

**DATE:** January 31, 2012

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Trustee Heather MacKenzie, Chair, School Closure Moratorium Committee  
Trustee Dave Colburn, School Closure Moratorium Committee  
Trustee Sarah Hoffman, School Closure Moratorium Committee

**SUBJECT:** School Closure Moratorium Committee Recommendations

**REFERENCE:** [Board Schools Closure Moratorium Committee Terms of Reference](#)

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**ISSUE**

As per its terms of reference, the School Closure Moratorium Committee (SCMC) is to provide recommendations to the Board over the duration of the moratorium once the committee explored the issues and impacts surrounding school closures.

**RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Board approves and implements the proposed recommendations as defined in Attachment I.**

**BACKGROUND**

Over the last six years, the Board has examined issues related to student enrolment, school space, programming opportunities, facilities maintenance requirements, and financial factors. This led to the creation of Sustainability Reviews, resulting in a decision to close two schools in 2007 and two schools in 2008.

Subsequently, an ad hoc committee on *School Closure and Sustainability* was established, and a discrete choice survey was commissioned. In addition, an external research firm was also contracted to conduct extensive focus groups with parents and staff in the community. A Board directed Sector Review process was initiated with an external public engagement and stakeholder relations firm contracted to facilitate the process. Upon completion of the pilot Sector Review (Hardisty and CCEP schools), the Board considered and approved the closure of five schools and one elementary program in 2010.

The Board determined it would proceed with the public engagement component of the a full Sector Review process for three sectors: South Central, Central and West 1 Sectors. These reviews involved approximately 70 schools.

In October 2010, a new Board was elected. On November 30, 2010 the Board of Trustees approved a two-year moratorium on school closures. The Board established the SCMC to further understand the issues and impacts surrounding school closures and find ways to support schools and keep them open. The findings of the full Sector Review process as commissioned by the previous Board were presented to Board in January 2011. No recommendations resulted from this process, nor were any schools identified specifically for closure.

To further understand the issues and impacts surrounding school closures, eight public meetings were held where staff members, students, parents and members of the community were invited to attend presentations delivered by the administration. After the committee's deliberations, there

was also an opportunity for members of the public to provide feedback and generate suggestions in support of the committee mandate. Topics included:

1. Urban Growth Patterns
2. Aging School Buildings and Infrastructure Deficit
3. Instructional and PO&M Funding
4. District Enrolment Trends
5. Space Utilization
6. Alternative Programs and Open Boundaries
7. Leasing
8. Concluding public forum

The SCMC concluded its public meetings in October 2011. Notes from the meetings have been posted on the District website for public access.

**RELATED FACTS**

Following the public meetings, the SCMC developed thirteen recommendations under three general categories: Space Utilization, Community Development, and Program Planning.

Each recommendation identifies the order of government that could take action to help the District find ways to support schools and keep them open.

**NEXT STEPS**

Upon approval of the recommendations, the Board will assign the approved actions to its committees for implementation.

The SCMC will continue to meet until the end of the Moratorium in order to follow up on these recommendations, make additional recommendations, and ensure that other committees of the Board are supported in carrying out these recommendations.

**ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES**

ATTACHMENT I	School Closure Moratorium Committee Recommendations
APPENDIX I	School Closure Moratorium Committee Terms of Reference
APPENDIX II	School Closures and Sustainability: Factors to Consider

**School Closure Moratorium Committee Recommendations**

<b>Board Actions</b>	<b>City Council</b>	<b>Provincial Government</b>	<b>Federal Government</b>
<b>Space Utilization</b>			
1. Advocate for a revision to the Plant Operations & Maintenance (PO&M) funding formula that is not per pupil.	-	√	-
2. Advocate for adequate, predictable and sustainable funding to address deferred maintenance and infrastructure maintenance renewal (IMR).	-	√	-
3. Advocate for a revision to the provincial Area Capacity and Utilization (ACU) formula to more accurately reflect the schools space available for educational purposes.	-	√	-
4. Work with partners to promote schools as community hubs (i.e. space for senior drop-in, stay at home parent groups)	√	√	-
5. Advocate for lease terms beyond one year.	-	√	-
6. Advocate for capital funds to upgrade leased space.	-	√	-
<b>Community Development</b>			
1. Develop a formal process for both urban boards to meet with the City of Edmonton to address growth and development highlighting the need to limit urban sprawl.	√	-	-
2. Initiate at least three joint discussions a year between the Board of Trustees, the City of Edmonton and the provincial government to discuss joint planning.	√	√	-
3. Advocate for family-friendly housing in mature neighbourhoods through new development or by providing housing for seniors so as to “free up” housing for families with children.	√	√	√
4. Encourage and support government incentives for retro-fitting older homes to make them more attractive to younger families.	√	√	√
5. Encourage and support progressive taxation policies to attract young families to mature neighbourhoods.	√	√	-
<b>Program Planning</b>			
1. Give first priority in the Three-Year Capital Plan to modernization of existing school buildings.	-	-	-
2. The Board will engage in discussions with administration about the concept of strategically locating programs to encourage enrolment.	√	-	-

SCHOOL CLOSURE MORATORIUM COMMITTEE  
TERMS OF REFERENCE

Composition

The Moratorium Committee shall consist of three Trustees appointed by the Board of Trustees to serve until the end of the Moratorium on School Closures (Nov 30 2012).

The Superintendent of Schools shall assign appropriate staff to support the work of the Moratorium Committee.

Parameters

All recommendations from the Committee will be presented as a recommendation to the Board of Trustees at a public board meeting.

The committee will inform itself and complement rather than duplicate the work of the Mayor's Task Force on Community Sustainability, the Tri-level discussions related to school closures, and other initiatives that the Board and broader communities take related to the issue of school closures.

Purpose

The motion that the Board of Trustees passed on November 30, 2010 was:

“That the Board impose a renewable two-year moratorium on school closures, and that during this time the Board seek to further understand the issues and impacts surrounding school closures. During the moratorium, the Board will also identify a number of ways to support schools instead of close them.”

On December 14, 2010 the Board of Trustees passed this motion regarding the Moratorium Committee:

“That the Board create a committee to further understand the issues and impacts surrounding school closures and that this committee work to keep schools open by recommending initiatives to the Board that will address these issues and impacts over the period of the moratorium. That the committee report back to Board with the proposed terms of reference, and a plan and budget by February.”

Therefore, the purpose of the Moratorium Committee will be to educate themselves on the issues and impacts surrounding school closures and identify ways to keep schools open.

## Outcomes

- Supports are identified to keep schools open
  - Board's role is clarified in providing these supports, and the feasibility.
  - Recommendations are provided to the Board over the duration of the moratorium.
  - Potential partner's roles are identified.
  - Partners have been engaged to determine their interest and ability to support
- Increase level of public trust/confidence in the Board.
- Advocacy Committee will incorporate and maintain a focus on issues related to school closures to increase public awareness of current pressures and realities.
- **Impacts of school closure to students, families, communities, and the district, both positive and negative, are summarized.**

## Process/Plan

- Examine the issues surrounding school closures (March – October 2011).
  - This would include but not be limited to: Student instruction funding; space utilization; aging school building; plant operation and maintenance funding; alternative programs and open boundaries; leasing issues; district enrolment trends; urban sprawl.
    - **To achieve this, the Committee will meet with staff members, students, parents, and other members of the community. This will include meeting with those impacted by the CCEP and Hardisty Area schools which were closed in June 2010.**
- **Give a Committee update to the Board (October/November 2011).**
- Develop recommendations for the Board (November 2011 – November 2012).
- Communicate the work of the committee with public and increase awareness of our district realities (Ongoing).
- Inform, advise and provide resources to the Tri-level conversations and the Mayor's Task Force on Community Sustainability (Ongoing).
- Engage in dialogue and collaboration with the Advocacy Committee and Board's delegate to the Mayor's Task Force on Community Sustainability (Ongoing).

## Amendment to the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference may be amended upon recommendation of the Moratorium Committee and approval of the Board of Trustees.

## Proposed Budget

<b>Information Gathering Meeting (food/drink)</b>	\$1000
<b>Communications</b>	\$4000
<b>Incidentals</b>	\$1000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$6000</b>

School Closures and Sustainability: Factors to Consider

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

(February 2011)

**Issues**

Providing high quality learning opportunities for all students is the Board's highest priority. The Board has an important commitment to supporting the needs of community and reflecting community values as suggested through our sector review process (Appendix II). Given the public dissatisfaction with school closures and the Board's need to ensure both "sustainable facilities" (i.e. high quality learning environments) and "sustainable funding" (i.e. new construction, modernization and ongoing maintenance of schools) to achieve success the Board is seeking to find alternatives to school closures.

The most significant of the factors affecting school closures and sustainability are outlined below.

**1. Student Instruction Funding**

Due to the funding structure in our district and province, low enrolment schools present unique challenges in providing basic educational programming. While the District provides additional funding through the multiple program allocation (i.e. small school grant), low enrolment schools face two basic challenges in providing educational programming. The first challenge is that these schools are unable to offer the full range of programming offered in larger schools where the population and per pupil funding enables support for a more diverse program. The second challenge is that schools receive funding allocations for instructional purposes and maintenance; if maintenance costs exceed the maintenance allocation, low enrolment schools have to use funds dedicated to instruction to balance the costs of maintaining and operating the school, further limiting the ability of the school to offer a wider range of programs to students.

During the 2010-2011 school year, a total of \$6.5 million was allocated to schools through the 'small school grant'. (These funds are re-directed from the provincial funds to operate all district schools to support schools with low enrolments.)

**2. Space Utilization**

The District's current space utilization rate, based on Alberta Infrastructure's most recent calculation, is 67 per cent. The utilization rate for Edmonton Public Schools will continue to decline in the 2010-2011 year. When the school closures and openings from this year are applied the District will see a net gain in capacity of 2,488 student spaces.

The current utilization rate is considerably lower than Alberta Infrastructure's over-all threshold of 85 per cent, which they set as the level qualifying districts across the Province to secure funding for new school construction. For a number of years, Alberta Infrastructure has stressed the connection between the District's ability to reduce its inventory of space and its ability to obtain funding for new facilities. An 85 per cent provincially calculated utilization rate is also referenced in terms of capital project eligibility, by district or sector totals. The capital project eligibility puts pressure on the district to close schools.

In considering funding for new school construction, Alberta Infrastructure relies on a sector model in defining the District's utilization of space. Edmonton Public Schools is divided into nine geographic sectors for this purpose. A tenth sector encompasses the District's senior high schools.

Each year, the District is required to submit a Three-Year Capital Plan to the Province identifying new school and modernization request priorities. In September 2010, six new Alberta School Alternative Procurement (ASAP) schools opened to address enrolment pressures in suburban neighbourhoods. The District has not received funding for additional school modernization projects since 2007.

### 3. Aging School Buildings

At present, Edmonton Public Schools operates 197 school buildings with an average age of 46 years. Of these, approximately 75 facilities are 50 years of age or older. Many of these facilities require significant renovations to maintain a quality learning environment. The District has a sizable investment in an aging inventory of school facilities. Funding for operating and maintaining schools, and for capital projects, is directly linked to the amount of space used for teaching and learning rather than the total district inventory of space. As a result, Edmonton Public Schools faces many challenges in attempting to maintain aging buildings that are typically in mature neighbourhoods where enrolment numbers are relatively low.

Alberta Infrastructure estimates the net value of all Edmonton Public School district buildings at \$2.3 billion, and estimates that the total value of deferred maintenance on the buildings may be as high as \$242 million. Components classified as being at 'significant' risk, where failure is imminent or likely to occur, is valued at approximately \$75 million. Those at 'moderate' risk are valued at approximately \$102 million, and those classified as 'minor' risk at \$56 million. Components can be addressed separately using Infrastructure Maintenance Renewal (IMR) funding, which is applied annually towards operating facilities through the Major Maintenance Plan, or through funded modernization projects included in the District's annual Three-Year Capital Plan.

The Province's School Infrastructure Manual specifies how utilization of schools must be calculated. It also indicates that annual IMR funding is provided partially on school facility areas in active use for instruction and partially by the full-time equivalent (FTE) student. Therefore, schools that are less densely populated are at a disadvantage. (See table below).

<b>Year of Building Construction</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Student FTE</b>	<b>Area in m<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>PO&amp;M per m<sup>2</sup></b>
1930	John A. McDougall	192	5484.5	\$27.30
1983	Fraser	207	3469.8	\$46.52

### 4. Plant Operation and Maintenance Funding

Plant Operation and Maintenance funding is received from the Province on a per pupil basis. These funds are used to heat, light, clean and maintain district schools. Based on the 2009 Provincial assessment of district space (ACU report), there are 37,576 excess student spaces. This calculation methodology is articulated in the Province's School Infrastructure Manual. While these spaces are unfunded, the District must still heat, light, clean and maintain them. For the 2009-2010 school year, the excess expenditure over revenue, as per the unaudited schedule submitted to Alberta Education, was over \$26 million in relation to operations and maintenance of schools. Eight million, eight hundred thousand dollars were recovered from instructional grants (provincial funds intended to support teaching and learning) to partially address the

shortfall. If a project is funded by the province, the funds must be used for facility construction. Capital funds cannot be diverted to cover education operating costs or building operational costs.

## **5. Alternative Programs and Open Boundaries**

Edmonton Public Schools offers over thirty alternative programs. Our diverse programs of study provide parents and students with different paths to achieve academic and personal success. Edmonton Public Schools is recognized internationally for offering the curriculum in ways that complement the unique backgrounds and talents of our students.

The approach of providing choice either through open boundaries or alternative programs, evolved in response to the growing competitiveness in education and public demand. Open boundaries and programs of choice have resulted in some schools experiencing an increase in enrolment, while others experience a decline in enrolment. For example, in the West I sector, enrolment is increased through the philosophy of open boundaries while the West II sector has experienced a decrease in enrolment through this same philosophy.

The District has seen a stable enrolment pattern of approximately 80,000 students over the last three decades. If students attended their designated school, a shift in demographics would occur resulting in increased enrolment pressures in some schools, and a decrease in enrolment in others. Presuming a stable enrolment, the District utilization rate would remain the same. There would continue to be approximately 80,000 students and the District would continue to operate the same amount of square metres of space.

## **6. Leasing Issues**

Leases, licenses and partnership agreements can be accommodated in surplus student space. The most significant demand for space from potential tenants is in areas of the city where there is minimal school space available for leasing. Further, where there is significant surplus space, there is not as much demand to lease that space. This is likely due to a combination of factors including building condition in areas where surplus space is located as well as the desire of those leasing buildings to be in a location where there are significant student numbers. The majority of district leases are with not-for-profit organizations that provide services for children and families.

To every extent possible, leasing rates are structured with the goal of recovering district costs associated with the operation, maintenance and capital renewal of the space, in balance with supporting tenancies that are compatible and supportive of students, schools and education.

However, due in part to subsidization of wrap around services, the overall revenue generated through the leasing of district space does not generate adequate funds to cover the costs to heat, clean, light and maintain the space occupied.

During the 2009-2010 school year, approximately 4.5 per cent of the District's operational school space was leased. The revenue generated through lease agreements totalled approximately \$1.75 million. This represented 0.21 per cent of the District's total operating budget for the 2010-2011 school year. The district has attempted to generate funds by leasing space, however, leased space is ineligible for any capital upgrade funding, including modernization and IMR funding. Ineligibility for this funding penalizes the district for leasing space and thereby puts pressure on the district to close schools.

## 7. District Enrolment Trends

Over the past decade the District enrollment levels have been stable with no expectation of significant increases. Despite a context of overall population growth in city residents, district enrolment and Federal Census data both indicate that an overall increase in school aged children is not projected. Keeping schools open for future growth is not supported by our data.

### Age Group Populations in Edmonton: 1996 to 2006

Federal Census	Ages 0 to 4	Ages 5 to 9	Ages 10 to 14	Ages 15 to 19	Total Gain
1996	42,820	43,346	41,935	40,607	
2001	39,405	41,712	43,391	46,897	
2006	39,431	39,872	42,728	48,990	
NET	-3,389	-3,474	793	8,383	2,313

Source: *Statistics Canada*

## 8. Urban Sprawl

Most of the growth in Edmonton's population is occurring in the City's suburban areas. There are currently 45 neighbourhoods under construction in developing areas of Edmonton (See Appendix I: *Edmonton Neighbourhoods Under Construction 2009*, City of Edmonton). The City has enough land planned to accommodate another 18 years of single-detached growth in new neighbourhoods. These areas have the capacity to accommodate over 350,000 people (*Edmonton City Trends 4th quarter 2009*, p.5).

Given the current and planned suburban development, it is anticipated that there will be continued enrolment pressures on schools providing student accommodation to these neighbourhoods. This will result in an intensified demand for new school construction in suburban neighbourhoods.

In relation to new communities, school designations located outside those communities will continue to place pressure on transportation services. As new communities near the perimeter of the City require school designations, available space at schools located nearby will continue to be at a premium. The relationship between school designations and outward growth of the City will always be at odds. The further out a new community is located, the more school designations located near the interior of the City will be required. As a result, ride times, unfunded expenditures related to fuel consumption, route delays, and environmental impacts increase and are augmented by factors such as weather and traffic.

## Conclusion

In the past, the Board has considered closing a school based on low enrolment, space utilization, and aging infrastructure while taking into consideration instructional funding and overall building maintenance. At the same time, the Board endeavors to maintain fairness in distribution of resources throughout the District. Given our shared purpose in building sustainable communities it is important that everyone work together to address the current pressures contributing to school closures.

