

Ministry of Education

Deputy Minister

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Sous-ministre

Édifice Mowat
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Directors of Education

From:George Zegarac
Deputy Minister**Date:**

August 10, 2015

Subject:Ministry of Education's Response to the Release of Community
Hubs in Ontario: *A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*

I am writing to advise you that today, the Premier's Community Hub Framework Advisory Group chaired by Karen Pitre, Special Advisor to the Premier on Community Hubs, issued its report entitled *Community Hubs in Ontario: A Strategic Framework and Action Plan*. The report can be found at: www.ontario.ca/communityhubs

The mandate of the advisory group was to review provincial policies and develop a framework for adapting existing public properties to become community hubs. The report includes a strategic framework and action plan that sets out specific recommendations on how the province can achieve this goal.

Schools can play an important role as a hub for programs and services that benefit the broader community. As such, the Ministry of Education has been working closely with the advisory group during its review to reaffirm the efforts of school boards, municipalities and community partners to develop successful community hubs in schools. For example, there are more than 2,500 licensed child care programs offered in schools across Ontario. However, there continue to be challenges associated with developing and maintaining partnerships.

The advisory group's report notes that there was overwhelming support for integrated service delivery through community hubs during its consultations. However, the report also notes that there are many systemic challenges to expanding community hubs, and that the report's strategic framework and action plan constitutes only the beginning of a sustained conversation involving communities, municipalities, local community groups, and the province.

The ministry is supportive of the recommendations of the advisory group and fully intends to work with other government ministries, school boards, municipalities and community partners to take the steps needed to implement these recommendations. The ministry also intends to leverage the considerable work that is currently underway to support the development and operation of community hubs in schools, and the communities they serve.

It is important to note that the release of the report does not change the overall requirement for school boards to review program needs and manage school properties to make the best use of funding to support student achievement and well-being. In fact, the advisory group's report recognizes the need for school boards to right size, given changing demographics, and to ensure educational program quality. It must be acknowledged that, in many cases, this may still result in school consolidations or closures.

As you are aware, in 2014-15, the ministry announced the School Board Efficiencies and Modernization (SBEM) strategy to provide incentives and supports for boards to make more efficient use of school space. The goal of promoting more efficient use of school space remains an important priority for the government. Among the key elements of the SBEM strategy recently announced by the ministry are:

- the introduction of \$750 million in funding over four years to support consolidations and rightsizing of school facilities through the School Consolidation Capital program,
- the introduction of \$8.3 million per year in funding to build planning capacity in boards where there is a need to address underutilized schools through the Capital Planning Capacity program,
- revisions to the Pupil Accommodation Review Guideline (PARG) and the release of a revised Community Planning and Partnerships Guideline (CPPG) to enhance opportunities for boards to collaborate more closely with local municipal governments and other community partners when undertaking planning to address underutilized space.


The ministry also recently announced a new investment of \$120 million over three years to support the construction of new child care spaces for children up to 3.8 years of age in new and expanded schools beginning this school year. This investment is another milestone step towards achieving the full vision of a seamless and integrated early years system in Ontario. It also represents an important component of the ministry's commitment to increase school-based community hubs across the province.

Addressing the Advisory Group's Recommendation of a Short-Term Strategy for School Property

While the advisory group noted that further consultations among various stakeholders are required to implement its vision of community hubs, it recommended an interim measure be put in place to reduce some of the barriers to the formation of community hubs. This involves amendments to Ontario Regulation 444/98, *Disposition of Surplus Real Property*, to ensure additional consideration of community and provincial interests when the sale of school property is contemplated. The advisory group also recommended that the ministry conduct further consultations and review of this regulation.

The ministry accepts this recommendation, and will be consulting on amendments to O. Reg. 444/98 as well as other potential changes to the regulation. It is expected that these consultations will begin in September. The ministry will provide more details in the near future.

The ministry recognizes the value and importance of schools as community hubs and is committed to engaging with our education partners, community partners, municipalities and other government ministries to improve community access to schools to support the communities they serve. I look forward to working with you on this important initiative.



George Zegarac
Deputy Minister

c: Council of Ontario Directors of Education