

Auburn Drive High/Cole Harbour District High School Review

School Options Committee Question & Answer Sheet

Why are 17 schools under review?

Many of the Cole Harbour/Auburn family of schools are operating with significantly fewer students than when they were originally constructed. This “under capacity” and projected declining future student enrollment created a need to assess whether or not students are best served by 17 schools. In November 2016, led by a School Options Committee (SOC), a transparent, community-based process to review our school utilization began.

What is the School Options Committee (SOC)?

The SOC is composed of a group of committed passionate parents and community members concerned about the future education of our children. Two Student Advisory Committee (SAC) members were appointed from each of the 17 affected schools to represent them on the SOC.

Were all schools represented consistently on the SOC?

The SOC monitored SAC representation throughout the term. As SAC representatives were unable to be in attendance, the SAC was accountable for sending an alternate member in their place to represent their school at each meeting. Part way through the process, a formal report was summarized, conveyed the HRSB and validated by school principals to help ensure school representation. The SOC states that all schools were sufficiently represented throughout the term.

What has the review process involved?

The objective of the SOC is to identify underutilized schools and reorganize them in order to optimize the use of facilities and programs for the benefits of all students. To make a review possible, the Halifax Regional School Board (HRSB) provided SOC members with a comprehensive overview of each of the 17 schools, including but not limited to information about the building condition, historical and projected enrollment, enrollment capacity, catchment area, etc..

After reviewing the basic viability of each school, the SOC decided that a values-based decision-making model, which takes a student-centered approach to decision-making would be used for all school option scenarios considered. This involved reviewing infrastructure assets and programming to help create the best options for schools while not only addressing the issue of underutilized schools, but also to create

an effective learning environment for all students. At the same time, the model considers extra-curricular opportunities such as competitive sports.

The SOC began its work with hearing from stakeholders, scenario exploration, followed by a close examination of the high schools, a review of the design of junior high school requirements, as well as the essential requirements for community elementary schools. As a result of the complexity of reviewing 17 schools and the SOC's desire to include effective public consultation, in March 2017, an extension was granted to allow the SOC to effectively complete this review in such a way that ensures the best options for the future of our children and schools.

How has the community been involved in the process?

Community engagement has been incredibly important to the SOC throughout the process. The SOC hosted three public information-gathering sessions, sought input from principals, teachers and programming staff, targeted community stakeholders, along with representatives from business and interest groups in the Auburn/Cole Harbour surrounding area. On many occasions, the SOC invited identified stakeholders including high school students to make presentations and/or participate in a Q&A panel to further help the SOC create informed scenarios.

All SOC meeting minutes are available on the HRSB School Review page allowing for the community to follow the process. The SOC received and responded to community correspondence through a review email address and Facebook; in addition, all communications were vetted through the HRSB and relayed to the SOC for response.

What does optimal school capacity look like?

As defined in the Provincial School Review Policy, capacity is the *total student enrollment based on the full occupancy of spaces that a school building can accommodate, in order to deliver the public school program*. A school's "utilization" is the percentage of students occupying the building as it relates to the capacity of the school. The current average utilization for junior high and elementary schools is 64% and 70% respectively. Across the 17 schools involved in this review, three are at or below 50% utilization and two are at or above capacity.

The goal is not to solely reach 100 per cent capacity in each school, but rather to aim for a reasonable utilization that will allow for growth and change while still addressing the fact that less schools are required within our community. The Provincial School Review policy states that the SOC's mandate is to work towards reaching 85% capacity for High Schools and 100% Capacity for Junior High and Elementary

schools. The SOC's review focuses on current and long range enrollment forecasts, provided by Baragar Demographics.

Can students be re-directed to schools outside of the 17 within this review?

The mandate and objectives of the SOC include boundaries for only the 17 schools in this review. Therefore, the SOC is unable to make recommendations that involve redirecting students to schools outside of this review or attracting students from other schools to assist with capacity issues.

How will current programming be maintained along with accessibility for all students?

Across our 17 schools, we are fortunate to have a mix of valuable early and late French immersion programming. At the high school level, the SOC has worked diligently on a scenario to maintain our International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) programming, our great Co-op and Options & Opportunities (O2) programs and our sought after arts and trades programs through a dual campus scenario. At the junior high level, the SOC has worked to ensure equal opportunity for students to access specialized infrastructure such as wood and metal shops, science labs, culinary labs, and extra-curricular activities. At the elementary school level, the SOC worked to create scenarios that focused on walkability, maintaining our valuable before and after school programs and our great physical spaces, while helping to ensure accessibility for all students.

The SOC carefully considered the learning needs of all students, overall accessibility, transportation, walkability, safety and supervision throughout the review process. For instance, the SOC identified some multi-level schools within the community as not having elevators to ensure accessibility for all students. Buildings without full accessibility rated poorly in the accessibility component of the values-based decision making evaluation tool developed by the SOC. In terms of transportation, the HRSB Student Transportation Policy states that bussing will be provided for elementary grades P-6 students living 2.4 kilometres or further from their school; this distance will continue to be applied.

How will the review process help save money in the long term?

Historical operating cost details were available to the SOC within the data sets provided for each school; however determining actual fiscal implications related to the scenarios created is not within the scope of the work of the SOC. As a result the financial savings for the scenario(s) are not available at this time.

The report will include recommendations including:

- revised grade configurations, schools recommended for major or minor capital improvement capital improvements
- boundary adjustments to create school populations where identified need exists
- transportation adjustments to help ensure safe and efficient transit
- school(s) identified for possible permanent closure, which attempt to create the least amount of disruption for students

Please note, the school review policy allows for a maximum of five years subsequent to the September following a Governing Board's decision to close a school. Future use of schools that become surplus will be determined by the HRSB.

The school review process has been emotionally intense for those involved, but also rewarding. Following this third public meeting where scenarios are presented, the SOC will make revisions and prepare a report with recommendations for the Governing Board through the Superintendent of Schools.

For more information, the minutes from all of the SOC meetings are available on the HRSB website (<http://www.hrsb.ca/school-review/auburn-drive-cole-harbour-district-family-schools>).

The 'Many Communities, One Future' Facebook page is active as is the @CHAuburns schools Twitter handle.