

**Chignecto-Central Regional School Board
Education Services/Operational Services Joint Committee Meeting
September 24, 2014**

The Joint Committee Meeting of the Education Services/Operational Services Committees was held in the Board Room at Central Office on Tuesday, September 24, 2014 at 6:00 p.m.

Members Present

Education Services Committee

Wendy Matheson-Withrow, Vice-Chair
Vivian Farrell, Chair
Jim Grue
Susan MacQuarrie

Operational Services Committee

Gordon Anderson, Chair
Adam Davies, Vice-Chair
Keith MacKenzie, Board Vice-Chair

Other Board Members in Attendance

Ron Marks
David Myles
Margie Nicholson
Mackie Ross
Jamie Stevens
Trudy Thompson, Board Chair

Staff in Attendance

Debbie Buott-Matheson, Communications Manager
Valerie Gauthier, Director of Financial Services
Debbie MacDonald, Recording Secretary
Allison McGrath, Director of Human Resources
Scott Milner, Director of Education Services
Herb Steeves, Director of Operational Services

Regrets

Andrea Paul, Board Member

CALL TO ORDER

Chair Anderson called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

NOVA SCOTIA HUB GUIDELINES AND CRITERIA – CCRSB APPLICATION

Chair Anderson welcomed everyone to the meeting. He invited Scott Milner, Director of Educational Services and Herb Steeves, Director of Operational Services to present to the committee.

The Director of Educational Services led the discussion by stating the goals for the meeting was to review the major components of the *“Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development GUIDELINES and CRITERIA for a Hub School Model to Guide the Use of School Space”* issued in July 2014. One of the key pieces is an agreement by the Board on costs required to be covered with the Hub model. He noted potential savings from the relevant Impact Assessments have already been distributed to the Board when the schools were scheduled to be closed.

A second important piece is in the creation of the business plan for a hub design by the respective communities. There would be requests for information and to what extent should staff participate in the creation of the proposal. Staff believes in many situations they can provide supporting information that is readily available to assist the Hub communities. There is not the ability and is likely a conflict of interest for CCRSB to actively be part of the community development of community business. For example, staff may be part of the evacuation process.

The third goal is the logistics. There should be a procedure for requesting and receiving information from the groups preparing a proposal for a hub concept. It may be helpful to have a dialogue with the communities as they develop the business plan and the direction they are considering to go. For example, the type of business or organization being proposed to be in the building being made known to the Board as soon as possible to assist in determining compatibility with the CCRSB services. One of the items is the frequency of joint committee meetings for communication-by the hub committees meeting with the Board.

He stated the provincial guidelines and criteria document was developed from a request of various communities in the province that were facing a school closure and were proposing a hub design that could have a school building remain open. The government assembled a committee from various stakeholders and departments across the province. The Director of Educational Services was a member of the committee representing Chignecto-Central Regional School Board. This document was distributed to the three community groups in currently working on a hub school model.

He began with the Hub School Model to discuss the key points. The Hub School Model is the reasonable and sustainable use of public school space that does not impede the delivery of the public school program, if financially and operationally viable, and is supported through a strong business case from the community. The key words in the statement are reasonable and sustainable. It may be easier to define that it does not impede the delivery of the public school program. What does it mean for a proposal to be financially and operationally viable in regards to the business plan? The next key part is how the board evaluates a business case.

He noted the guidelines of how to support an environment that is in the best interest of students and added it would require input from the joint committee. The Director of Educational Services stated for our board to accept a hub model it must clearly demonstrate how it will result in no increase to capital or operational costs for the school board or the province as compared to the board’s plan for closure of the school facility. The hub model as indicated by the province would allow school boards to continue to achieve cost savings from school closure.

The Director of Operational Services stated it is key to note the CCRSB had determined, after a difficult review process, to close the three schools. CCRSB was approached by the communities asking if they could work towards a hub school. The criteria results from a request from the communities.

He stated the first point in the process is to determine how you evaluate the proposals. According to the DEECD criteria a community proposal is only evaluated if it meets the minimum requirements as noted in the document. Examples of writing a business plan has been given to the community as their plan will be the primary means upon which the Board makes an evaluation.

He noted the proposals, much like business plans, must clearly demonstrate financial viability and such as a commitment in writing from the source, such as a bank, to secure the funding used in potential renovations and operating expenses. The community groups should provide within their proposal reasonable and viable methods of how they are going to sustain the building in the long term.

Renovations required for tenants are the responsibility of the hub school committee and they way they have estimated these costs will be on the evaluation criteria. Alternatively, the business plan could state reasons why a group may not be able or feel they should not cover certain expenses. He spoke on the appropriate building use criteria and the condition of the facilities. One of the things to consider is the deferred maintenance outstanding across the board and how it could be assisted to some degree through capital savings by closing the buildings with their own deferred maintenance requirements.

The Director of Educational Services questioned if a hub proposal is accepted by the board, what happens if it is not sustainable after a period of time. Normally a business case indicates a plan for a three to five year period and what happens for example if it does not meet its first year goal.

Board Member Marks noted the important statement in the DEECD guidelines which states: *Any proposal for use of available space in a public school must also clearly demonstrate how it will result in no increase to capital or operational costs for the school board or the province, as compared to the board's plan regarding that school facility and to allow school boards to achieve cost savings.* He added the board's plan is to close the schools.

He asked the question about a hub model not being sustainable. Would the Board have to start the school review process over again?

Board Member Matheson-Withrow stated the business plans should be multi-year business plans. Also, if there is agreement from an organization to provide funding in the initial stages of the hub model, it would be almost impossible to have a commitment for a number of years to keep the school sustainable.

In response, Mr. Steeves noted there could be a clause in the Building Use Agreement required with the Hub model criteria that if in the event the hub model cannot be sustained, the Board would close the school. It would not require a new school review process.

Board Member Stevens stated he feels we are giving false hope to these groups.

Committee Vice-Chair Davies noted the biggest problem in rural areas is sustainability. Rural Nova Scotia is in a state of decline.

Board Member MacQuarrie stated having the board work with the municipalities maybe helpful. She added there was going to be a big development in the Wentworth area in the next couple of years with subdivisions and people living there year round.

Mr. Steeves reminded the Board that it did not make these guidelines, they came from the Province.

Board Member Marks asked Board Member MacQuarrie about the background to the statement there was going to be a huge influx of people in the Wentworth area. She responded it will be bringing people to living year round in the valley of the Wentworth area.

Board Member Stevens noted the model provided by the province will not work in Nova Scotia.

Board Vice-Chair MacKenzie stated from the beginning this hub model was unrealistic. To generate the money they need, not even counting the renovations will present a significant challenge.

Board Member Ross stated the only lifeline left for our children in rural Nova Scotia is the school board.

Board Member Nicholson asked if we could say no to the process. The response was no. You need to complete the process and look at the proposals.

The Director of Educational Services continued with the criteria and guidelines. There is a section outlining the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the proposal applicant. He noted school boards are required to evaluate proposals received to ensure they are aligned with legislation and regulations governing the operations of school boards and public school buildings, as well as any other school board policies or processes related to school facilities. He added school boards are required to provide clarity on the implementation of these guidelines and criteria. This would include such things as administrative procedures could clarify the role of staff, processes, timelines for application and contact information. This should be included on the board website.

He stated as mentioned in the guidelines and criteria the importance of the proposals to have a timeline in their proposal for a hub model.

He advised the criteria states that the applicant may only proceed with a proposal where they believe they meet all of the eligibility requirements. These requirements are as follows:

- The health and safety of students and staff is not at risk.
- The proposal will not compromise the school's ability to deliver the public school program.
- The proposal is appropriate for the school setting and respects the mission and vision of the school board.
- The proposal aligns with the policies and long-range planning of the school board.
- The proposal does not interfere with the school board's strategy for student achievement.

When proposals are received and do not meet the above criteria, it will need to be sent back to the applicant, within the specific timeline. The municipality may need to become involved to fully develop the applicant or community proposal.

Board Vice-Chair MacKenzie stated he feels there will need to be a committee developed with staff members and a few board members to evaluate the proposals.

The Director of Operational Services provided the list of elements that would need to be included in a proposal for a hub concept. At a minimum as outlined in the guidelines a proposal would include:

- Executive Summary
- Background Section
- Project Description
- Cost/Benefit Analysis
- Financial Plan
- Analysis of Financial Risks
- Analysis of Non-Financial Risks
- Analysis of Impacts on Stakeholders
- Acknowledgement of Appropriate Insurance Requirements
- Implementation Strategy
- Operating Model

He pointed out the importance of the Cost/Benefit Analysis which would assist the board in understanding the assessment of strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. The applicant needs to provide a target in their proposal and how they plan to meet the target.

Board Member Matheson-Withrow stated the document has made several references to the municipalities and is wondering if they have been provided the documents and have some knowledge on the process. The committees were asked in July if they had been in contact with the municipalities and they had responded discussions have been held. She asked if this document should be sent to departments within municipalities.

Committee Chair Anderson suggested a copy of the document could be sent to each of the counselors representing the area of the school in each of the municipalities. After discussion it was decided the document will be sent by Committee Chair Anderson to each of the municipalities.

The Director of Operational Services stated one of the issues for the proposals may be the timelines. Comments have been made by the committees that they feel they should have more time to complete their proposals because of the time it took for the Criteria and Guidelines to be provided from the Province.

The Board must allow the committees at least eight months to develop and complete their proposal and present it at a board meeting. This would be followed by at least a two month period for consideration of the proposal by the Board. With regard to the current three proposals this would require a final decision by the end of June 2015 when the schools are scheduled to close.

Board Member Matheson-Withrow noted the cost numbers used in the Impact Assessment were from 2012. Should we provide up to date numbers to the committees? Mr. Steeves responded any update of numbers would increase the costs of repairs, condition of buildings, etc.

Board Member Matheson-Withrow suggested the committees are provided the numbers for 2012, 2013 and 2014.

Board Vice-Chair MacKenzie suggested the committee work with the 2012 numbers and also be aware of the percentage of increased costs over the past two years. We are addressing the fact that the Board is aware the numbers are out of date but for the groups to use them when preparing their proposal.

Board Chair Thompson agreed but felt they should know from this point forward the numbers would need to update to include the increased costs.

The Director of Educational Services asked the committees for their thoughts on the involvement of the process for the proposal. The Director of Operational Services noted when the proposals are to be evaluated it will also require the involvement of various staff members. For example what is the role of the FoSS or the principal of these schools? Many of the staff will be involved in the process with these groups.

Board Chair Thompson noted in many of these areas the principal also is a member of the community, a member of the SAC committee which the community hub falls under the SAC committee, but the Board is the employer. How do you balance?

Board Member Grue stated he feels the principal should not be part of the process as a member of the committee.

The Director of Human Resources stated it could be a conflict of interest for the principal to be on the committee as a leader.

The Director of Educational Services noted this is also an emotional interest for the principal and may feel pressure to part of the process. He added principals have been advised not to be involved in the process. He added the principals may be needed for consultation during the evaluation of the proposals.

The Communication Manager, added she agreed principals have been very professional, but, the principals may find it very difficult to not be included in the process. If they are advised they are not allowed to participate, it may help their situation.

Board Member Matheson-Withrow suggested the principals be advised of their non-involvement in the preparation of the proposal to be directed from the Board.

The Director of Operational Services spoke on the frequency of meetings with the committee as well as the Hub School Committees. It was suggested the committees meet on a monthly basis and the Hub School Committees would be invited on alternate months to present an update of their progress in developing a business plan application. Potentially the last meeting with the hub communities could be an opportunity to present their final proposal and business case.

Board Member Farrell agreed with that schedule of meetings for the joint committees for the next six months.

It was agreed the Hub School Committees would be invited to attend the October Meeting of the Joint Committees of Educational and Operational Services.

Moved by Trudy Thompson, seconded by Keith MacKenzie

THAT THE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDS THAT THE THREE HUB COMMITTEES WOULD BE INFORMED THAT THE OPERATIONAL AND CAPITAL COST SAVINGS INDICATED IN THE IMPACT ASSESSMENTS FOR THEIR RESPECTIVE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS WOULD NEED TO BE COVERED WITH THEIR HUB MODEL ALONG WITH THEIR RECOGNITION OF ANY ADDITIONAL COST PRESSURES DURING THE TERM OF A BUILDING USE AGREEMENT.

MOTION CARRIED.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.