



September 15th, 2017

J.J. Syer _____

Dear Ms. Syer,

Re: Request for an Administrative Review of the Prince Edward County Pupil Accommodation Review (PAR) for Queen Elizabeth School (Picton)

This letter is in response to your request for an Administrative Review of the Prince Edward County PAR undertaken by the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board (“the board”), which included Queen Elizabeth School in Picton (“Queen Elizabeth”).

Due to the importance of accommodation decisions to students, families and communities, we share your desire that accommodation review processes follow the policies developed and approved by local school boards and that community members have the opportunity to form opinions and to have them presented and understood. However, based on the ministry’s review of your administrative review request package, the ministry has decided not to appoint a facilitator in this case.

When reviewing an administrative review request, the ministry gathers documentation to identify whether requirements of a board’s accommodation review policy were met during the board’s pupil accommodation review process. The ministry also assesses whether the documentation indicates that the steps taken by a board were sufficient and reasonable within the context of a public consultation.

In your petition, you state:

1. That the board failed to provide relevant or accurate material regarding the rationale for the closure of Queen Elizabeth, including data on transportation ride times, programming enhancements, facility plans, or student safety.

2. That the board failed to provide relevant answers to questions during the PAR process.
3. That the board's initial option and report does not address accommodation issues, and that these issues remained fundamentally unexplored throughout the PAR process.
4. That the board did not provide a finalized version of the transition plan for students in schools that would be closing.
5. That the board did not hold an annual Community Planning and Partnerships ("CPP") meeting, which negatively affected the potential to develop partnerships that may have allowed the school to remain open.
6. That the board chair failed to provide the Board of Trustees sufficient information on the financial impacts of school closures and consolidations resulting from this PAR. Without a detailed school budget, the Trustees were unable to hold informed discussions on school closures.
7. That Trustees were frequently absent from Accommodation Review Committee ("ARC") meetings and public consultations.
8. That the board did not consider alternative options presented to them by the ARC. You also state that the board refused to participate in an engagement held by the Minister of Education on new approaches to support education in rural and remote areas.

I will take this opportunity to address each of the points that you have raised.

Regarding the first item, you indicate that the board did not provide relevant or accurate information regarding transportation times, programming enhancements, facility plans, student safety, or financial rationale for the closure of Queen Elizabeth. The board responded that they provided the ARC with all of the information required for them to make informed decisions regarding the development of recommended options. The information provided include:

- SIPs for each school;
- Capital Planning Forecasts for each school;
- Condition Assessment Reports for each school; and
- Transportation Ride Times.

The ministry finds that the board provided the information listed above during ARC Working Meetings in a manner that allowed for discussion and clarification of the data. The board-provided information addresses all of the disputed deficiencies in this item. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy regarding this item.

The second item indicates that the board did not provide answers to questions raised during the PAR process, including questions surrounding financial planning, transportation times, facility plans, programming changes, and safety concerns. You mention that the Questions and Answers Chart prepared by the board was inadequate. The board responded that all questions were provided answers by board staff, and were contained in either the Questions and Answers Chart, the Frequently Asked Questions ("FAQs") section of the board's website, or summarized in the Final Staff Report. The question charts contained answers to 160 questions, and also referred interested individuals to specific board policies and documents.

The Questions and Answers Chart was updated until March 29th, 2017, which was sectioned into several different topics. The board's website contains an FAQs section, as well as documents to which the public can easily access to find answers to their questions. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy regarding this item.

The third item indicates that throughout the PAR process, the following topics were not addressed:

- How student transportation would be affected;
- If any new capital investment would be required;
- How the school board intends to fund investments;
- How students would be accommodated if funding is not available; and
- Documents received from municipalities or other partners prior to the start of the PAR were not included in the Initial Staff Report.

The board responded that all of the information regarding the topics above has been included in the information provided to the ARC and available to the public through the board website. As a result of the community consultation process, recommendations to close C M L Snider School ("C M L Snider") and Kente Public School ("Kente") were removed from Trustee consideration. Additionally, Trustees voted to leave Sophiasburg Central School ("Sophiasburg") open to explore opportunities with a community partner.

The ministry finds that the topics above have been addressed adequately through the Questions and Answers Chart, the SIPs, and the Transportation Ride Times document. The board has indeed presented the ARC and the public with the relevant information required to develop options. The rationale for the final recommendation can be found in the Final Staff Report. The fact that the final recommended option was revised to keep Sophiasburg, C M L Snider, and Kente from closing suggests that the initial option was further explored and refined based on community consultation. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy regarding this item.

The fourth item indicates that the board did not provide a finalized version of the transition plan for students in schools that would be closed. The board asserts that it has complied with its PAR policy regarding the provision of a transition plan. The Transition Plan was developed in consultation with the ARC and was included in the

Final Staff Report. A separate transition plan was developed by the Special Education Advisory Committee as well.

The transition plan was not finalized before the end of the PAR process. However, under the board's PAR policy, it is not required for the board to produce a finalized version of the transition plan before the end of the PAR. The board's PAR policy states that the transition plan should be prepared in consultation with parents/guardians and staff. Meeting minutes from second ARC working meeting indicate that the ARC members worked on transition planning development. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy regarding this item.

The fifth item indicates that the board did not hold an annual CPP meeting with community partners as required by the ministry's Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline ("CPPG"). You state that due to the lack of this meeting, the community did not have adequate time and opportunity to develop partnerships that might have allowed schools to stay open. The board responded that there was ongoing correspondence with the County Council, and that the Council was aware of all meeting dates, and had access to all PAR materials. Additionally, two members of the Council participated as members of ARC. Furthermore, the board states that the ministry's CPPG is a guideline, and not policy.

Letters and e-mails from multiple community partners and members of the public have been included in the Final Staff Report. Many letters indicated interest in developing a food-based community hub at Sophiasburg. These expressions of interest are presumably the basis on which Trustees voted to keep Sophiasburg open. Additionally, notifications of public meetings have been sent out in a timely manner.

While it is unknown whether or not the board held the meeting to discuss facility partnerships, which is defined in their Community Planning and Partnerships Procedure 570, it is not required of the board to hold such a meeting under their PAR policy. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy regarding this item.

The sixth item indicates that Trustees were not provided sufficient information regarding the budget for the school board, as well as the financial value of the schools involved. As a result, it is felt that Trustees were unable to have informed discussions to produce an effective solution. The board responded that Trustees were provided with all of the information required including the Watson Report, Initial Staff Report, and Final Staff Report. Trustees also had access to all of the information provided online through the board's website, as well as heard delegations on May 25, 2017. The board also notes that the Trustees are also involved in the board's budget deliberations and approval of the board budget throughout Spring 2017, and have very detailed information regarding ministry funding and budget issues for the entire board.

The ministry agrees that the Trustees were provided adequate information regarding financial impacts of school closures. The ministry also agrees that the Trustees have a comprehensive understanding of the board's finances, as they are required to approve budgets annually. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy

regarding this item.

The seventh item indicates that the Trustees were frequently absent from ARC Working Meetings and public consultations. The board responded that the Trustees were not members of the ARC, and were not required to attend ARC meetings. The board also responded that many Trustees did attend the meetings to hear the feedback from the community and the ARC members.

Trustees participated in the public consultation process through hearing delegations as members of the Student Enrolment/School Capacity Committee. They also have access to public consultation information through the e-mails received from the public and communications from municipal and local partners in the Final Staff Report. Ultimately, the board's PAR policy does not require Trustees to attend ARC Working Meetings or Public Meetings. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy regarding this item.

The final item indicates that the board did not consider the alternative options, and proceeded to move forward with closing Queen Elizabeth without sufficient information. You also state that the board rejected the opportunity to attend a meeting, held by Minister Hunter, on new approaches to support education in rural and remote areas. The board responded that the Trustees' final decision was made in the best interest of all students and that alternatives were taken into consideration. Alternative options that were identified by the ARC include:

- Relocation of grade 7-8 students to Prince Edward CI beginning in Sept 2017;
- Expansion of the catchment area for Sophiasburg and developing it as a community hub; and
- Re-alignment of the catchment areas for C M L Snider and Kente.

The board also responded that both the Director of Education and the Chair attended the Minister's meeting. In its letter to the Minister, the board expressed its commitment to delivering programs and opportunities to its students, and its appreciation to the government's plan to support education in rural and remote communities.

The ministry finds that the board did consider alternative options, since the final recommendation was revised to include parts of the ARC's alternative options. The board's response to the Minister was requesting assurance that the Minister's letter was not intended to undo the responsibility of Trustees to make local decisions based on the needs of the students. The board's letter was not a rejection to the invitation for engagement. Ultimately, the board is not required by its PAR policy to attend such a meeting. The ministry is satisfied that the board adhered to its PAR policy regarding this item.

I appreciate the level of engagement that members of the Queen Elizabeth school community have shown through this process. I encourage parents and guardians of students to remain involved as the Hastings and Prince Edward DSB continues to support the successful transition of students during the new school year. The continued

involvement of parents and guardians will help to ensure that the needs of all the students involved in this review are met.

Should you have further questions, please contact Jacqueline Chan, Policy and Issues Analyst, Capital Policy Branch, Ministry of Education at 416-325-2961.

Sincerely,

Joshua Paul
Assistant Deputy Minister
Capital and Business Support Division

cc: Mandy Savery-Whiteway, Director of Education, Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board

Denis Chartrand, Regional Manager, Ottawa Regional Office, Ministry of Education