

School Capital and Facilities

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

In June 2017, over six years ago, the Government of Ontario announced a moratorium on Pupil Accommodation Reviews – the community engagement process used by school boards when considering closing a school or consolidating schools. In many cases, our school facilities no longer match their student population.

During the moratorium, school boards have been delicately balancing the upkeep of aging infrastructure, shifting enrolment, and financial pressures while doing their best to deliver quality programming in their schools. The current situation has created unsustainable funding deficits, as it costs the same to clean, heat, maintain and keep the lights on in a school whether it is half empty or full.

The closure of a school is among the most challenging decisions for school boards face. Despite these challenges, school board trustees always focus on the educational needs of all their students as well as the prudent distribution of resources to meet those needs. We recognize that school closures can be difficult and emotional for students, families, and staff, however they are often necessary to ensure the academic success of students and the long-term financial stability of the school district while responding to natural shifts in demographics over time.

School boards have traditionally consolidated or closed schools to ensure that students are receiving the best possible educational options and opportunities. By bringing students together through a school consolidation, school boards are often able to offer a better educational experience. Some of the potential improvements may include:

- Increased access to more robust program options and greater availability of specialized support services.
- Modernized, energy efficient buildings that are well-maintained and include facilities to meet diverse student needs such as gyms, libraries, technological education, arts/music, and STEM programming.
- Enrolment levels that support a vibrant co-curricular program.
- Accessibility features with respect to entry, movement within the facility and outdoor play space.

The government has taken steps to address many of the challenges that slow down the process and increase the costs of building schools in Ontario, but the moratorium continues to create issues for school boards.

We appreciate this is a complex issue, but after more than six years, our students and their families shouldn't have to wait any longer for their schools to be built, repaired, and renewed.



OPSBA RECOMMENDS

Our member boards have continued to call for the Ministry of Education to complete its review of the Pupil Accommodation Review Guidelines, release revised guidelines, and lift the moratorium as soon as possible, so that boards are best able to align the new process with their annual planning cycles.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are the most important things to consider when consulting with communities on school closures or consolidations?

How do we ensure communities feel heard by local school boards during a Pupil Accommodation Review?

Why is it important for school facilities to be a proper fit for their student population and local communities?