



GUIDELIGHTS

British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

INFORMATION

SCHOOL CLOSURES

As the parent leaders for your school, it is important for you to understand the school closure/consolidation process. Whether your school closes or not, the way you conduct yourself as you move through this process will determine what examples are set for parents/guardians, students, and staff. It will also have an effect on the relationships within the school and district. As you move through this process, remember, this could be a very emotional time for some people and everyone should be treated with dignity and respect.

If your school is being considered for closure, here are a few things you can do:

Obtain a copy of your district's policy on school closures from your School Board Office. The policy should outline the consultation process to be followed before school closures can take place. If you do not understand what the consultation period looks like, ask your school trustees, Superintendent, or district staff for clarification. Remember to invite and encourage all parents/guardians of your school to be involved in the consultation process. Attend every public meeting regarding the planning for school closures that you can. Your DPAC can also be a source of information, and they may have suggestions as to where to find the information you may need in the consultation period.

Obtain a copy of the School Act regarding school closures. This information can be found on the Ministry of Education's website at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m320-20.pdf>.

Contact senior district staff to obtain a copy of all the relevant information that will be used to make a decision regarding the school's future. This information may include the reason why the school is being considered for closure, maintenance audits, student enrolment figures, the effects on programs and services, and budget information including budget shortfalls. If you do not understand the budget information, you can ask your Secretary-Treasurer for help. Talk to your trustees.

Remember, as the PAC executive, you represent all the parents/guardians of your school community. You need to ensure that ample opportunity has been provided for all the parents/guardians of your school to express their views on the possible closure. There are usually pros and cons to everything, and these need to be discussed fully and openly.

If your school has been selected for closure, here are some things to consider:

PAC Records: It is important to check your PAC bylaws to see what they say regarding the dissolution of the PAC and what is to be done with the records. If there is nothing in your bylaws to guide you, talk to your DPAC, principal, and school district staff to decide how best to deal with the records. If your PAC is a registered society, you will need to make sure that you follow proper process as laid out in the Society Act. For more information, you can obtain a copy of the Society Act at <http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/registries/corppg/crinfopkg.htm>

PAC Funds—General PAC Account: Check your PAC bylaws to see if they contain anything regarding the disbursement of PAC funds upon dissolution. Prepare up-to-date statements of account, and have books reviewed by two or three PAC members. Discussion as to how the PAC funds will be spent should take place at a general PAC meeting. You might also wish to call a special meeting for this purpose. Under the direction of the PAC bylaws, the membership may decide to spend their money prior to the school closing, or they may decide to send the funds along to another school PAC where the majority of students will be attending.

If your PAC holds a **Gaming Account**, the disbursement of funds must follow the conditions set by the Gaming Policy and Enforcement Branch at <http://www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/gaming/publications/direct-access/procedures/Pac-Dpac-Conditions.pdf>.

It is important for you to include as many parents/guardians of the school community as possible in the decisions regarding PAC funds. This decision should not be made by the PAC executive alone.

PAC Purchases: These could include items purchased for the PAC (for example, filing cabinets, parent resources, etc.) or items purchased to support learning (for example, computers, sports equipment, library books, etc). Check with your school district to see if there is a policy regarding PAC purchases. If there is no policy or district procedure in place, contact the principal or senior district staff (Secretary-Treasurer or Superintendent) to discuss what to do with the PAC purchases. Once the PAC has received enough information from the district regarding PAC assets, all parents/guardians of the school community should be invited to be part of the decision. Some considerations may be as follows:

- Items could be distributed to other schools in proportion to the number of students moving to those schools from the closed school.
- Items could be donated to a school that demonstrates a strong need for them, such as a school located in a less fortunate neighbourhood.
- Or, assets could be sold and the funds distributed to other schools in the district.

The Role of DPAC

The DPAC represents all the schools in the district and should remain neutral in decisions regarding which schools should or should not be closed. DPAC should be a source of information such as where to find school board policies, where to look for information, and which district staff or trustee to talk to. DPAC can also offer assistance with the dissolution process to PACs whose schools are closing. They should be able to help make connections to the new schools, and give ideas on how to blend PACs and how to support children and

parents/guardians through this time. It is important that DPAC representation be at every public meeting to provide information and support and ensure fair process is followed.

Suggestions for moving forward in building a new school community:

Everyone should work for positive change and set good examples for students. Some ideas that have seen positive results when blending school cultures and creating school spirit are as follows:

- The receiving school can change its colors, mascot, etc. through school-wide activities so that all students, new and old, can be involved in building a new school community.
- Include some of the closing school's traditions as part of the receiving school. Invite students and parents/guardians to visit your school before their school closes.
- Invite parents/guardians to attend a PAC meeting or coffee get-together at their new school.
- Actively recruit parents/guardians from the closed school to become part of your PAC executive and, if possible, hold off elections until the two schools are blended in order to include all parents.
- Invite parents/guardians from the closed school to share ideas on how things were done in their school.
- Send out a questionnaire to see if your meeting times will work for the new parent/guardian community.
- Make sure the new parents/guardians receive a school handbook (if there is one) and know your school goals.
- Invite them to run for your School Planning Council.
- And lastly, hold a fun social event to celebrate the new combined school community. The kids and parents will feel welcome and included in the new school, and this will contribute to its success.

This Guidelight is meant to give some suggestions on how to deal with the details of school closure. The next edition will give ideas and suggestions on dealing with change and the emotions that go with it.

T = To accept the reality of the loss

E = Experience the pain of the loss

A = Adjust to the new environment without the lost object

R = Reinvest in the new reality