



Superintendent's Report

March 2016

As March comes to a close, the final steps in a school review process that will determine the future state of our board facilities draws to a conclusion as well. My report this evening will attempt to retrace the path we have been following since the release of our last strategic plan in 2012. In that updated plan, the critical issues facing the board were identified along with a process to involve our public in managing the resolution of these issues. An intensive internal and external review of our community identified the key challenges - the impact of continuous declining enrollment as well as the identification of a collaborative governance model to manage necessary changes.

In the fall of 2012, work began on a document *Looking Inward* that was released in April 2013 for public review and input. A planning framework for long term system sustainability outlined 32 scenarios for families of schools within the board's jurisdiction. These scenarios were

to form the basis for the essential conversations regarding declining enrollment, excess capacity and fiscal realities. The consultation on this document was extensive. School advisory councils, school based administration and public input generated another 50 scenarios.

Upon review of these 82 scenarios, administrative staff generated another series of proposals which were then shared with our elected board. A second document was then released in April 2014. Study groups in each family of schools were then tasked with examining the proposals. Delivery of the *Public School Program*, equity of access to programming, stewardship of public resources, sustainability of programming, as well as transparency were the guiding principles in this review. The planning process undertaken by the board also included a reflection on grade level configuration. In January of 2015, a plan for reconfiguration was approved that envisioned P-5 elementary schools, 6-8 middle schools and 9-12 high schools. Existing P-9 facilities would become P-8 and existing P-12 and 7-12 facilities would have a middle school within a school for grades 6-8. This grade level reconfiguration was implemented in September 2015.

Coincident with this public consultation, the Nova Scotia Department of Education and Early Childhood Development released a provincial *School Review Policy* in October 2014. A fundamental requirement in the policy is an annual report to the public providing “information about the current and developing situations of their schools and the delivery of

education programs and services.” The provincial policy ensures community engagement and contribution at each stage of the process. The information gathered over a three year development and consultative process formed the foundation for our board’s *Long Range Outlook* to meet the provincial requirement.

On April 27, 2015, as per the provincial requirement, a *Long Range Outlook* was publicly presented and posted on the board website. This outlook provided an extensive projected view of our community schools over the next decade. The 143 page report can be found on our site under the school review tab.

On August 24, 2015, staff presented recommendation for review reports for five families of schools. The rationale for the review is an enrollment decline of 46.1% since the 1996 amalgamation as well as a continued projection for significant decline into the foreseeable future. In addition to this factor, 85% of our schools in September 2013 had an excess capacity of 40% or greater. Furthermore, the cost to maintain this excess capacity in 2014-15 was 1.5 million dollars from general revenue. Finally, as most boards across the province began to experience declining enrollment, a new provincial formula was introduced to reflect this. As we move to this new formula, our transitional funding in the amount of 7.2 million dollars is being phased out as of the 2015-16 school year. To ensure our ability to continue to maintain programming and services for students, our Board passed a

motion to begin the school review process for five families of schools - New Waterford, Glace Bay, Sydney, Sydney River and the Northside.

By the end of September 2015, school options committees were established for each family of schools. Our very capable and diligent facilitators for this process were Mr. Jim Burton and Mr. Bernie MacKinnon. Our communications officer, Mrs. Michelle MacLeod, very capably handled the tremendous volume of public requests for information as well as the posting of minutes for each committee in a timely fashion. Our school options committees, composing of school advisory council representatives, community representatives and central office coordinators, worked continuously over the past five months to consider board options, consult with their communities, develop additional options and, finally, develop a final report and recommendations for submission to the board within 150 days of their first meeting. Mr. Paul Oldford, Director of Operations, is the very capable lead in this exhaustive process.

Our board has presently held two of the five public meetings where our school options committees present their reports and our operations' director presents the technical report. A further opportunity for public input has been provided at each of these meetings.

For many of our community members and staff, this process has been a three-year commitment. The consultations have been extensive and, at times, contentious. The dedication of our SOC's to this formidable task has been truly inspirational. Our board now has the opportunity to review the tremendous volume of input into this process and map our future direction in terms of sustaining our system, protecting student programs and services, and the provision of adequate facilities to accomplish this.

Our final meeting will be held at Riverview High School on April 12 at 6:00 p.m. where our board will consider the motions to permanently close schools.