

School plan review to continue

By Sarah Sobanski

The school year may have ended but the school closure debate will continue into the summer.

The deadline for public comment on the Long-Term Capital and Accommodation Plan, which suggests drafting a formal recommendation to better allocate resources between regional schools, has been extended to Sept. 30, 2016. The extension comes after many trustees of the Student Enrolment School Capacity Committee of the Hastings Prince Edward School Board (HPESB) decided parents and members hadn't had enough time to review the plan.

The reaction from parent committees so far suggests many are against the consolidation of local schools - one option of many that could be considered once the recommendation process begins.

"Most of the input that we have received has been with regard to individual scenarios, and it's really important to note that this plan contains absolutely no formal recommendations with regards to school closure or consolidation," said HPESB director of education Mandy Savery-Whiteway. "If and when any formal recommendations were to come before the trustees we would have to follow a very prescribed process from the Ministry of Education called an accommodation review process. So basically it's just that framework, but it doesn't contain any formal recommendations at all."

Savery-Whiteway noted that the plan takes place over 10 years so it can be changed and updated in the future. The accommodation recommendation process alone can take one full school year.

"If there's any kind of renovation or addition or a new build, it would take time to apply to the ministry to see if they would consider funding it. Then it takes time to go through a process of transitioning students and setting up construction. So you're really looking at a period of a minimum of two years, but maximum up to three or four years before you can actually activate any action once you bring a formal recommendation forward," said Savery-Whiteway.

The earliest the formal recommendation process could begin is November 2016. The plan predicts \$250 million in renewal needs across the district over the next 10 years.

"We will reach out in the fall, even though we don't have [a formal recommendation yet], we will reach out to all of our municipalities. Once that happens, then what we can do is work through the process, and during that process the public input can actually change the scenario that is brought forward by senior staff," said Savery-Whiteway.

Public comment will continue to be accepted and responded to throughout the summer.