE

There have been changes to the overall procurement process (evaluations, bids, and tender platform functionality) over the past few years. Additional training and orientation in the department is needed to ensure maximum efficiency can be reached for a generally lean department.

The role of Purchasing staff has increased beyond what would be considered best practice due to a lack of clarity as to which department (Purchasing or the business area) is responsible and accountable for which functions. The separation of responsibilities for the preparation of business requirements, evaluation criteria, preparation of business-specific contracts (e.g., capital projects), and evaluation of proposals burden Purchasing with additional work that could be done within the business areas with additional training, reducing the amount of support required.

Other Ontario school boards expressed concern over the drastic turnover rate in their respective procurement departments. These competencies are in high demand in the current market. HPEDSB must be prepared in case of turnover by having the necessary policies, procedures, and processes clarified and documented. The manual would benefit both onboarding of new purchasing staff as well as clarification for client departments on procurement policies and procedures.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Clearly defined roles and responsibilities between Purchasing, business areas and schools allow Purchasing to prioritize core functions in the purchasing process and to empower schools to conduct their necessary purchasing tasks.
- **Resource stewardship:** The documentation of processes reduces turnover-related risks.
- **Service Experience:** An employee manual acts as a tool for business areas to take on responsibility for some of the purchasing functions and in many cases, can increase overall compliance with policies and procedures.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

As a first step, it is recommended that roles and responsibilities for each purchasing activity between the Purchasing departments and the business areas are clearly defined in the form of a service level agreement (see R.8 for additional implementation considerations).

The process of determining roles and responsibilities will help identify gaps in training, which will in turn inform any training materials that should be developed as part of the employee manual. It should be noted that the roles and responsibilities may differ depending on the business area. For example, Facilities management may take on a more central role in their purchasing activities due to the scale and complexity related to their projects.

R.33 Management should consider increasing the capacity of the Purchasing area by introducing one additional full-time equivalent.

RATIONALE

The Purchasing area only has two full-time equivalents dedicated to conducting purchasing for the entire Board, one of which is a Bargaining Unit position. A lack of department capacity can result in staff overload, inefficiency, and a high dependency on individual commitments beyond what would normally be expected. There's also no additional trained resource to cover unexpected absences or time off.

Over the past five years, HPEDSB on average deals with 35 RFX⁸ items, which are managed exclusively by the Supervisor, and 1,950 purchase orders per year. When compared to industry benchmarks, the median number of RFXs and POs managed annually by one buyer is 25 and 789 respectively. These benchmarks include buyers who are supported by a procurement software application and assumes that this was their sole function (for high-performing buyers, the numbers are 47 and 2258 respectively)⁹. For HPEDSB, this involves managing the end-to-end process¹⁰, which includes developing the front-end contract and evaluation matrix in consultation with departments. To add further complexity, if the contract is for services, Purchasing is responsible for preparing the form of agreement to be signed by all parties.

All document drafting and administration of high-value, more complex procurements (RFT/RFP) are being managed by the Supervisor. The focus of activity is necessarily reactionary and at a transactional level (i.e., processing) with little time spent on more strategic opportunities. This does not allow exploration of opportunities to become more efficient and cost-effective to the benefit of the Board.

The Ontario school boards that were interviewed as part of this review all had a minimum of three full-time purchasing staff. However, a few of these boards also rely on a system where business

⁸ RFX = broad term that includes all references to Request for Proposal (RFP), Request for Information (RFI), Request for Quote (RFQ), Request for Bid (RFB) and Request for Tender (RFT)

⁹ Productivity KPI from American Productivity and Quality Centre (APQC)

¹⁰ **Note:** Involvement varies depending on the department, but Procurement generally manages and owns the end-to-end process

areas are empowered to manage much of their procurement needs. Purchasing provides more oversight to ensure compliance rather than carrying out the operational tasks. At HPEDSB, if the Purchasing department continues to control many of these processes, then an additional resource should be strongly considered.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Increased support centrally helps increase the support that schools receive to conduct their purchasing functions.
- **Resource stewardship:** An additional resource mitigates the risk of being dependent on certain individuals to perform critical purchasing functions.
- **Service experience:** An additional resource allows supervisors and leadership to focus more time on forecasting and planning, which helps reduce the overall burden and workload on the department in the long run as well as take advantage of opportunities to create more efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Quick Win

To ensure a seamless onboarding process, the Board should consider completing the employee procedures manual first, as indicated in R.32.

9.0 School Operations & Facilities Management

9.1 Current State Findings

The Facilities department works well as a team, despite external pressures around recruitment. The department should look to proactively address these issues through future planning.

Focus Area	Key Findings
Maintenance and Operations Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HPEDSB is experiencing difficulties recruiting tradespeople due to the disparity in wage schedules. This creates a burden on existing staff or could increase costs for the Board if they have to outsource these trades functions. • Policies and procedures are well-documented allowing for consistent execution of maintenance and facilities services.
Management of Capital Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managers and coordinators collaborate and coordinate well within the department allowing for project roles to be divided amongst the group based on skills, expertise, and capacity. This helps the department balance overall workloads. • There is limited collaboration between the Facilities department and the IT infrastructure team, despite clear points of overlap. This results in

Focus Area	Key Findings
	duplication of effort and negatively impacts the service schools may receive.

9.2 Recommendations

The Facilities Services department is responsible for ensuring schools are in an optimal condition for learning. This includes overseeing the construction, maintenance, sustainability, and operations functions for the Board.

The following recommendations were made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of School Operations and Facilities Management:

- **R.34** Recruitment of qualified trades is a systemic challenge beyond HPEDSB that is not likely to be resolved in the near term. Management should develop a long-term recruiting plan that includes options to augment Facility Services’ capacity.
- **R.35** Introduce standardized practices that allow for increased collaboration between the Facilities department and IT Infrastructure team.

R.34 Recruitment of qualified trades is a systemic challenge beyond HPEDSB that is not likely to be resolved in the near term. Management should develop a long-term recruiting plan that includes options to augment Facility Services’ capacity.

RATIONALE

HPEDSB is experiencing difficulties recruiting tradespeople due to the disparity in wage schedules. The compensation package for key roles within the Facilities department is reportedly not competitive with the market rate presenting significant challenges in recruiting. For example, the Facilities department previously attempted to find a Gas Technician (G1) to no avail. To attempt to mitigate these challenges, HPEDSB has taken advantage of apprenticeship programs for trade positions with the intent to focus on future growth and provide access to skills over time. It is recognized that this is a longer-term solution and does not eliminate the risk of apprentices being recruited later by the private sector, but it is a viable course of action nonetheless that should be continued.

Based on jurisdictional research, other school boards in Ontario are experiencing similar challenges related to the recruitment and retention of tradespersons. There is a high demand for these skills and school boards, including HPEDSB, often cannot provide competitive wages compared to the private sector. Other boards are considering, and in some cases have already implemented, increased use of third-party contractors where necessary for key trades.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Resource stewardship:** Planning for the long-term through providing apprenticeship opportunities allows the Board to invest in an initiative that can help mitigate the challenges of recruiting trained tradespersons.

- **Service experience:** Consideration for how the existing team can be augmented where necessary in the short-term with third-party contract staff will support overall service experience to schools.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

As an initial step, HPEDSB must look closer at the issue and ensure the problem is well-defined. The Board should also define which competencies they can develop internally versus the ones that will need to be acquired.

The Board has already begun building a strong apprenticeship pipeline. Although relying on apprentices for trades can be inefficient in the short term due to their inexperience, it is a strategy that should be continued.

R.35 Introduce standardized practices that allow for increased collaboration between the Facilities department and IT Infrastructure team.

RATIONALE

Certain infrastructure projects involve overlap between the Facilities department and IT infrastructure team, particularly when cabling is involved. The two teams must demonstrate some level of integration to ensure projects are planned and completed efficiently. A more formal collaboration process may be required.

Both departments must place focus on cultivating opportunities between management team members.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Service experience:** Repair, maintenance, and builds are done in a more efficient manner.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

Stronger collaboration between the Facilities department and the IT Infrastructure team can be facilitated in different ways. At the simplest level, the two teams can hold regular touchpoints to discuss work orders or ongoing projects to ensure staff are aware of what the other team is working on. The addition of an IT steering committee (see R.14), could help provide an additional level of oversight to ensure there is proper coordination between departments.

Based on jurisdictional findings, Ontario school boards are also actively managing the relationship between these two departments. Boards with Facilities and IT falling under the same Superintendent (typically Business Services), as is the case with HPEDSB, typically have an easier time ensuring the two teams communicate with each other.

From a broader perspective, Optimus SBR learned from another school board that one of the approaches they have taken for large capital projects is to establish a steering committee. The

steering committee could be composed of Superintendents and senior leaders in the organization to ensure there is adequate oversight and visibility. This board also forms a cross-functional technical team that reports to the steering committee, which can include representatives from schools (i.e., principal or vice-principal), Purchasing, IT, and Finance. With established leadership on both committees, this process acts as a training mechanism and helps build project management capacity across the organization.

10.0 Communications

10.1 Current State Findings

Communications at HPEDSB has the opportunity to facilitate more collaboration between departments within Central Operations and between Central Operations and schools.

Focus Area	Key Findings
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are limited mechanisms available for schools to raise concerns or highlight opportunities for improvement. Without consistent feedback from schools, the Board is limited in its ability to identify opportunities to continuously improve. • The Board does not have a central repository where data can be easily accessed by Central Operations or staff. This limits collaboration between departments and between schools.

10.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Communications department:

- **R.36** Develop a strategic approach for communicating with schools.
- **R.37** Provide opportunities for principals and teachers to collaborate school-to-school, focusing on improving student achievement and program implementation.

R.36 Develop a strategic approach for communicating with schools.

RATIONALE

Optimus SBR learned from stakeholder interviews that some areas of Central Operations have a limited customer service orientation in their interactions with schools. In addition, there are limited mechanisms for schools to raise concerns or highlight opportunities for improvement. The documentation of the communication process itself was also identified as a current gap. It is important for the Board to consider the process by which they share information, who they share it and how follow-up is conducted.

There is an opportunity to maximize coordination between the departments in Central Operations in their interactions with schools. By taking a more interdependent approach to communication,

HPEDSB may realize more opportunities to assess and respond to school-specific needs. This interdependent approach is used by other school boards across Ontario.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** Increased engagement with schools.
- **Enabling schools:** Stronger communication channels and mechanisms help Central Operations develop a better understanding of individual school needs.
- **Enabling schools:** Documenting communication processes can help ensure alignment, build trust, and increase engagement between Central Operations and schools.
- **Service experience:** Increased efficiency and response time to solving problems.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Incremental

A school messenger has been developed for the Aspen Student Information System. Optimus SBR learned that the Board is looking to further enhance its functionality. Expanding the use of the school messenger module could be a component of this recommendation.

As an initial step, HPEDSB could engage principals and teachers through the use of surveys or focus groups periodically to ensure some form of feedback is being gathered. While this is time-consuming for Central Operations staff, it is important that Central Operations have these mechanisms in place so that schools feel heard and engaged. In the future, HPEDSB may want to work towards a model that encourages both virtual and face-to-face meetings between school groups, with findings or discussion points brought to Senior Administration team meetings.

HPEDSB may also want to consider documenting some of these communication processes to ensure the right information is being communicated to the right individuals.

R.37 Provide opportunities for principals and teachers to collaborate school-to-school, focusing on improving student achievement and program implementation.

RATIONALE

Optimus SBR learned from stakeholders that teachers do not have a centralized data repository or online tool to collaborate on matters such as sharing lesson plans or best practices. In speaking with other jurisdictions, Optimus SBR learned of one Ontario school board that has implemented this initiative. They have made school learning plans available for viewing to all school administrators across their school board. This creates greater transparency across the district and allows for natural linkages between schools without Central Operations unnecessarily intervening.

HPEDSB has an opportunity to actively facilitate communication, knowledge sharing and problem-solving initiatives among schools. These mechanisms can take many forms including principals' meetings or focus groups, leadership programs, or mentoring arrangements. Not only could this help Central Operations identify unique school needs, but it can also empower school staff to find solutions among themselves, rather than relying solely on Central Operations for support.

EXPECTED BENEFITS

- **Enabling schools:** This could help Central Operations easily identify unique school needs.
- **Enabling schools:** Empowers school staff to find solutions among themselves, rather than relying solely on Central Operations for support.
- **Service experience:** Stronger collaboration between schools could also indirectly increase the strategic alignment between Central Operations and schools.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priority: Transformational

Similar to R.36 above, HPEDSB can start by facilitating meetings and focus groups between various principals or teachers to exchange information and ideas. As other technology initiatives are explored, such as an ERP, HPEDSB can consider how it can best facilitate these interactions between principals and teachers. The advantage of integrating these online tools with other systems is the data is maintained in a central location and users could potentially share data seamlessly with each other.

11.0 Closure

The implementation of the recommendations in this report is expected to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of HPEDSB's Central Operations. By engaging with internal stakeholders and peer school boards through this operational review, coupled with document review and process mapping, Optimus SBR was able to identify improvements that could save time, reduce duplication, and enhance productivity.

With the recent exit from its financial recovery plan, the Board is in a strong position to make positive changes and establish a foundation so continuous improvement can take place. A school board's primary objective is student achievement. To make a positive impact, Central Operations staff need to remove barriers that prevent them from performing their jobs well.

12.0 Appendices

12.1 Stakeholder Engagement Summary

To develop current state findings and future state recommendations, Optimus SBR conducted a series of interviews, focus groups and process mapping sessions. The table below provides a summary of the engagement activities that were conducted per functional area.

Functional Area	Interviews	Focus Groups	Process mapping Sessions
Board Administration	6	1 ¹¹	-
Human Resources Management	4	2	1
Information and Technology Services	4	-	-
Curriculum and Student Services	2 ¹²	2	1
Financial Services	4	1	-
School Operations and Facilities Management	4	1	-
Communications	1	-	-
TOTAL	25	7	2

12.2 Summary of Recommendations (by prioritization)

Prioritization of recommendations was based on expected benefit and expected effort. The methodology also allows for the identification of short-term recommendations that may be considered quick wins versus longer-term and more strategic recommendations.

PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA

Expected Benefit

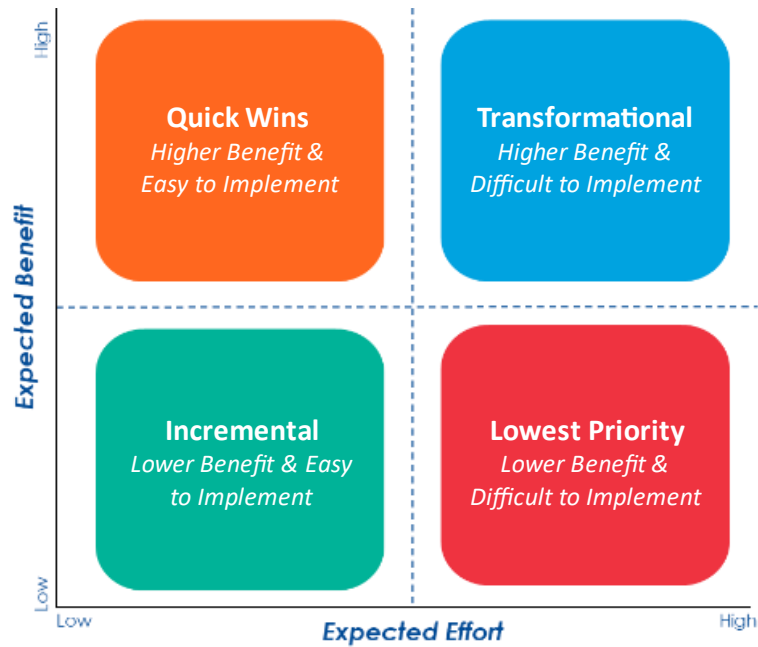
1. Risk mitigation
2. Expected functional impact
3. Operational impact
4. Likelihood of success or adoption

Expected Effort

1. Complexity
2. Directional cost
3. Work effort
4. Timeframe

¹¹ A focus group was facilitated with school principals of HPEDSB.

¹² Curriculum and Student Services related questions were also discussed during the Board Administration interviews with the various academic Superintendents.



The current prioritization and timing of recommendations are based on Optimus SBR’s assessment and are expected to be changed or updated by HPEDSB over time depending on its own view of priorities. If resource capacity is not available to implement the recommendations outlined in this report, the Board could explore several options including prioritizing a certain recommendation above a current priority or bringing in a temporary resource or contract to support implementation.

For the purposes of this report, recommendations with expected low effort (quick wins and incremental) are projected to be completed within the next year. While recommendations with expected high effort (transformational)¹³ are projected to be completed within the next two to five years.

The tables below organize the recommendations based on the prioritization level.

Quick wins – higher benefit and easy to implement

Functional Area	Recommendations
Organization-level	R.3 Ensure policies, procedures, and processes are documented and updated periodically to support knowledge transfer and enhance accountability.
Board Administration	R.5 Management should consider introducing a new Superintendent role to the Senior Administration team.

¹³ **Note:** recommendations considered to be “lowest priority” with high expected effort and low expected benefit were not considered for this report.

Functional Area	Recommendations
	<p>R.6 Clearly define roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities regarding the allocation of funds and reporting of Ministry-funded initiatives.</p>
Human Resources	<p>R.7 Maintain the current structure over the next year to allow staff to adjust to the recent changes within this department. Over this short-term period, management should consider establishing measures to determine the effectiveness of this new structure.</p>
	<p>R.8 Clarify the roles and responsibilities for Central Operations HR and schools for key HR functions such as recruitment, discipline, and performance management. The roles and responsibilities should be documented in the form of a service level agreement.</p>
	<p>R.9 Senior leaders within the HR department should consider identifying and delegating operational tasks throughout the department to ensure time and resources can be focused on implementing strategic initiatives such as organizational training, development, and recruitment strategies.</p>
	<p>R.11 Standardize the intake process when a new employee is hired to ensure information is captured once and the appropriate stakeholders are notified.</p>
	<p>R.12 Develop an implementation plan for the Attendance Support Program. Validate the program’s components, the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes, and buy-in from staff before further implementation.</p>
Information Technology	<p>R.13 Develop an IT Strategic Plan.</p>
Curriculum and Student Services	<p>R.22 Develop business processes and improve collaboration between International Student Services and the Finance department to better understand program finances.</p>
	<p>R.23 Consider developing a business case for the International Student Services program to allow for further exploration of the value proposition, financials, and legal implications.</p>
	<p>R.24 Delegate roles and responsibilities within the staff allocation process.</p>
	<p>R.25 Identify opportunities for automation within the staff allocation process to maximize efficiency.</p>

Functional Area	Recommendations
	R.27 Consider building a pool of relief or occasional EA staff by leveraging other support workers throughout the community with positions such as Child and Youth Workers (CYWs), Developmental Service Workers (DSWs) and Social Service Workers (SSWs).
Financial Services	R.28 Document processes to ensure appropriate transfer of knowledge and identification of gaps.
	R.30 Increase communication with the HPE Learning Foundation to ensure fundraising initiatives align with the strategic priorities of the Board.
	R.32 Develop an employee manual that outlines the process flow, best practices for initiating procurements and provides training to business areas. This may include the development of a service level agreement.
	R.33 Management should consider increasing the capacity of the Purchasing area by introducing one additional full-time equivalent.
School Operations and Facilities Management	
Communications	

Transformational – higher benefit and difficult to implement

Functional Area	Recommendations
Organization-level	R.1 Adopt best practices in change management.
	R.2 Enhance the organization’s culture to support collaboration between Central Operations and schools and enhance the customer service orientation within Central Operations.
	R.4 Develop a project management focus and capability to ensure consistency, rigour, and discipline for larger projects and to help the Board ensure that people and financial resources are properly allocated to projects.
Board Administration	
Human Resources	R.10 Explore implementation of an ERP solution based on Ministry Direction for better integration of HR, Finance, Payroll and Purchasing functions.

Functional Area	Recommendations
Information Technology	R.14 Develop an IT governance framework.
	R.16 Develop a cloud governance framework.
	R.17 Establish clear processes and technology standards for schools in the form of a service level agreement.
	R.18 Formalize a cybersecurity program that includes policies, procedures, and guidelines.
	R.19 Develop a data management strategy.
Curriculum and Student Services	R.20 Management should consider modifying the roles and responsibilities of Superintendents and System Leads to ensure workloads are balanced and to create capacity for Superintendents to support schools.
	R.21 Improve the use of data in curriculum areas for both Central Operations and schools to better inform school planning, resource allocation, and student achievement initiatives.
	R.26 Identify opportunities to allow for continuous monitoring of student needs once Educational Assistants (EA) have been assigned and the school year begins.
Financial Services	R.31 Clarify operating and working relationships to reflect that the Learning Foundation and School Board are separate entities through a revised MOU and additional agreements.
School Operations and Facilities Management	R.34 Recruitment of qualified trades is a systemic challenge beyond HPEDSB that is not likely to be resolved in the near term. Management should develop a long-term recruiting plan that includes options to augment Facility Services' capacity.
	R.35 Introduce standardized practices that allow for increased collaboration between the Facilities department and IT Infrastructure team.
Communications	R.37 Provide opportunities for principals and teachers to collaborate school-to-school, focusing on improving student achievement and program implementation.

Incremental – lower benefit and easy to implement

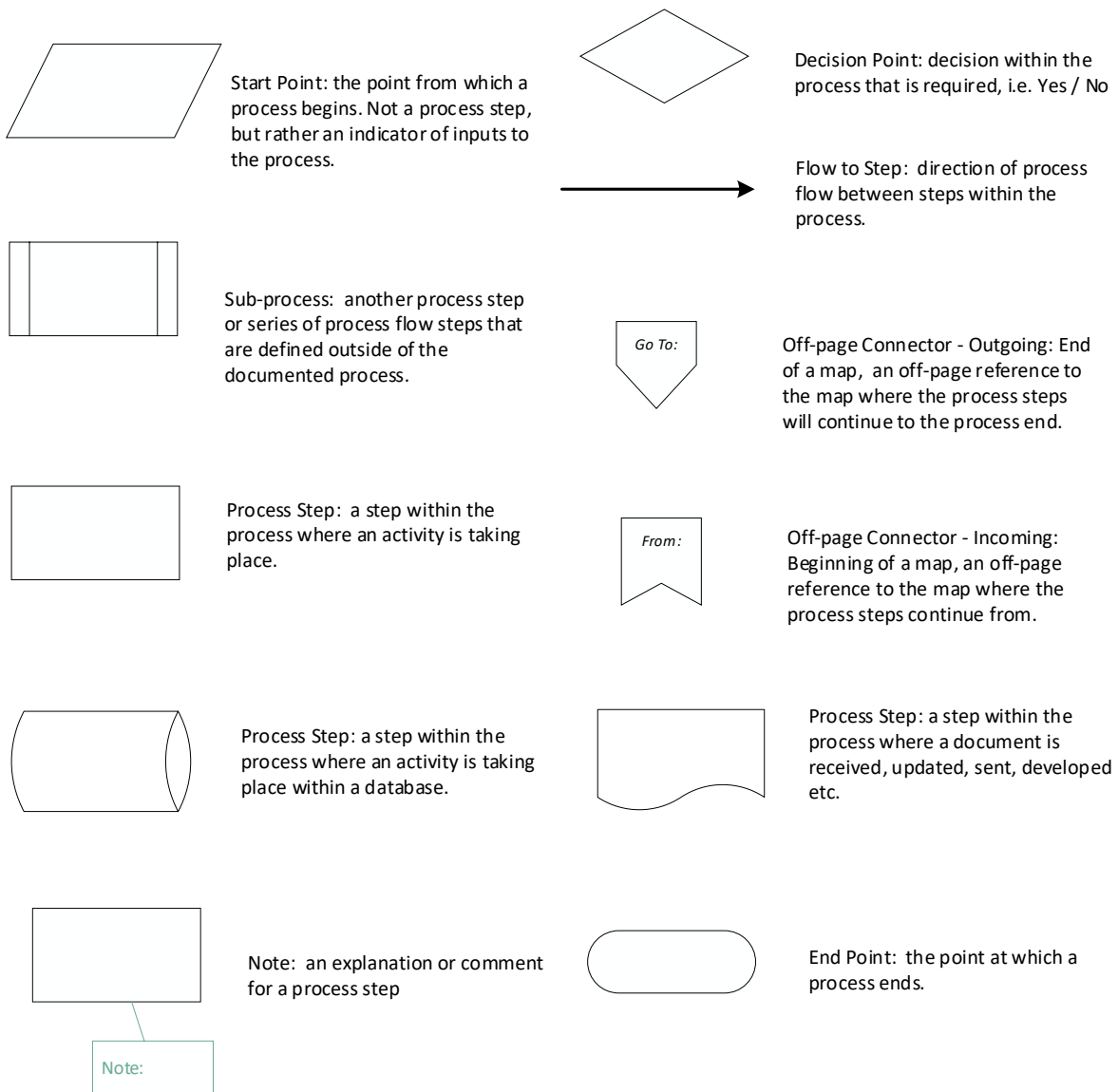
Functional Area	Recommendations
Organization-level	
Board Administration	
Human Resources	
Information Technology	R.15 Perform an IT skills assessment such as SFIA (Skills Framework for the Information Age).
Curriculum and Student Services	
Financial Services	R.29 Invest in training staff (both within Central Operations and in schools) and develop a service level agreement.
School Operations and Facilities Management	
Communications	R.36 Develop a strategic approach for communicating with schools.

12.3 Current State Process Maps

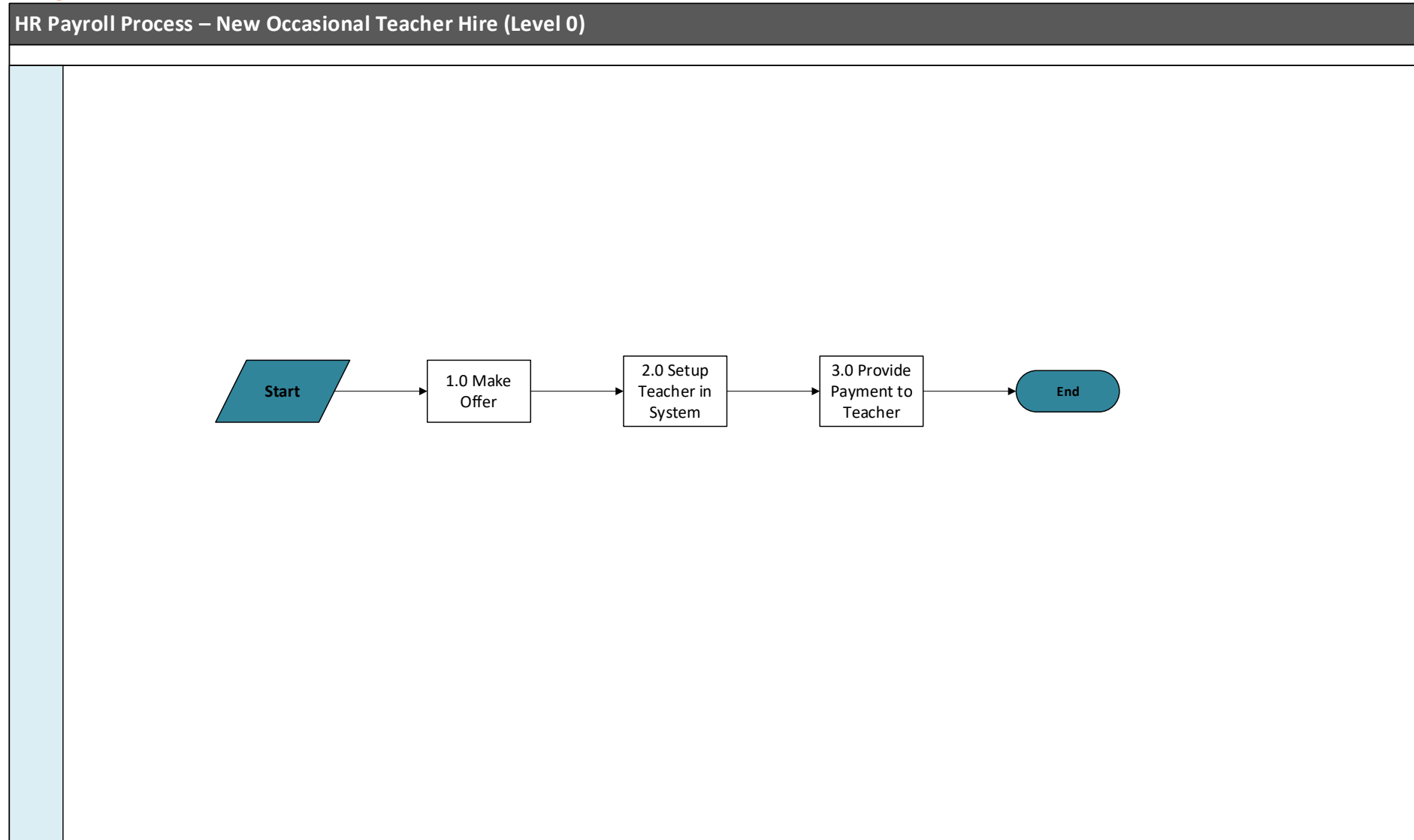
As part of this review, Optimus SBR developed two process maps that represent important workflows for HPEDSB.

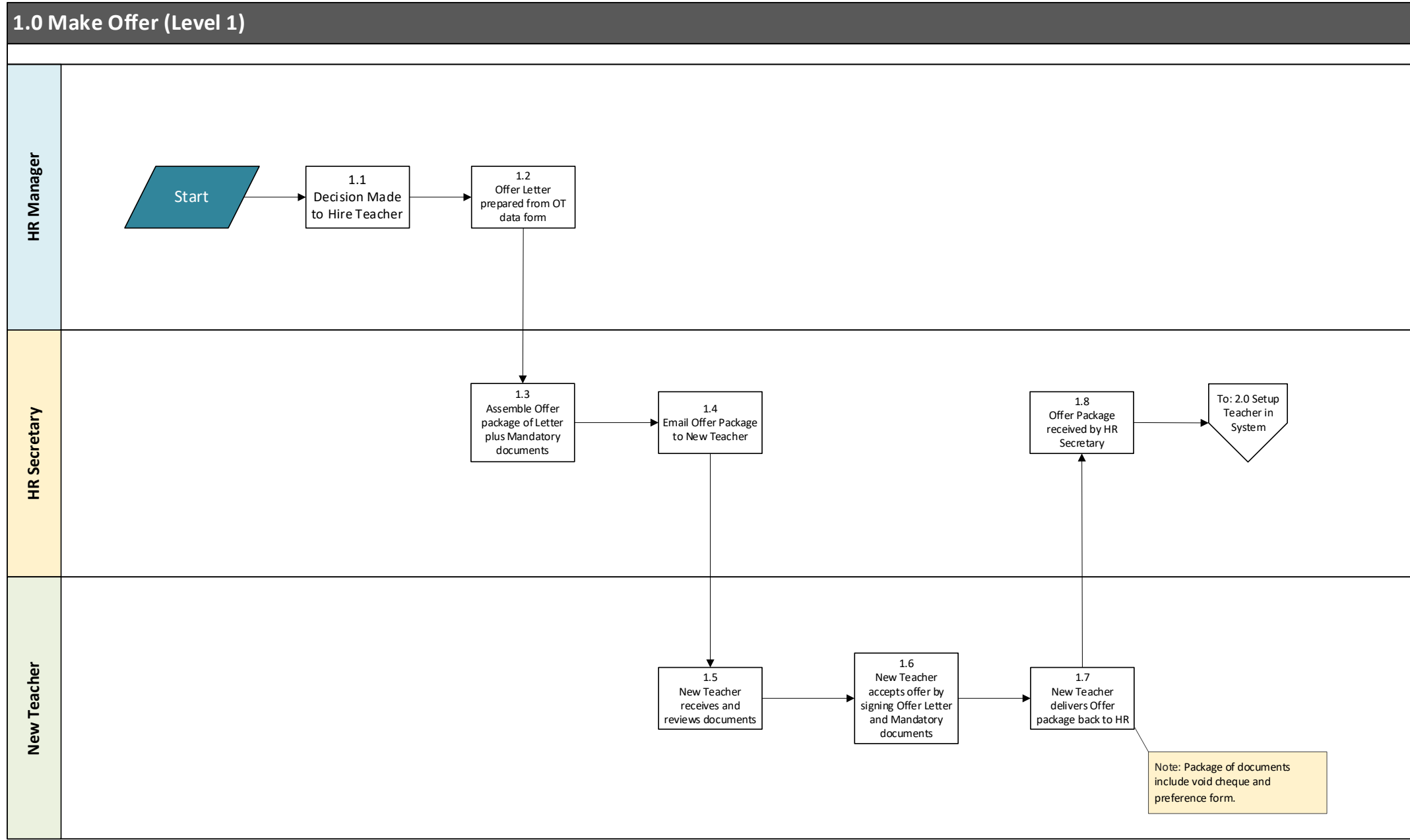
1. **Onboarding of an occasional teacher:** the purpose of process mapping was to better understand the roles and responsibilities between HR and Payroll and to identify areas of overlap.
2. **Staff allocation process for elementary schools:** the purpose of process mapping is to identify opportunities for efficiencies in the planning process.

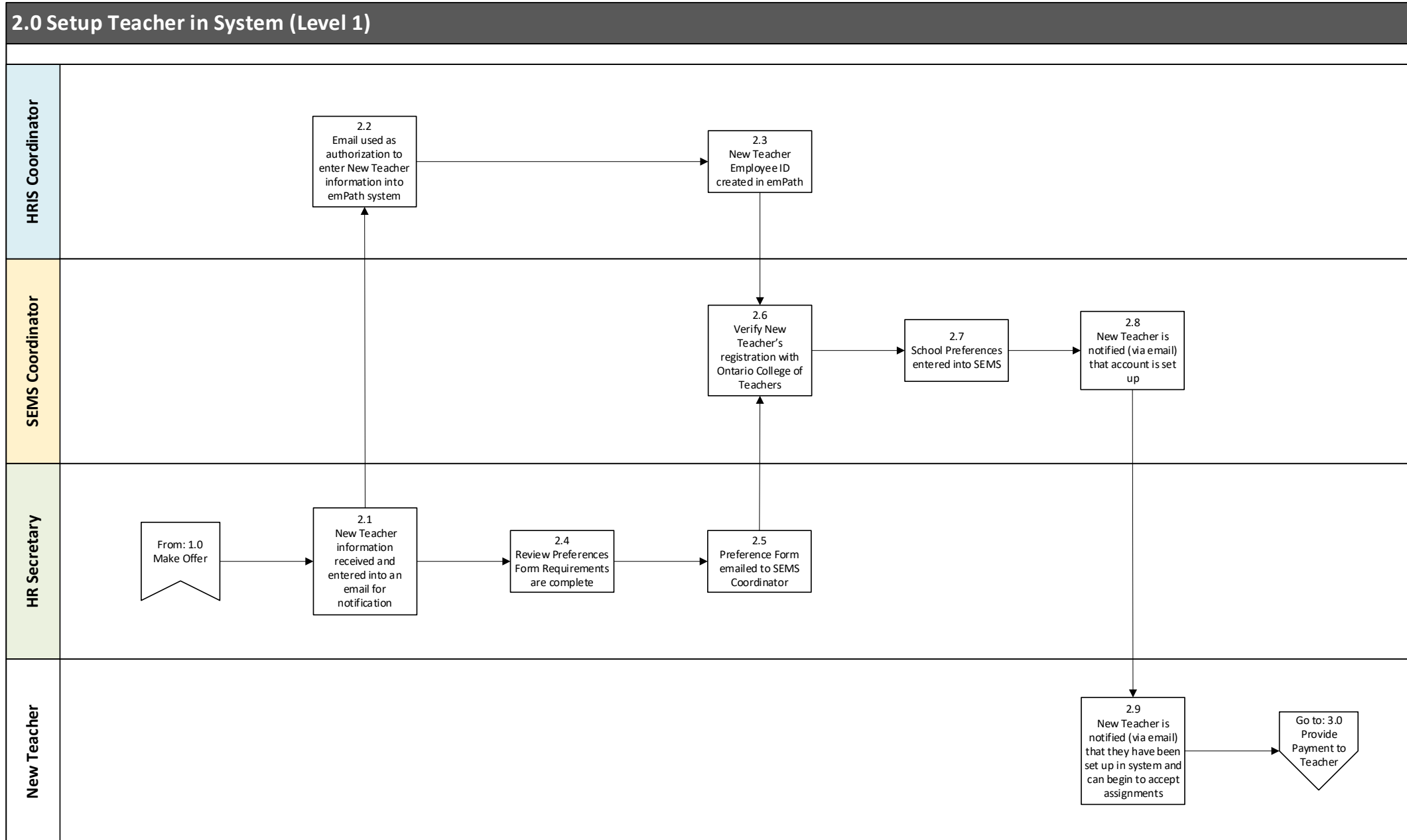
Workflow Shapes

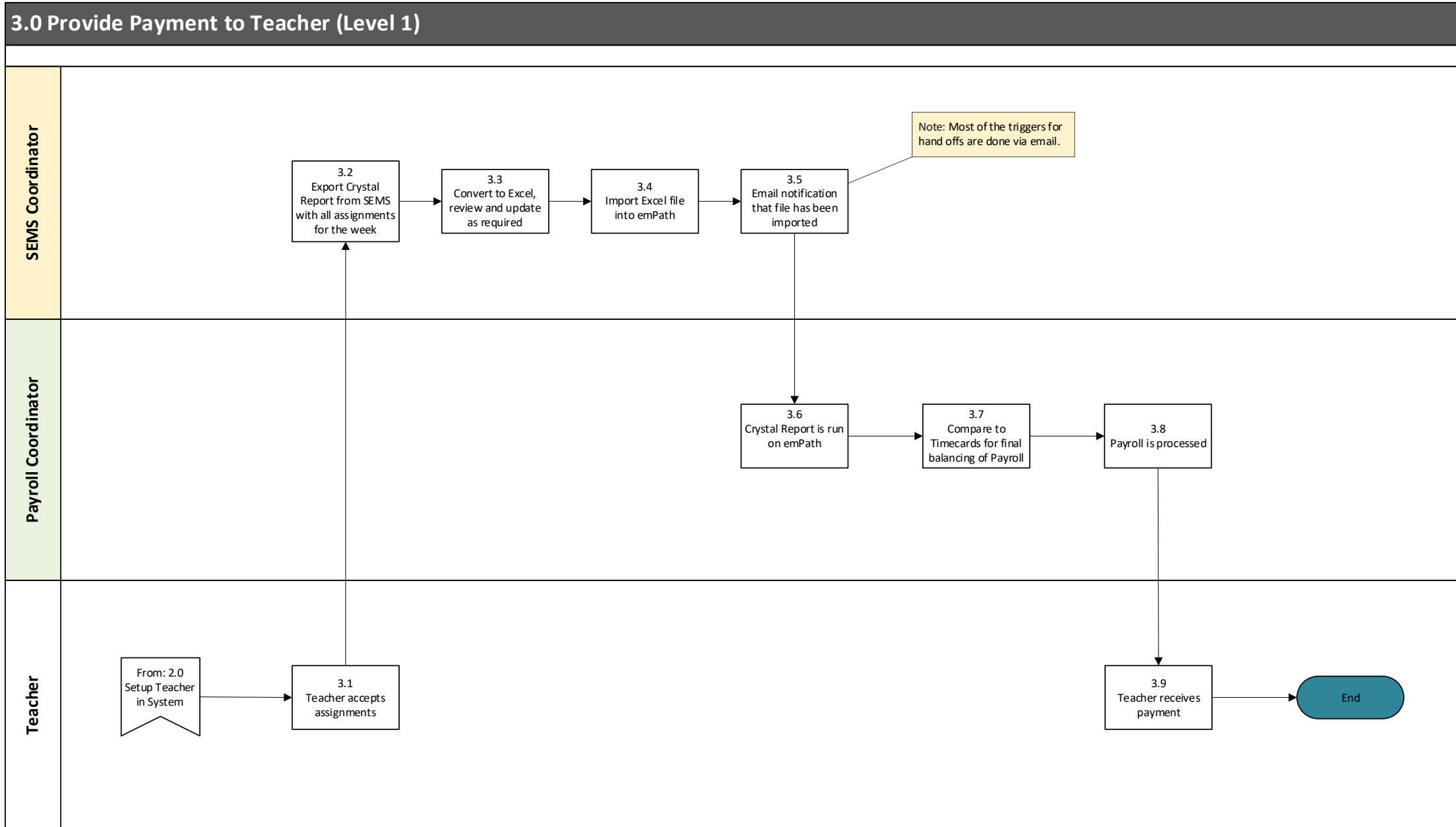


12.3.1 Onboarding Process for an Occasional Teacher









12.3.2 Staff Allocation Process for Elementary Schools

