

School Review Handbook

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1. Introduction

Purpose of This Handbook

Saskatchewan's economy and population are growing and along with this growth comes hope and optimism for the future.

However, in some parts of Saskatchewan, demographic shifts and decreasing birthrates have resulted in declining enrolments. With very small student numbers, it becomes difficult to provide a complete educational program that responds to the needs of all students, to provide elective courses, and to attract administrators and specialist teachers. In some situations, aging school structures are an additional factor that must be considered.

As a result, boards of education must make decisions about the viability of schools in some communities. In order to maintain the quality of educational programming, it is sometimes necessary to close schools with very small enrolments or reduce the number of grades or years offered. When grade or year reduction occurs, it is typically high school or middle years programs that are discontinued.

This handbook was developed to provide information to communities, boards of education, school community councils and schools that may be facing the review of a school. This handbook describes the school review process, addresses practical matters associated with closing a school, defines a school of opportunity, and outlines the process that may lead to designation as a school of opportunity.

Please note that this handbook has no legal status. It is for information purposes only. For the legal requirements concerning school reviews and schools of opportunity, refer directly to the legislation or consult legal counsel.



Introduction

Saskatchewan's growing population and economy bring optimism and hope.

However, in some parts of Saskatchewan, shifting demographics and a declining birthrate mean decreasing enrolments. When small student numbers make it difficult to offer a complete program that responds to the needs of all students, school closure or grade discontinuance becomes an option.

This handbook provides information to communities and boards of education that may be facing the review of a school.

This handbook has no legal status. For legal purposes refer to Sections 54 to 64 of *The School Division Administration Regulations* which set out the school review process and provide for schools of opportunity.

Sections 54 to 64 of *The School Division Administration Regulations* apply to rural schools only, not to urban schools.

Sections 54 to 70 of *The School Division Administration Regulations* which regulate the school review process and designation as a school of opportunity apply only to schools which are located in school districts, in other words, rural schools, they do not apply to urban schools.

The Legislation and Regulations

In 2017, the Government of Saskatchewan proclaimed *The School Division Administration Regulations* that provides the framework for the review of schools. Sections 54 to 64 of *The School Division Administration Regulations* set out timelines to review a school and describe processes that must be followed.

The School Division Administration Regulations (section 65) also makes provision for schools of opportunity (schools located in communities that may experience an increase in student enrolment as a result of economic growth in the area) and provides details of the school of opportunity process.

The regulations that govern the school review process and schools of opportunity is available from the Government of Saskatchewan Publications Centre:

The School Division Administration Regulations:

<https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/104103/E0-2r26.pdf>

Sections 54 to 64 of *The School Division Administration Regulations* provide for two processes:

- When the school community council gives consent to closure or grade discontinuance, the board of education may proceed directly to closure/grade discontinuance.
- When the school community council does not give consent, the review process defined in *The School Division Administration Regulations* and explained in this handbook must be followed.

Organization of This Handbook

This handbook is organized into six chapters and a Briefcase which provides sample materials:

- 1. Introduction** – which outlines the purpose of this handbook and notes that regulations has been enacted which guides the school review process and provides for schools of opportunity.
- 2. Roles and Responsibilities** – which outlines the roles of key participants throughout the school review process. Roles of the following are described: Minister and Ministry of Education; board of education; school community council; school review committee; school staff; students, parents and families; and communities.
- 3. Long-Term Planning** – which describes the importance of developing and maintaining school profiles to help identify schools that are approaching non-viability, of implementing consistent policies and procedures relating to school review, of open, transparent communication, and of engaging in ongoing dialogue with local governments and First Nations.
- 4. The School Review Process** – which describes the legally-mandated process that is to be followed from the time a school is flagged for review to the time the board of education has the option to pass a final motion for school closure or grade/year discontinuance.

5. Schools of Opportunity – which defines a school of opportunity and describes the legally-mandated process that is to be followed when applying for designation as a school of opportunity.

Briefcase – which provides samples of documents and resources that may be helpful to communities and boards of education during the school review process. Boards of education and communities are invited to “open up” this Briefcase and pull out the items that are useful to them. These items are provided for information and convenience only. There is no requirement or expectation that boards of education and communities will use the items in the Briefcase, but they are welcome to do so if they wish. Although the school review process applies only to rural schools, urban school divisions may also find the items in the Briefcase useful.

Graphics

Throughout this handbook graphic symbols are used to signal key pieces of information.



Indicates that *The School Division Administration Regulations* requires that a decision must be made or an action taken by a certain date.



Indicates that the public must be given notice using a process prescribed in *The School Division Administration Regulations*.



Introduces the summary boxes which appear at the beginning of each chapter in this handbook. The summary boxes briefly restate the main points made in the chapter.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

During the school review process, the board of education plays a key role, and so do several other groups. The roles and responsibilities of these key participants are described below. This section addresses seven topics:

- The Minister and Ministry of Education
- The Board of Education
- The School Community Council
- The School Review Committee
- School Staff
- Students, Parents and Families
- Communities

The Minister and Ministry of Education

Minister of Education – The Minister of Education does not make decisions regarding the review of a school. This authority rests with boards of education.

The Minister of Education accepts and reviews applications for designation as a school of opportunity and is responsible for deciding whether a school will be designated as a school of opportunity. The Minister of Education also determines the length of the designation period which shall not exceed three school years.

Ministry of Education – The Ministry of Education, acting under the direction of the Minister of Education, drafts regulations relating to school review and schools of opportunity.

The Ministry of Education may also develop policies to provide further guidance for the school review process and offer information such as the information contained in this handbook.

The Board of Education

The board of education has a broad perspective and is responsible for delivery of educational programs and services for the entire school division. It considers the needs of all students across the division. Thus, it is aware that the possibility of a school closure/grade discontinuance impacts the receiving school(s) as well as the school being closed.



Roles and Responsibilities

The provincial government enacted regulations that provide a framework for the school review process.

Subject to the regulations, the board of education has overall responsibility for all aspects of a school review process. Other groups also play roles in this process including the school community council; the school review committee; staff of both the school under review and the receiving schools; students, parents and families; and the community as a whole.

Students' most important job is to learn. A responsibility shared by all interested parties is shielding students from the strong emotions that sometimes accompany a school review and keeping students' attention focused on their studies.

In situations where a decision is made to close a school or discontinue grades, the board of education is responsible for ensuring that school division staff take measures to smooth the transition for students and to ensure that students are successfully integrated into their new school.

Subject to regulation requirements, the board of education governs the school division over which it has jurisdiction. The board of education has overall responsibility for all aspects of a school review process. The board of education creates policy that causes schools to be flagged for review, establishes criteria for the review, creates a school review committee, and passes motions that move the school review process along through a series of stages.

The School Community Council

Every school has a school community council established by the board of education according to sections 140.1 to 140.5 of *The Education Act, 1995*.

The school community council can give consent to a school closure/grade discontinuance or withhold consent. Consent means that the board of education may proceed directly to school closure/grade discontinuance. Lack of consent means that the review process mandated in *The School Division Administration Regulations* and described in this handbook must be followed.

The school community council's responsibilities include providing advice to the board of education, thus it can advise the board of education throughout the school review process.

If a board decides to close a school or discontinue grades, the school community councils of both the closing school and the receiving school(s) may play a role in supporting transition planning to ensure continuity for all students, including those with special needs or unique situations.

If a school closes, the school community council of that school is dissolved and any records in the possession or control of the school community council should be transferred to the closing school to be managed in accordance with the Records Retention Guidelines for Schools. This can be found on page 72 of this handbook.

The members of the dissolved school community council can, if they wish, stand for election to the school community council of a receiving school, the next time that school community council holds an election.

The School Review Committee

The school review committee is established by the board of education when the school review process begins. It consists of members of the school community council (not the principal or teachers), representatives of local government, community members, and in some situations representative(s) of local First Nation(s).

Although the school review committee is established by the board of education, it does not take direction from the board. Rather, it consults with community, and provides advice and recommendations to the board of education on the school review process including recommendations to consider discontinuance of one or more grades or years taught in a school as an alternative to closing the school.

The school review committee does the bulk of its work between the time it is formally established (no later than November 1) and the end of January. It makes at least one report to the board of education by the end of January, because February 1 is the last date on which the board of education can move to consider school closure/grade discontinuance. However, the school review committee remains active until the board of education holds a meeting of electors (no later than March 31) or until the day on which the board of education decides to remove the school from in-review status, whichever comes first. This enables the school review committee to report on its findings at the meeting of electors.

School Staff

Staff of the School Under Review

The staff of the school under review includes a principal and teachers and may include other staff such as educational assistants, custodians, bus drivers and secretarial/clerical staff.

The primary responsibility of all these staff members is to protect the learning environment, so student learning continues and so the school remains a pleasant, productive place for all students. This means ensuring that events relating to the school review process do not negatively affect the learning environment or interfere with students' interest in and commitment to their studies.

School staff carry on with their normal responsibilities throughout a school review process and, as employees of the board of education, play no role in that process.

Staff of Receiving Schools

When new students enter a school, the principal, teachers and other staff always take steps to make them feel welcome, to familiarize them with the school, and to integrate them into their classrooms.

When the staff of a school knows the school will be receiving students from a school that is being closed, they can begin the process of making students welcome in May and June, even before the school has closed. They can work with the staff of the closing school and with the school community councils of both schools to organize activities that will facilitate the transition for students and familiarize them with their new school.

Students, Parents and Families

Learning is a student's most important job and parents and other family members have a responsibility to create an environment that promotes learning throughout the school review process. This means putting the educational needs of students first, keeping students' attention focused on their school work, and shielding them from the high emotions that sometimes accompany a school review.

If the board of education passes a final motion to close a school, parents and other family members can assist their children's transition to a new school by presenting the change in a positive light – as an opportunity for new friends and new experiences. They can participate in activities such as open houses and field trips designed to facilitate students' transition to their new school, they can read information provided by the school division so they are better able to discuss the change with their children, and they can stay in touch with the school community council so they are up-to-date on plans and events.

Communities

Community members have an ongoing responsibility to stay informed about the operations of the school division and the schools in their local community. They can do this by taking advantage of opportunities to get information, ask questions and provide feedback. These opportunities include becoming involved in their local School Community Council, attending the board of education's annual general meeting, reading information posted on the school division's website, and reading school and school division newsletters.

The school review process outlined in *The School Division Administration Regulations* is designed to facilitate community input. For example, the school review committee is comprised of representatives from the school community council, local government, the community, and in some situations, local First Nation(s). The legislation requires that a public meeting of electors be held.

The community has a responsibility to become informed about the school review process – to understand the steps in the process, the timing of the process and the opportunity for public participation in the process. The community can make its voice heard by participating in the school review process through the legally mandated mechanisms. The community also has a responsibility to provide the school review committee and the board of education with information about the community that may influence decisions regarding the viability of a particular school.

3. Long-Term Planning

This chapter describes the long-term planning that will enable boards of education to continuously monitor all schools in the division and communicate information about the status of these schools to the public.

It includes five sections:

- School Profiles
- Consistent Policies and Procedures
- Transparent and Open Communication
- Dialogue with Local Governments
- Dialogue With First Nations

School Profiles

It is recommended that school division staff, in collaboration with the school community councils of individual schools, prepare annual profiles of all schools in the division and post the profiles on the division's website. This will enable members of the public to view information about the current status of schools in their division.

At minimum, the school profiles should include information that boards of education are required by section 60 of *The School Division Administration Regulations* to provide to the school review committee and the school community council. This information is:

- enrolment history of the school since January 1, 2006
- five-year projected enrolments and the source of this data
- current number of teaching and non-teaching staff
- projected number of teaching staff based on projected enrolments and board policy
- information about the physical condition of the school
- other relevant information.

The Briefcase at the end of this handbook includes:

- An example of a school profile (Item #1)
- An example of a summary chart that displays current and projected enrolment for all schools in a division. (Item #2)



Long-Term Planning

Most boards of education participate in long-term planning that enables them to continuously monitor all schools in the division and to communicate with the public.

Monitoring involves creating an annual profile of each school in the division in order to identify schools that are approaching non-viability long before a school review process begins. Making these profiles available to the public helps ensure that the public is aware of the status of every school in the division.

Formal written policies and procedures regarding school reviews are another important part of long-term planning. Written policies allow decisions to be made systematically and consistently and provide the community with information about the process that will be used to conduct a school review. Open and transparent communication serves this purpose as well.

Ongoing dialogue and communication between the board of education, local governments, and First Nations has benefits for all parties. It is important that the board connect with local governments whose jurisdictions include possible receiving schools as well as with local governments whose jurisdictions include schools that may come under review.



Consistent Policies and Procedures

It is vitally important that boards of education create formal written policies and procedures relating to school reviews.

Formal written policies and procedures can:

- Ensure that board of education processes comply with the legislation and regulations.
- Ensure that decisions are made systematically and consistently according to defined criteria.
- Provide the community with information about the school review process, so that community members are aware of the criteria that will flag a school for review and the processes that will be used to implement the review.

The School Division Administration Regulations require that the board of education policies relating to a school review are posted on the board's website and that any amendments to these policies be posted within 30 days.

Transparent and Open Communication

Transparent and open communication provides necessary information to school staff members, students, parents and the community when the board of education enters into a school review process.

Open communication begins long before a school review is even considered, with posting of school profiles and school division policies and procedures relating to school review.

If a school review is initiated, it is important to be open and transparent about the process – describe the steps that will be followed and provide summaries of events and information at key points in the process. A variety of means can be used to communicate with students and staff and with the community including website postings, news releases, paid announcements in local newspapers, public meetings, posters, and mail-outs to students' families. The communication methods used will depend on the community and the current stage of the review process.

Communication with the media, the community and with key people at all stages of the school review process will ensure the community has accurate, up-to-date information and reduce the potential for rumour and misinformation.

If a school review process proceeds to the stage of a final motion, at least two outcomes are possible. The board of education may move to leave the school open or to close the school/discontinue grades. There are other possible outcomes as well. For example, the board may move to close the school or discontinue grades one or two years hence.

It is essential that school division staff develop a communication plan, so they will be prepared regardless of what decision is made by the board. At a minimum, the communication plan should provide for two options: the board votes to leave the school open and the board votes to close the school/discontinue grades. For example, the board can have two sets of letters ready to go to parents: one set to be used if the board moves to leave the school open and a second set to be used if the board moves to close the school/discontinue grades.

Reporters from local or provincial news media will probably be at a meeting where a final vote is taking place. The school division's communication plan should ensure that school staff and the school community council are informed about the board's decision before they hear it on the radio or see it in the newspaper. Mechanisms such as phoning trees and e-mails are useful to spread information quickly.

In some communities, it may be appropriate to specifically ask members of the public to communicate with the board of education or the school review committee, rather than with teachers or the principal of a school under review. The principal and teachers are employees of the board and have a loyalty to both their students and their employer. Directing complaints to them puts them in a very difficult position and is also ineffective because the principal and teachers play no role in the school review process.

Dialogue With Local Governments

An ongoing dialogue between the board of education and local governments has benefits for both parties. A key component of this dialogue could be an annual formal presentation by the board of education to local governments. The board of education may choose to host a single event which brings all local government representatives together or host a series of regionally-based events. Because a large school division can encompass several towns, villages, rural municipalities and First Nations, the board will probably be a participant in several ongoing dialogues with local governments.

The board of education, in its presentation to local governments, can provide information about the board's long- and short-term plans, about enrolment trends in specific schools and the school division as a whole, and about the physical condition of schools in the division. This information is important for local governments whose jurisdictions include possible receiving schools as well as for local governments whose jurisdictions include schools that are approaching non-viability and thus may come under review.

In addition to making an annual presentation to local governments, the board of education can invite representatives of local governments to attend board meetings when the board is discussing enrolment trends and planning for the future.

Ongoing dialogue between boards of education and local governments alerts the local governments to the possibility that certain schools may come under review and to possible infrastructure needs that may result from, for example, changing bus routes and transportation patterns.

Dialogue With First Nations

In some Saskatchewan schools, a significant number of students are members of one or more local First Nations. The students attend a provincial school because the board of education and the First Nation have entered into a partnership through an educational services agreement (often called a tuition agreement).

Most educational services agreements require that the board of education and the First Nation establish a joint planning committee. Discussions at the joint planning committee will ensure that each partner is aware of the other's situation. For example, if the school is approaching non-viability, the partners can discuss possible options for the students and the school. Because the agreement is between the First Nation and the board of education, rather than a specific school, it may be possible to transport students to another school in the division, for example. If the First Nation is anticipating offering more on-reserve education services, the impact of this decision on the school can also be discussed.

Most educational services agreements have a termination clause which allows the agreement to be terminated by either partner. The conditions and timelines prescribed in the termination clause may affect a board of education's decision to review a school.

4. The School Review Process

The School Division Administration Regulations, sections 54 and 55, specifies that two methods can be used to close a school or discontinue grades or years of schooling. These methods are:

- Consent of the school community council, or
- When the school community council does not give consent, implementation of a formal school review process with specific requirements that are outlined in the legislation.

If a school community council gives consent for school closure/grade discontinuance, then the board of education can proceed directly to implementing the closure/grade discontinuance.

If the school community council does not give consent for school closure/grade discontinuance, then the legally-mandated review process described in this chapter must be followed.

If the school community council gives consent to a school closure/grade discontinuance at any point during the review process, the school review can be discontinued and the board of education can proceed directly to closure/grade discontinuance.

This chapter is organized according to the steps in the school review process. An additional section at the end summarizes the school review timeline.

Step 1: School Division Conducts Internal Review

Step 2: Board Moves to Review School

Step 3: School Review Committee Consults with Community

Step 4: Board Makes Motion of Consideration

Step 5: Board Holds Meeting of Electors

Step 6: Board Makes Final Motion

Step 7: Board and SCCs Develop Transition Plan

As described in Chapter 3 of this handbook, boards of education are required by *The School Division Administration Regulations* to post their school review policies on their website. These policies provide a framework for all actions that take place during a school review.



The School Review Process

The School Division Administration Regulations state that two methods can be used to close a school or discontinue grades or years of schooling:

- with consent of the school community council, or
- by following the mandated review process outlined in the Act when the school community council does not give consent.

The legally-mandated school review process includes three motions by the board of education: a motion to review the school, a motion to consider school closure/grade discontinuance, and a final motion in which the board decides whether the school will remain open or be closed, or whether grades will be discontinued.

The process requires the establishment of a school review committee which consults with the community. It also requires that the board of education hold a public meeting of electors.

The process prescribed in the legislation is organized so that it can be completed within one school year.

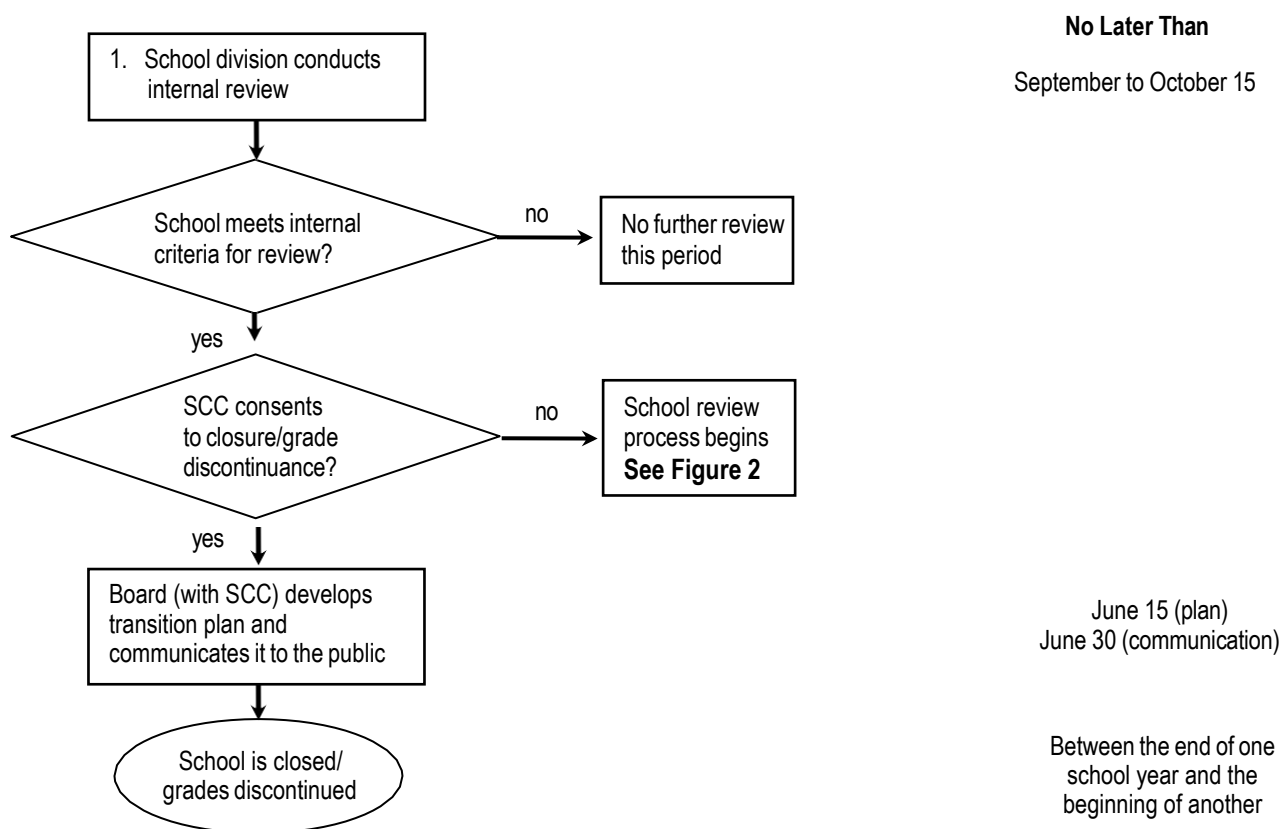
Step 1 – School Division Conducts Internal Review

School divisions regularly monitor the viability of the division’s schools, and those schools that are approaching non-viability may be flagged for review. It is good practice to establish policy defining the formal criteria that may initiate a school review and to post these criteria on the division’s website. *The School Division Administration Regulations* provide the minimum criteria that define school viability. Therefore, school division policy can reflect enrolment and distance criteria that are the same as or no more stringent than the minimum legal criteria and may include additional criteria relating to facility condition, grades per class, and other related matters.

When an internal school division review indicates that a particular school is approaching non-viability, the board of education’s first step is to ask the school community council for consent to close the school or discontinue grades (see Figure 1).

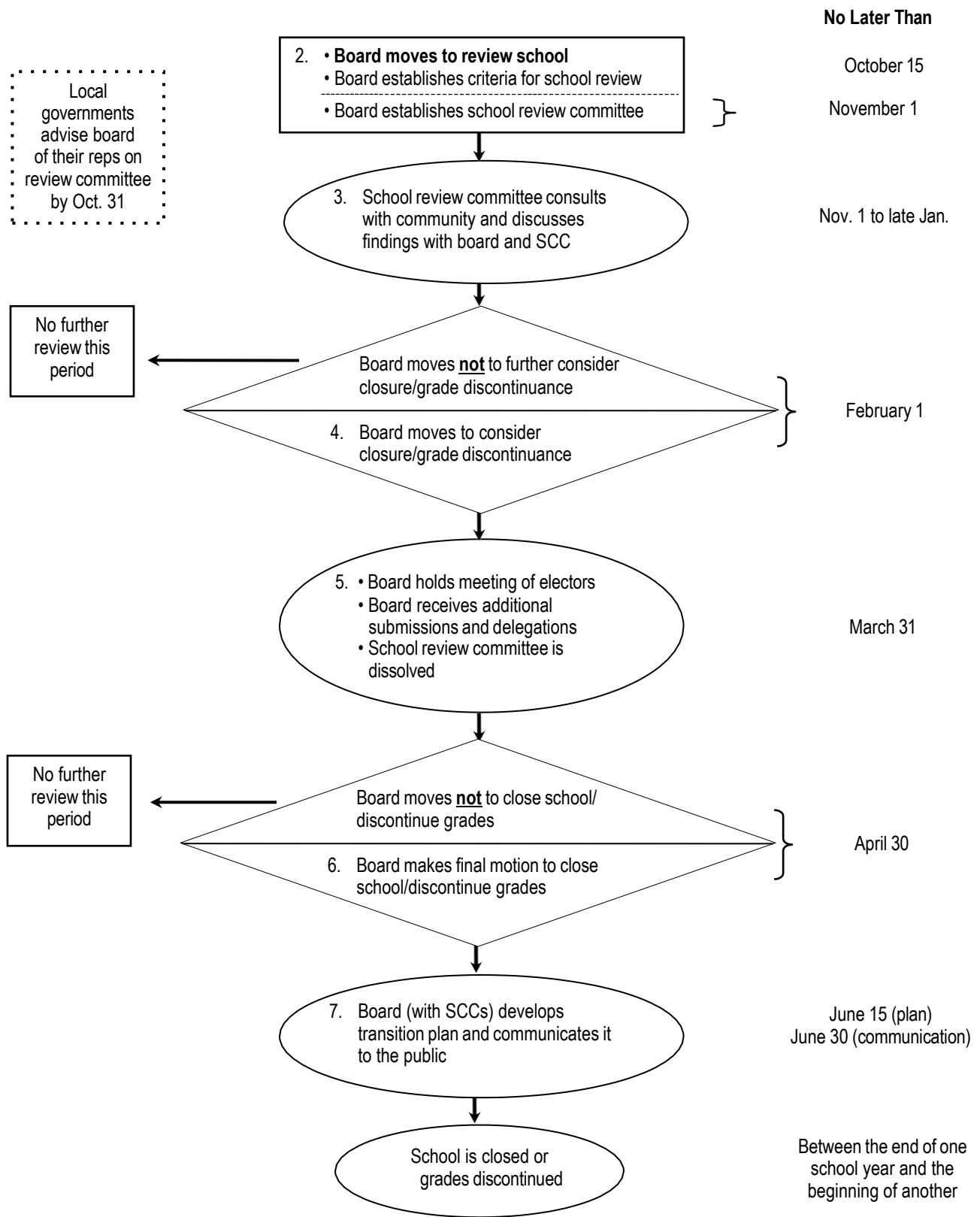
- If the school community council gives consent, the school can be closed or grades discontinued. The board of education, in consultation with the SCCs of the affected school and the receiving school(s), develops a transition plan and the school is closed or grades are discontinued during the summer.
- If the school community council does not give consent, the school review process outlined in this handbook is implemented (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: School Division Internal Review and Closure/Grade Discontinuance with Consent of SCC



Note: At any time during the school review process the SCC can consent to school closure/grade discontinuance. Consent by the SCC means that the school review process is halted and the board moves directly to development of a transition plan and closure/grade discontinuance.

Figure 2: The School Review Process Without Consent of SCC



Step 2 – Board Moves to Review School

The steps in starting a school review process are as follows:

The board of education:

- Passes a motion to review the school
- Establishes criteria for the school review
- Notifies the school community council and the public of its intention to review the school and of the criteria that will be used for the review.
- Establishes a school review committee

Each of these steps is described in more detail below.

Motion to Review the School

This motion to review the school must be passed by **October 15**, in order for the outcome of the review to become effective by the beginning of the next school year.



Criteria Established for Review

The board of education will probably already have established in policy the criteria that cause a school to be flagged for review. Establishing criteria for a particular school review will usually mean reaffirming the policy rather than starting at the beginning each time.

Basic Criteria – *The School Division Administration Regulations* set out basic criteria for a school review.

- a) (i) The distance between the school under review and the nearest potential receiving school for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students is less than 40 kilometres based on the shortest route by regularly maintained roads, and;
- (ii) at least 90 per cent of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students live within 75 minutes of the nearest school if traveling by motor vehicle under normal driving conditions, and;
- (iii) the board of education arranges for alternative transportation that minimizes the transportation time for those pupils who live more than 75 minutes from the nearest school and pays for this transportation.

And

b) Projected enrolment in the school under review for the next school year is expected be less than:

School	Student Enrolment ¹
K-4	25
K-5	30
K-6	37
K-7	44
K-8	51
K-9	58
K-12	88

¹ The minimum enrolment numbers by school type were based on two considerations. The first consideration was an objective to maintain delivery of rural education as close to the students' home community as possible, especially for the younger grades. The second consideration was the need to establish a minimum number of students that would not place unreasonable expectations on classroom teachers for maintaining educational quality, understanding that student independence increases with age. The minimum enrolment numbers reflect an attempt to balance these two considerations.

If a school does not meet both of these criteria, the school review cannot proceed and the school remains open. A school must meet both of the criteria specified in The School Division Administration Regulations in order for a school review to continue.

- Boards of education may choose not to review schools meeting both these criteria.
- In addition, boards may set less stringent review criteria as part of their school review policy. For example, a board may decide upon short bus routes and set the distance between the school under review and the nearest potential receiving school at 30 kilometres rather than 40. Or the board may decide upon smaller schools and set the minimum enrolment for a K-4 school at 20 students rather than 25.

Additional Criteria – If a school meets both of the basic criteria outlined in *The School Division Administration Regulations*, the board of education may consider additional criteria for the school review. However, these additional criteria are not required. These additional criteria may include:

- The physical condition of the school
- Operational cost per student
- The number of grades combined in each classroom
- Other criteria the board of education considers relevant to the review.

The criteria for the school review must be adopted by **October 15**.



Notification of the Public

The board of education must notify the public of its intention to review the school and of the criteria that will be used for the review. A standard process that is defined in the legislation must be used to notify the public.

The School Division Administration Regulations require that the notice must be:

- Published in at least one issue of a newspaper having general circulation in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted in at least five, widely separated, conspicuous locations in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted at school division headquarters, and
- Posted on the school division's website.



The public must be notified of the board's intent to review the school and the criteria that will be used for the school review by **October 15**. The Ministry of Education should be informed of all board motions to review a school by **October 30**.



Establishment of School Review Committee

The board of education must establish a school review committee which consists of the following people:

- **Four members of the school community council** that are appointed by a motion of the council. These members cannot be the principal or teacher members of the school community council. Although, theoretically, a student member of the school community council could be appointed to the school review committee, this would be a heavy responsibility to place on a student.
- **Two people appointed by the town/village council** or the hamlet board of the town, village or hamlet in which the school under review is located.
 - One person must be an elected member of the town/village council or the hamlet board.
 - One person must be a resident of the town, village or hamlet in which the school is located who is not an elected member of the town/village council or hamlet board.
- **Two people appointed by the councils of the municipalities** located within the electoral area of the school community council of the school under review.
 - One person must be an elected member of a municipal council.
 - One person must be a resident of a municipality who is not an elected member of municipal council.

In some cases, the electoral area of the school community council of the school under review encompasses part of two or more municipalities. In these cases, the municipalities must agree amongst themselves who their representatives will be.

In addition, if any students at the school live on a First Nation reserve, **the First Nation has the right to appoint a representative** to the school review committee, if they so choose. If students at the school come from two or more First Nation reserves, then each reserve has the right to appoint a representative to the school review committee.

The names of the individuals appointed by the school community council, the town/village/hamlet, the municipality and the First Nation (if applicable) must be submitted to the board of education by **October 31** of the year in which the review is announced.



If the school community council does not appoint four of its members to the school review committee, the board of education is required to appoint these members from the school community council.

If the town/village council or hamlet board, a municipal council, or a First Nation does not appoint representatives by October 31, those positions on the school review committee remain empty. The board of education is not required to appoint representatives on behalf of local government.

The school review committee must be formally established by **November 1**.



Step 3 – School Review Committee Consults with Community

Once the members of the school review committee have been appointed and the school review committee formally established, the committee members, collectively, are responsible for calling the first meeting of the committee and getting started on their work. The school review committee includes representatives of municipal government who bring with them knowledge of how to organize and conduct meetings and how to develop and implement work plans – knowledge that will be useful to the school review committee.

The School Division Administration Regulations require that the school review committee selects a chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary from among its members. It is appropriate that selection of these officers takes place at the first meeting of the school review committee.

The School Division Administration Regulations specify that members of the school review committee are volunteers and are not paid a salary or an honorarium for their work. The provincial government does not provide reimbursement for expenses, but other organizations in the community may if they choose. For example, the town council or a major employer may be willing to provide money or an in-kind contribution for gas, photocopying, postage, newspaper ads, coffee at meetings and the like.

The School Division Administration Regulations, require that all meetings between the school review committee and the board of education take place in the attendance area which the school under review is located, unless the school review committee and the board of education mutually agree to another location.

Responsibilities of the Board of Education

When a board of education has passed a motion to review a school and established a school review committee, the board is required by *The School Division Administration Regulations* to provide the school review committee and school community council with the following information:

- enrolment history of the school under review since January 1, 2006
- five-year projected enrolments and the source of this data
- number of teaching and non-teaching staff at the time of the review
- projected number of teaching staff based on projected enrolments and current board policy
- information about the physical condition of the school
- any other information the board of education plans to consider when reviewing the school.

The board of education must provide the school review committee and the school community council with information about enrolments and related matters by **November 1**.



Responsibilities of the School Review Committee

Purposes – Subsection 59 (5) of *The School Division Administration Regulations* states that the purposes of the school review committee are:

- (a) to gain an understanding of the board of education's review process and to share information with the board of education to facilitate the development of viable options for the school that is the subject of the review;
- (b) to bring forward information and additional considerations to the board of education, in the form of written submissions, in the context of the school review; and
- (c) to share information respecting the review process with the public and to provide the board of education with written feedback from the public as the review progresses.

Responsibilities – *The School Division Administration Regulations* provide information about the responsibilities of the school review committee.

The regulations specify that the school review committee **shall** undertake the following activities, which means **these activities are required**.

- (a) acquaint itself with the board of education's school review process including the criteria being used for the school review and the data that will be used to evaluate the school against the review criteria;
- (b) describe the impact that all potential outcomes of the school review process will have on the students and the broader community;
- (c) share the information provided by the board of education with the community and ask for written feedback from the community; and
- (d) share the written feedback received from the community and the school review committee's recommendations with the board of education.

In order to fulfill the responsibilities required of it, the school review committee will be consulting with the community. It can use a variety of methods to obtain information from the public including surveys, public meetings, informal interviews, targeted consultations with key community groups, and/or acceptance of written submissions. The consultation methods used will depend on the community and the preferences of the members of the school review committee.

The Regulations specify that the school review committee **may** undertake the following activities, which means **these activities are optional**, at the discretion of the school review committee:

- (a) provide advice and recommendations to the board of education with respect to the school review process including a recommendation to consider the discontinuance of one or more grades or years taught in the school as an alternative to closing the school.

Responsibilities of the Community

Members of the community have a responsibility to make their opinions known to the school review committee. As in the past, members of the public are free to submit their views directly to the board of education through a letter or a request for a delegation. Although *The School Division Administration Regulations* establishes a school review committee, nothing in the legislation precludes members of the public from contacting the board of education directly.

Feedback to the Board of Education

The school review committee does the majority of its work between the time it is appointed (no later than November 1) and February 1 when the board of education makes a motion specifying whether or not it will consider school closure or grade/year discontinuance. The committee remains in existence until the board of education holds a meeting of electors (no later than March 31) or the day on which the board of education decides not to further consider the closure or the discontinuance of one or more grades or years taught in the school.

The school review committee shares its findings with the board of education. Some of this reporting may be verbal, but *The School Division Administration Regulations* requires that the committee provide the board of education with written feedback from the public.

Step 4 – Board Makes Motion of Consideration

After the board of education has considered the information available to it including the findings and recommendations of the school review committee, it must decide either to discontinue the review process or to proceed to the next step, which is a motion to consider school closure/grade discontinuance.

If the board decides the review process shall continue, it must:

- Pass a motion to consider school closure/grade discontinuance;
- Notify the public of the motion; and
- Notify parents and school community council of potential receiving schools and transportation options.

These responsibilities are described in more detail below.

Motion to Consider School Closure/Grade Discontinuance

The motion to consider school closure/grade discontinuance that is passed by the board of education must state the effective date of the possible school closure/grade discontinuance. This date must be during the summer holidays, between the end of one school year and the beginning of another.

The motion to consider school closure/grade discontinuance must be passed by **February 1**. The Ministry of Education should be informed of board motions by **February 15**.



Notification of the Public

The board of education must notify the public that it has passed a motion to consider closure of the school or discontinuance of certain grades/years. It must also notify the public of the effective date of the school closure or grade/year discontinuance.

A standard process that is defined in the legislation must be used to notify the public.

The School Division Administration Regulations requires that the notice be:

- Published in at least one issue of a newspaper having general circulation in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted in at least five, widely separated, conspicuous locations in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted at school division headquarters, and
- Posted on the school division's website.



Information to Parents and School Community Council

When a board of education passes a motion to consider the possible closure of a school or discontinuance of one or more grades, the board of education is required to provide the school community council of the school and the parents of the affected students of the school with information about:

- All potential receiving schools; and
- Options for student transportation to and from the potential receiving school.

This information is to be sent to parents and the school community council by ordinary mail within seven days after the motion is passed.

In addition, this information must be posted on the school division's website within seven days of the motion.

Information about potential receiving schools and student transportation options must be provided to the school community council and parents and posted on the school division's website no later than seven days after the motion of consideration. Thus, if the motion of consideration is passed on **February 1** (the last possible date), this information must be made available by **February 8**.



Step 5 – Board Holds Meeting of Electors

After a board of education passes a motion to consider school closure/grade discontinuance the board must:

- Hold a public meeting of electors.
- Notify the public of the meeting.

Each of these responsibilities is described below.

Public Meeting of Electors

After the board of education passes a motion to consider school closure or grade/year discontinuance, it must hold a meeting of electors – of people who are eligible to elect the school community council of the school under review.

The meeting of electors must be held by **March 31**.



Notification of the Public

The public must be notified of the meeting of electors using the standard notification process.

The School Division Administration Regulations requires that the notice be:

- Published in at least one issue of a newspaper having general circulation in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted in at least five, widely separated, conspicuous locations in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted at school division headquarters, and
- Posted on the school division's website.

The public must be given 14 days notice of the meeting of electors. Thus, if the meeting of electors is held on **March 31** (the last possible day) the public must be notified no later than March 16.



Agenda for the Meeting of Electors

The legislation does not prescribe any particular format for the meeting of electors, so each board of education can organize the meeting as it considers appropriate. A meeting of electors may include some or all of the following items.

Meeting of Electors – Possible Agenda

1. Welcome from board chair and explanation of purpose of the meeting.
2. Introduction of members of the board of education.
3. Review of agenda.
4. PowerPoint presentation explaining the school review process and results of the review to date.
5. Presentations from the floor – Most school divisions require that:
 - Individuals or groups who wish to make presentations notify the appropriate school division official at least two days before the meeting.
 - Presentations be limited to 15 minutes in length.
 - Individuals or groups that make presentations provide a written version of their presentation
6. Description of next steps:
 - Additional written submissions – Give deadline date.
 - Board deliberations – Board will consider all information presented and make a decision about the future of the school by April 30.

Public Representation and Submissions

Some boards of education may decide to hear presentations and accept written submissions in addition to those presented at the meeting of electors, although this step is not required under *The School Division Administration Regulations*.

The board may decide to hear additional presentations at a regularly scheduled board meeting or it may schedule a special day or evening to hear additional presentations.

Most boards of education have a policy for delegations to the board. Typically, this policy defines the amount of time each delegation can have for its presentation, the number of people who can be included in each delegation, and the form that written submissions must take. Boards of education may decide to apply their policy on delegations to additional submissions or they may establish criteria specifically for the situation. For example, it is appropriate to limit the length of each presentation (so that as many presentations as possible can be accommodated) and to require a written summary of each presentation.

If the board decides to accept written submissions in addition to face-to-face presentations, the board can place as few or as many requirements on these submissions as it chooses. For example, to ensure readability, it can request that all submissions be typed, doubled-spaced, limited to a certain number of pages, and provided in electronic form.

The work of the school review committee ends after the meeting of electors has been held or the board of education decides to discontinue the review of the school. The latest possible date for the meeting of electors is **March 31**. Thus, the work of the school review committee ends on March 31 or earlier if the meeting of electors is held earlier. The school review committee is dissolved after the meeting of electors has been held.



Step 6 – Board Makes Final Motion

The next steps in the school review process are:

- Final motion
- Notification of the public

Final Motion

After the meeting of electors, the board of education considers all the information available to it. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Statistics about current and future enrolments.
- Information about possible receiving schools including their locations, student capacity and quality of the physical facility.
- Information about anticipated changes in transportation times.
- Information about the physical condition of the school building.
- Information provided by the school review committee.
- Information presented at the meeting of electors and in other submissions and delegations to the board.

After the board of education has considered all of this information it must pass a final motion. There are several possible outcomes at this stage. The board, in its final motion, may decide to close the school or discontinue grades at the end of the current school year, close the school or discontinue grades or years one or two years in the future, or leave the school open.

If the board moves to close the school or discontinue grades, the motion must specify the date on which the school will be closed or the grades will be discontinued.

The final motion to close a school or discontinue grades/years must be passed by **April 30**. The Ministry of Education should be informed of

- board motions by **May 15**.
- The school closure or grade discontinuance date must be during the summer holidays – **between the end of one school year and the beginning of another**.



After passing a final motion for school closure or grade discontinuance, the board of education is required to notify the public and to develop and adopt a plan to implement the transition.

Notification of the Public

The standard process that is defined in the legislation must be used to notify the public of the final motion to close the school or discontinue grades or years.

The School Division Administration Regulations requires that the notice be:

- Published in at least one issue of a newspaper having general circulation in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted in at least five, widely separated, conspicuous locations in the attendance area of the school under review,
- Posted at school division headquarters, and
- Posted on the school division's website.

Step 7 – Board and SCCs Develop Transition Plan

If there is a final motion to close a school, the board of education, in collaboration with the school community councils of the schools affected, is required to develop and adopt a transition plan for school closure/grade discontinuance. The board of education is also required to notify the public where they may obtain access to the transition plan. Although it is not required by *The School Division Administration Regulations* it is good practice to post the transition plan on the school division's website and thus make it accessible to all.

The transition plan and its implementation are discussed in more detail in the next chapter of this handbook.

School Review Timeline

Figure 3 on the next page presents the key dates in the school review process. This chart shows that the school review process can be completed within one school year. However, boards of education may use a longer timeline for the process if they wish – spreading the school review process over one-and-a-half or two school years. If the board of education chooses to use a longer timeline, this timeline should be published on the school division website.

The chart that follows provides the last possible date for each element of the school review process.

Figure 3: Key Dates in the School Review Process

Date – No Later Than	Element of School Review Process
September 1 – October 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School division internal review
October 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board moves to review the school and sends notification to the Ministry of Education • Board adopts criteria for school review • Board notifies public and the Ministry of Education of board's intent to review the school and of the criteria that will be used for the school review
October 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local governments advise board of their representatives on school review committee
November 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board of education formally establishes school review committee • Board of education provides school review committee and school community council with information about enrolment since January 1, 2006, five-year projected enrolments and the source of this data, current number of teaching and non-teaching staff, projected number of teaching staff, the physical condition of the school building, and other relevant data
November 1 – late January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School review committee consults with community and advises the board of education of the results of their consultations. This may be a process that involves a series of consultations with community and discussions with the board
February 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board moves to suspend the review or to consider school closure/grade discontinuance and sends notification to the Ministry of Education
February 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board makes information about receiving schools and bus routes available to parents and school community council
March 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board provides public with notice of upcoming meeting of electors
March 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board holds meeting of electors and receives submissions

	<p>and delegations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work of the school review committee is completed, committee is dissolved
April 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board makes final motion to suspend the school review or to close the school/discontinue grades and sends notification to the Ministry of Education
	If the final motion is to close the school or discontinue grades:
June 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board (with SCCs) completes development of transition plan
June 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board notifies the public as to where they may view the transition plan
Summer – between the end of one school year and the beginning of another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School is closed/grades are discontinued

5. Schools of Opportunity

Saskatchewan's economy is growing as never before and the population is increasing for the first time in 10 years. People are drawn to Saskatchewan from other parts of Canada because this province combines economic opportunity and quality of life. *The School Division Administration Regulations* make provisions for schools of opportunity in communities that are benefiting from Saskatchewan's prosperous economy and have the potential for population growth and increased student enrolment.

This chapter addresses five topics. It provides a description of a school of opportunity and then outlines the four steps in the school of opportunity process.

- What is a School of Opportunity?
- Step 1 – Development of the Proposal
- Step 2 – Consideration of Proposal by Minister
- Step 3 – Evaluation of Growth
- Step 4 – Decision-Making About the Future of the School



Schools of Opportunity

A school of opportunity is a school that is currently assessed as “non-viable” through the school review process, but is located in a community that is experiencing an economic turnaround, with the potential for population growth and increased student enrolment.

The School Division Administration Regulations describes the school of opportunity process.

This process is initiated when a board of education passes a motion to review a school. The school of opportunity process operates parallel to the school review process and independently from it. The school of opportunity process applies only to schools that are being considered for closure, not to schools where discontinuance of grades or years is being considered.

If, at the conclusion of the school review, the board of education moves to close the school, it becomes eligible for consideration as a school of opportunity.

The school of opportunity process requires that representatives of the community and local government prepare a proposal demonstrating the community has an economic plan that will result in increased enrolment in the school within thirty-two months.

The Minister of Education considers the proposal and, if it is accepted, the school is designated a school of opportunity and may receive additional funding for up to three years.

The group that prepared the proposal is required to do evaluations twenty and thirty-two months after designation comparing projected growth in the pre-school and school age population with actual growth.

If the minimum enrolment has been achieved, the school remains open.

If the minimum enrolment for school viability has not been met, the board of education has the option of closing the school after the designation period expires without going through the school review process a second time.

What is a School of Opportunity?

A school of opportunity is a school that is currently assessed as “non-viable” through the school review process, but is located in a community that is experiencing an economic turnaround, with a growing population that will result in increased student enrolment. The student population is expected to increase sufficiently so there is a real probability that the school will again be viable.

Schools of opportunity are designated by the Minister of Education and receive funding according to a predetermined formula. Designation as a school of opportunity is for a maximum of three years and is not renewable. Throughout these three years, the board’s final motion to close the school stands, and at the end of three years the school must meet the criteria for a viable school or it may be closed by the board of education.

Motion by board of education to review school (no later than **October 15**) alerts community.



The school of opportunity process operates parallel to the school review process and independently from it.

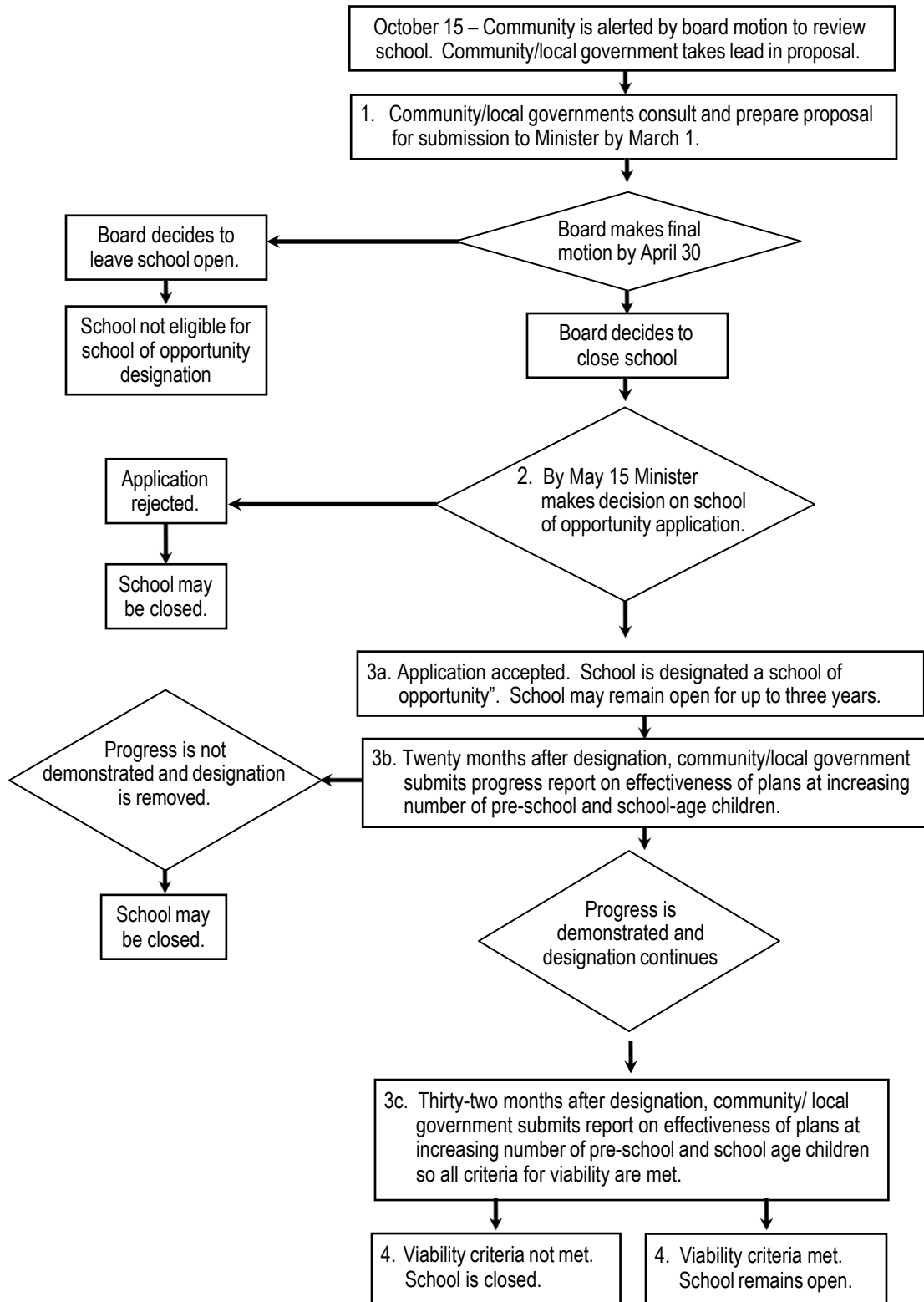
The school of opportunity process is initiated when the board of education passes a motion to review a school. At that point, local community and municipal officials can set to work on development of a proposal to have the school designated as a school of opportunity.

Key points about the school of opportunity process are:

1. The school for which the school of opportunity designation is requested must be the only school in the school district.
2. The school of opportunity designation is a one-time only designation.
3. The proposal that is submitted by the community must, in the Minister of Education’s opinion, demonstrate an economic plan that will increase enrolments in the school, so the school will again be viable.

A diagram that illustrates the school of opportunity process appears in Figure 5 on the next page.

Figure 5: The School of Opportunity Process



Step 1 – Development of Proposal

In order to have a school considered as a school of opportunity, local municipal and community representatives must submit a proposal to the Minister of Education. The proposal must demonstrate that the municipality/community has an economic plan that will result in an increase in enrolments at the school at the end of three years so that the evaluation criteria are met. At a minimum, this proposal must include the items listed in Figure 6. The local municipal and community representatives who have developed the proposal for designation as a school of opportunity are required to send a request for designation as a school of opportunity and their proposal to the Minister of Education with a copy to the board of education.

The Minister of Education must receive the proposal to designate a school as a school of opportunity by **March 1** of the year in which the school closure is to come into effect.



Step 2 – Consideration of Proposal by Minister

The Minister of Education will consider the proposal for designation as a school of opportunity and make a decision to approve or deny the application. If the Minister designates the school as a school of opportunity he/she will also determine the grade configuration in the school and the time period for which the school is being designated.

The Minister of Education will advise the applicants and the board of education by **May 15** of the approval or denial of the application to designate the school as a school of opportunity.



If the Minister of Education denies the application for designation as a school of opportunity, the board of education may close the school in accordance with its final motion during the school review process. If the Minister of Education approves the application for designation as a school of opportunity, the Minister may provide additional funding to the board of education to support the school's operation during the period it is designated as a school of opportunity.

The school division may receive specific funding in addition to the funding it would normally receive through the PreK-12 funding distribution model. This funding would be provided for a maximum of three school years. The school division may receive additional funding for each of the three years based on the following formula:

$$\text{Schools of Opportunity Funding} = \text{Provincial Average Per-Student Amount} \times 15\% \times \text{School of Opportunity Enrolment}$$

In this formula, the provincial average per-student amount equals school divisions' total provincial funding allocation divided by the provincial PreK-12 FTE enrolment. This is the same per-student funding amount used to calculate funding for associate schools, historical high schools and qualified independent schools. The school of opportunity enrolment equals the K-12 FTE enrolment of the school under review.

Figure 6: Minimum Contents of a Proposal for Designation as a School of Opportunity

A. Grade Configuration

- (i) Proposed grade configuration of the school for which the school of opportunity designation is requested. (What grades will be offered at the school for which the school of opportunity designation is requested? The grades to be offered may be the same as are presently offered or they may be different. For example, with a K-12 school, the request for designation may be only for Grades K-8 because these are the grades where enrolments are expected to increase.)

B. School Profile

- (i) Enrolment history of school since January 1, 2006, five-year projected enrolments and the source of this data, number of teaching and non-teaching staff at the time of the review, projected number of teaching staff based on enrolment projections and board policy, information about the physical condition of the school, other factors the board of education used in reviewing the school – as provided by the board of education and the school community council.
- (ii) Current peer group size by grade and by gender, average classroom size, cultural and recreational activities, and course offerings by grade – as provided by the school.

C. List of Businesses and Employers

- (i) A list of businesses and employers in the community, including their addresses, a description of the primary business of each, and a profile of the workforce of each.

D. Future Plans and Opportunities for Businesses and Employers in the Community

- (i) Identification of actual business expansion plans
- (ii) Identification of the forces driving business expansion
- (iii) Identification of the risks associated with business expansion
- (iv) Projected expansion of the workforce and any projected change in the profile of the workforce
- (v) Projected timeline for expansion of the workforce
- (vi) Projected impact of workforce expansion on the number of pupils enrolled in the school

E. Summary of Strategic Plan for the Municipalities of the School Division

- (i) Description of business and community partnerships that will enhance and sustain growth in the community and that will maintain a healthy community
- (ii) Municipal infrastructure plans and initiatives to support and enhance growth in the community
- (iii) Financing arrangements that support full implementation of the plans and initiatives outlined in E.(i) and E.(ii) above

F. Benefits of Business Expansion Plans to the School

- (i) Expected increase in the number of preschool and school-aged children in the community
- (ii) Rationale as to why the increased economic development will result in an increase in the number of pupils enrolled in the school by the end of the third school year following the year of designation, and beyond
- (iii) Expected increase in the value of the school, including a description of the enhanced community and business partnerships with the school

G. Description of the Data Sources and Methodology Used for All Quantitative Information in the School of Opportunity Proposal

H. Description of the Data Sources and Methodology That Will be Used to Report Back to the Minister at twenty and thirty-two months.

Step 3 – Evaluation of Growth

The local government and community officials who prepared the proposal for designation as a school of opportunity are required to do evaluations twenty and thirty-two months after designation. The evaluation is to compare the population growth projected in their proposal to the actual population growth in the community. These written evaluation reports must be submitted to the Minister of Education.

- The **twenty month progress report** must include:
 - an update on business expansion plans and municipal initiatives described in the community proposal
 - an update on the number of preschool and school age children in the school district.
- The **thirty-two month progress report** must include:
 - an update on business expansion plans and municipal initiatives described in the community proposal.
 - an update on the number of preschool and school age children in the school district relative to the minimum enrolment criteria prescribed in *The School Division Administration Regulations* and demonstration that this enrolment will be sustained.

If the evaluation reports are not provided to the Minister of Education twenty and thirty-two months after designation as a school of opportunity, the Minister of Education may terminate the designation immediately.

If anytime during the designation period the community feels that they can no longer meet the targets presented in their proposal, they may ask the Minister to remove the school of opportunity designation effective with the next school year.

Step 4 – Decision Making About the Future of the School

In order to be considered viable, a school must have at least the following enrolment.

School	Student Enrolment
K-4	25
K-5	30
K-6	37
K-7	44
K-8	51
K-9	58
K-12	88

If the thirty-two month evaluation of a school of opportunity shows that the enrolment has been achieved and there is demonstration that this enrolment will be sustained, the school remains open.

If the thirty-two month evaluation of a school of opportunity shows that the enrolment has not been achieved, the board of education's final motion to close the school stands.

The board has the option of closing the school and moving the students to another school for the next school year without undertaking a second review process. Even though the board of education is not required to undertake another school review process, it should still undertake the transition planning required under subsections 63(3) and (4) of *The School Division Administration Regulations* and described in the previous section of this handbook. Effective transition planning makes a move from one school to another smoother for students, parents, teachers and others who are affected by the change.