

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 9, 2000

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Policy and Regulation Update: FL.BP School Closure and FL.BR School Closure

ORIGINATOR: A. McBeath, Department Head

RESOURCE
STAFF: Manfred Malzahn

RECOMMENDATION

1. That FL.BP School Closure, Appendix I, be amended.
2. That FL.BR School Closure, Appendix II, be rescinded.

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The district requires more flexibility in the process and timeline for considering school closure, while continuing to ensure that parents and communities are well informed and have adequate opportunities for input. The amended policy that is being recommended would achieve this. It should be noted that significant elements of FL.BR School Closure have been incorporated into the amended policy.

School closure is defined in the School Act as:

- Closing a school permanently or for a specified period of time
- Closing entirely 3 or more consecutive grades in an elementary school
- Closing the entire junior high or entire senior high program in a school
- Transferring all students from one school to one or more other schools.

A ministerial regulation (Appendix III) authorizes boards to close schools, and prescribes minimum requirements for a closure process. The amended policy is consistent with this regulation.

It should be noted that the amended policy is based on the same philosophy as the previous board policy and board regulation:

- School closure can only be considered if a school meets specific criteria (these have not been changed)
- School closure is discretionary on the part of the board; i.e. the policy is enabling, not prescriptive
- Public consultation is given high priority.

The amended policy is also supportive of the district's goal of supporting the neighbourhood school and at the same time making more effective use of school space across the district. It does this by making possible:

- Reconfiguration of grades in schools to enhance programming and allow more effective grouping for instruction
- More effective and efficient use of space, particularly specialized facilities
- Preventing overcrowding in some situations.

The amended policy includes the following new elements:

- The administration is given authority to close or relocate fewer than three grades in a school
- The City of Edmonton must be given an opportunity to comment on any proposed school closure (this is a new requirement in the provincial regulation)

The amended policy would eliminate the following:

- The requirement that the administration obtain board approval of a detailed consultation plan by October 31, make a recommendation by December 31 as to whether school closure should be pursued, and make a final decision by May 1
- The requirement that there be written communication to parents of students who are not significantly affected by the closure
- The requirement that the minister approve a board's decision to close a school (this results from a change in the provincial regulation)

The intent of removing the first two requirements listed above is to increase overall flexibility. This approach will make it possible to use a greater variety of strategies to obtain parental and public input, to modify consultation processes while they are underway, and to follow timelines that are appropriate in specific situations. The district will continue to behave in a manner that reflects our belief in the value of consultation.

If the recommended policy is approved, parents and communities would find their interests protected in three ways:

1. In the amended board policy, some sections are virtually identical to the Alberta Learning regulation:
 - Notice of motion at a public board meeting is required
 - Parents who are most affected will receive detailed written information
 - Additional consultation can take place if appropriate.
2. In the board policy, some sections exceed Alberta Learning regulation requirements:
 - Schools are only eligible for closure if criteria are met
 - A majority of trustees must be present at the public meeting (Alberta Learning requires two trustees to be present)

3. In the Alberta Learning Regulation:

- The process must be completed within one school year
- A public meeting is held, and is advertised well in advance
- Minutes of public meetings are prepared
- A minimum of three weeks is allowed for further public input
- The board is required to give due consideration to input received after the public meeting.

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APPENDIX I - FL.BP School Closure

APPENDIX II - FL.BR School Closure

APPENDIX III - Alberta Regulation 238/97 Closure of Schools Regulation