

Connecting School Closures and Community Planning
Understanding the policy and process of Accommodation
Review in Southwest Ontario through a Planning lens

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

A major challenge facing communities across the Province of Ontario is the provision of educational facilities for students while balancing community-planning objectives. In recent years, it has become clear that Provincial and local policies coupled with demographic and financial pressures are leading to more closures and the loss of the public resources that are local schools. In the last three years, 172 schools have been slated for closure. In addition, public outcry has grown in volume as the Accommodation Review process is cited as an unsatisfying exercise for all those involved. From a planning perspective, schools are an irreplaceable resource in a community, yet current policy structures have left planners with no power to protect public assets while school boards are limited in the ability to find creative alternative solutions to closure.

Therefore, to gain a broader understanding of the policies and processes governing Accommodation Reviews, this research was guided by these key questions:

- What roles do school board and provincial policies play in school closure process?
- How do these policies affect the pedagogical landscape?
- What is the impact of school closures on their respective communities?
- How do these educational governance methods compare to community planning policies?
- Can school board objectives be reconciled with community planning objectives?

These questions were addressed through qualitative surveys and interviews with School Board and Municipal officials and staff. The survey was completed with 39 responses across four communities in Southwest Ontario.

The survey and interviews discovered a major gap in the knowledge of local officials pertaining to the comprehensive impact of school closures. In addition, responses spurred further investigation into the policies governing school boards including funding formula and public consultation guidelines. When asked, key respondents pointed to the lack of flexibility and the poor structure of the Province's Education funding formula as the main challenge for providing educational facilities. In addition, the lack of collaboration between local municipalities and school boards in conjunction with the lack of cohesiveness in Provincial policy mandates from the

Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs were found to ultimately compound the problems and the frustrations associated with the Accommodation Review process. Of the School Board officials surveyed and interviewed, very few saw the need for comprehensive collaboration with municipalities and local residents. However, nearly every planner surveyed or interviewed criticized this mindset as shortsighted and myopic.

This paper found that for the provision of public goods, such as education policies, there is a need to provide flexibility for the local context. Municipalities must have a role to play in the process and must collaborate with local School Boards. In addition, the Accommodation Review process is limited by outdated funding policies from the Province and lacks the public empowerment that leads to creative decision-making with involvement of the electorate.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In March of 2010, a board meeting of the Hamilton-Wentworth School Board Trustees ended with the approval to begin an accommodation review of the secondary schools in the north of the city – the urban core. In January of 2012, the Accommodation Review Committee brought forward a recommendation to close the only three secondary schools in the inner city of Hamilton and replace these with one centrally located school within the next three years (North ARC 2012). This kind of large shift in school resources is not a new phenomenon, but is the status quo for School Boards faced with financial pressures and shifts in demographics across their catchment areas.

In the province of Ontario, declining enrolment and financial considerations are easily cited as a contributing factor to closures, however outdated funding formula and underlying school board philosophy have been recent topics of discussion in the evaluation of government policies (People for Education, 2009; Irwin, 2012; Irwin & Seasons, 2013). The residual effects of accommodation review and school closure on a community and the underlying factors in the rational model for educational governance have rarely been addressed. This closure process lacks the collaborative decision-making and creative solution cultivation that one would hope to find, in theory, in any community-planning department.

The Hamilton closures, in addition to the 172 schools that have been recommended for closure between the years of 2009 and 2012 in Ontario (People for Education 2009), have all been a part of the new wave of accommodation guidelines presented in 2006 and 2009 by the Ministry of Education. While these guidelines were intended to prescribe a more rigorous public consultation process, the well documented

conflict-ridden nature of the accommodation review and closure process has been continually criticized (Doern & Prince, 1989; Basu, 2004a; Kearns et al., 2009) and has continued even after the introduction of public involvement policies (Irwin 2012). This begs the question of what is really wrong with the policies and processes of school closures?

At a preliminary glance, it appears as though there is a considerable lack of study in the field of school board policies, school closures, and collaboration between educational institutions and municipal government. While this scarcity of research is true of the Ontario context, the same is true for the rest of Canada. Studies in New Zealand (Witten et al., 2001; Kearns et al., 2009), Denmark (Egelund & Laustsen 2006), the United Kingdom (Bondi 1987), and the United States (Engberg et al. 2012) explore the potential impacts of closures on all parties involved, including the affected neighbourhood. These studies also recognize a lack of research on this topic. Insufficient study on the local effects of closures and the shortage of research investigating the broader patterns of accommodation review policy should be a major concern to policy-makers and community inhabitants alike. There is a need for study in the Ontario context, the results of which will have broader implications for both educational governance and community planning.

Using a survey of South-Western Ontario School Boards and Municipalities the proposed research will contribute to the body of knowledge on school closures through an analysis of the process of closures and the resulting consequences. This investigation adopts an urban planning perspective due to the interdisciplinary nature of the profession. Planners are mandated to foster community vitality and resiliency. The entire profession

is built on the pursuit of improving the local environment for community residents (Hodge & Gordon 2008). It is a vocation built on problem solving and long-term outlook. However, while a school board provides a long term vision of education, their mandate is much more narrow and does not contain provisions for a comprehensive understanding of a school's role in a community nor the strategic objectives for the social consequences of school closures.

1.1 Research Questions

For this paper, my research questions are as follows:

- What roles do school board and provincial policies play in school closure process?
- How do these policies affect the pedagogical landscape?
- What is the impact of school closures on their respective communities?
- How do these educational governance methods compare to community planning policies?
- Can school board objectives be reconciled with community planning objectives?

For the purposes of this investigation, “policy” will refer to all legislation, goals, objectives, and other relevant guiding principles. Policy is not the action itself, but it is the written prescription for a problem or a description of intent for an organization to follow or employ in the decision-making process (Pal 2006). The term “process” will refer to the follow through or actions guided by policy. It is a series of actions that seek to fulfill the underlying goals and objectives outlined in the policy structure. In the Province of Ontario, the main process involved in the provision of school space is Accommodation Review. This Provincially mandated process outlines the regulations and structures for the local School Board to review their space resources, consult local communities, and meet other minimum benchmarks (Ontario Ministry of Education 2006).

Through an investigation of the closure of schools and research of topics including policy formation, Accommodation Review priorities, and strategies of re-purposing space, this study will examine the policies and processes surrounding the Accommodation Review Process with the purpose of evaluating government organizations and their impact on local communities. There are four central research objectives. First, there is the need to understand the important role of schools in a community. Second, the particular reasons for school closure are examined, including a content analysis of key documents in relation to school board philosophy and decision-making. Third, a study the various government organizations involved and their role in the process will grapple with the question of whether closure was the best solution from a planning perspective. This third point will concentrate on the main research question of closure as it relates to policy and process. Finally, drawing from an urban planning lens, this study will address the question of what should be done from a planning perspective in response to these phenomena. This section will also provide recommendations for the South-Western Ontario context and supplementary study on the subject of alternatives to closure.

To further understand the material regarding the subject of neighbourhood impact of schools, school board governance, and the factors involved in Accommodation Review, a literature review of all relevant materials was conducted. In addition to orienting the subject of this research, the review will point to gaps in the literature that this study will fill. In addition to a study of the key documents, an online survey and informant interviews canvassed the opinions of school board trustees and planners, municipal officials and planners, and other relevant stakeholders. This survey and

interviews will complete the comprehensive picture of the varying perspectives regarding the efficiency of resources in conjunction with continued investment in “public goods.”

1.2 Thesis Structure

This thesis is organized into five sections. The second Chapter is concerned with the question of “where are we now?” A literature review is conducted in this section to frame the Ontario context in addition to the importance of schools. Chapter 3 expands on the methodology of this research and the limitations of this particular paper. Chapter 4 dives into the results of the online survey and key informant interviews and Chapter 5 synthesizes the results into four recommendations and the questions for further research that evolved from this thesis.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

As noted in the previous chapter, several key questions drive this research. First is the question of the role of school board policies, in particular the Accommodation Review process, and how the policies in place at the provincial and local level influence the pedagogical landscape. Second, the question of policy impact on the ground will seek to understand the consequences of the various results of accommodation review. Then, the introduction of the planning perspective will compare and contrast school board objectives with community planning objectives. Ultimately, policy implementation is an essential component of this research. Through an investigation of the guidance and accountability provided in Accommodation Review policy, the relationship between institutional viability, school board mandates, and community planning intentions will become more visible.

The greatest challenge of tackling the subject matter of schools and their impact is the complexity of all stakeholders and variables involved. A literature review will provide the opportunity to investigate all of the complexities involved and why, ultimately, an examination of policy and process is the ideal starting point for a greater understanding of cause and effect at the local level. As previously noted, a number of factors lead to a school closure. Sometimes the physical building is not worth the cost of repairs and is then replaced. For the majority of situations though, declining enrolment and financial considerations are most cited reasons for closure (People for Education 2009). Unfortunately, school closures are a highly contested process and provoke visceral reactions among parents, teachers, and other community members (Doern & Prince,

1989; Basu 2004b). The issue not only is deeply divisive (Berger 1983) but also is surrounded by hostile interactions (Marshall, 1985). Addressing this fracturing process is an important issue in public policy (Kearn et al. 2009); therefore, an understanding of the relevant literature is the logical first step.

Previous studies will point to the possibility that current school board policies and processes are the cause, and the effects are soon to follow. This review will first tackle the topic of public administration and frame the policy context of South-Western Ontario. Therefore, our initial task is to conduct a survey of relevant literature related to public administration and policy creation that will then frame the case studies found in the following chapters. Second, we will explore the major tenets and consequences of school closures and connect these factors to the policies in place in the South-Western Ontario context. Finally, a survey of planning literature related to policy creation will introduce the community building perspective.

2.2 Public Administration and Policy

For the purposes of this study, public policy will refer to the trajectory created by public governing bodies to address an issue or problem in society. Pal (2006) emphasizes that this trajectory could include action or inaction on a particular issue. It is simply a course set by public authorities on a given topic. Public policies are tools - a way in which we deal with the changing nature of our values - and cannot be separated from the human component. This is one of the reasons why an understanding of policy in the circumstances of school closures is so important: policies are the standards, yet they are intrinsically linked to the values of those who craft their genesis. Rationalists may argue

that the technical solution will always result in the best possible solution, but, more recently, this assumption has been challenged by the connection of values to almost every policy decision (Howlett & Ramesh, 1995; Pal, 1987; 1997; 2006). Due to this multifaceted nature of public policy, a comprehensive approach to policy analysis is required.

Currently, the most widely utilized method of decision-making is the rational comprehensive model. This methodology asserts that the most efficient, and best-suited result will come about from a systematic formula using all inputs to project the best possible output. As Pal (2006) describes, the rational model generally includes a step-by-step process that includes choosing objectives, considering alternatives, outlining impacts, determining desirability of outcomes, applying scenarios, implementing the preferred option, and finally, evaluating the consequences (p. 20).

Some analysts have suggested four ways in which to understand policy creation and implementation. These four include 1) the organization and nature of the political system, 2) the policy “determinants” or quantitative analysis, 3) policy content, and 4) the outcome of policy implementation (Howlett & Ramesh 1995). On the other hand, Peter deLeon (1994) argues that policy research and analysis does not result in improvement on deficiencies and shortcomings in the governance of social programs or education. The argument goes that an analyst cannot understand the specific life experiences of those localities where the policy is implemented – therefore the policy ends in inadequacy and further barriers are constructed between governing bodies and the policy recipients; what deLeon (1994) calls ‘separation syndrome.’ Policy analysts, advisors, and creators have found themselves deeply invested in the rational model of thinking where economics and

‘tangible’ relationships can be expressed and vindicate only quantitative analysis of a situation.

The language used to best describe the current state of policy-creation is ‘cost-effectiveness’ best described in the Canadian context by Janice Gross Stein in her 2001 book *The Cult of Efficiency*. Efficiency and cost-effectiveness are a seductive brand utilized by advertisers to sell the latest product or governments to sell the “best” sorts of policies and procedures. Stein (2001) argues that efficiency has become an end rather than the means to not only our private lives, but also the public realm (p. 7). Rather than asking whether the efficient way will bring about the best results, policy-makers subscribe to efficiency because the public will respond. We point to and praise cuts in government spending, yet we forget to ask ‘but at what cost?’ Efficiency, or its counterpart in the political realm: ‘equity’, becomes a feel-good term for the masses – a maximization satisfaction (p. 29) – while the complicated nature of full cost accounting

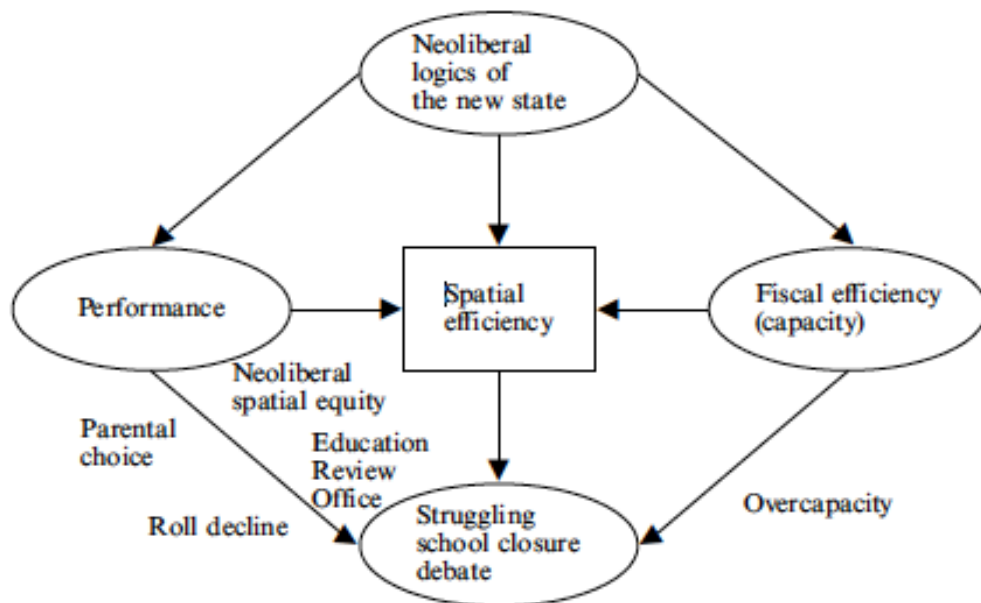


Figure 1: Efficiency and Closure (From Witten et al. 2003)

and locally informed, flexible policy is pushed aside. It appears as though ‘efficiency’ is a good sound bite to the public and ‘complicated and comprehensive policy analysis’ does not sell. In Figure 1, we denote how neoliberal efficiency policies become the central factor in determining how the School Board proceeds in an Accommodation Review. The result is fiscal and spatial efficiency and a disillusioned public.

In 1969, Sherry Arnstein, an American urban planner, published a paper entitled “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” (Figure 2) with the focus on the evolving importance of public participation in any government process or policy analysis. Arnstein created a literal ‘ladder’ to visually express the extent to which an organization allows citizen’s to have a role in the decision-making process. The ‘rungs’ range from the bottom (or least amount of public participation) to the middle (certain extents of tokenism) to the top (citizen empowerment). My research and results will refer back to this ladder and will fundamentally argue that the school board accommodation review process sits on the lower end of the ladder, using public participation as a token formality. The results of which are an inhuman process that strays too far on the side of rational economics without adequately gauging social consequences. Public participation is widely considered to be an integral part of the policy creation and implementation process and it is agreed that, overall, citizens wish to participate in the process (O’Connor & Jose, 2011; Irwin & Seasons, 2013). This involvement is empowerment for local residents and gives the local community the ownership of their community amenities.

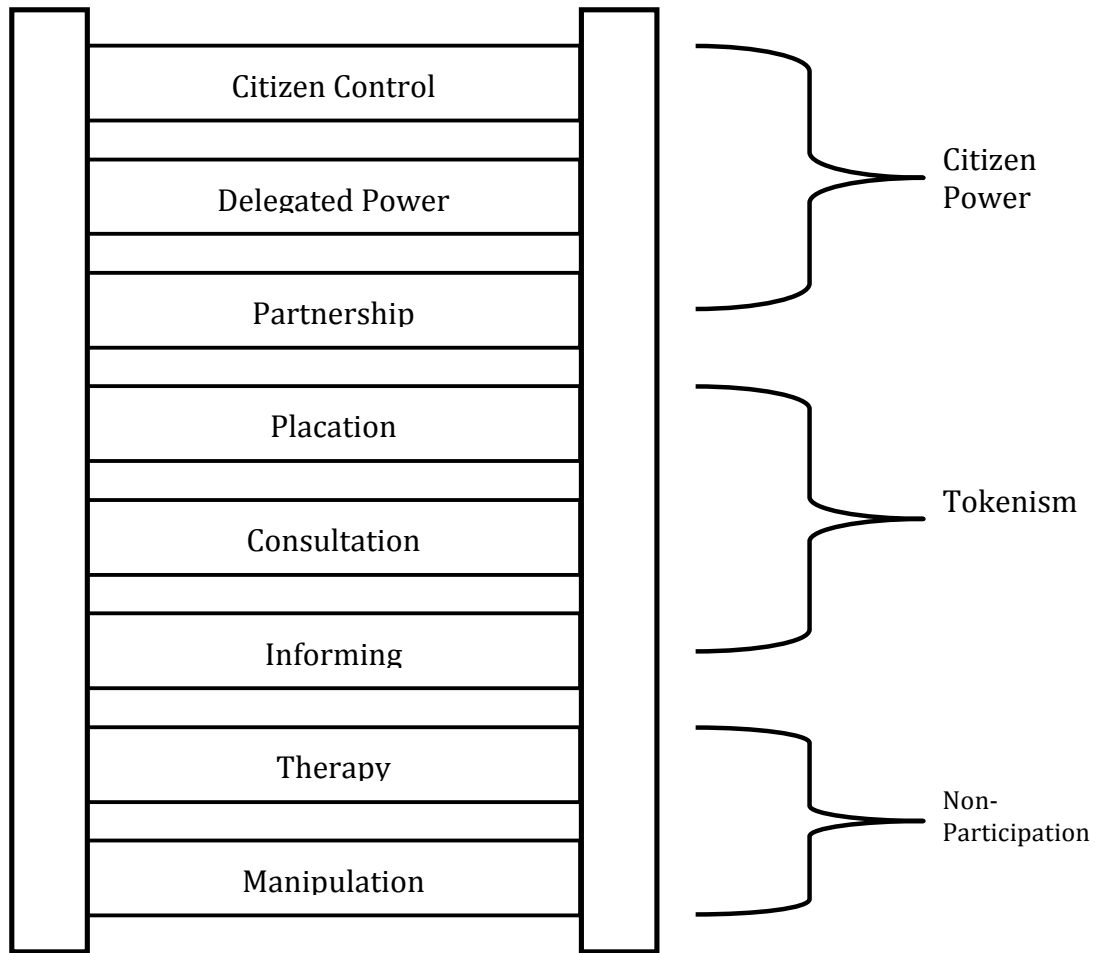


Figure 2: Adapted from “A Ladder of Citizen Participation” by S. Arnstein (1969)

While this practice of problem analysis and solution making had been the norm of policy creation, a growing consensus maintains that the rational comprehensive model as it is currently practiced does not adequately involve its citizens and does not give them real power to influence local policy (Campbell, 2010; Stout, 2010; Irwin, 2012). This challenge applies not only to the accommodation review realm, but also to the planning realm. As Stout (2010) discusses, a “sense of efficacy” is of “critical importance to citizens ” (p. 48) when involved with policies related to land-use planning. In fact, in Henry Sanoff’s book *Community Participation Methods in Design and Planning* (2000), policy makers in municipalities found that citizens found more satisfaction in having an

influence on decisions rather than simply whether their expectations were met (p. 12). This means that real citizen participation, not just tokenism, results in a less hostile and well-informed public. Planners and policy-makers must be deliberative in the incorporation of citizen participation (Campbell 2010) – yet the processes currently in place and the status quo for policy creation in both the planning and education governance realm have crippled their own local community from finding meaningful engagement. Public institutions are less democratic than they would say themselves and actually use democracy as a political talking point to prove worth (deLeon 1997) rather than an actual exercise in public discourse and problem-solving.

2.3 Public Policy and Schools

According to Greene (1992), school board policy-making can be summarized in two different models: the professional or the political models. The professional model attempts to govern education as a purely technical exercise whereas the political model puts the school board as a facilitator between school leadership, the board itself, and the community (Greene 1992). While it is significant to understand these underlying board philosophies and models, it is first also important to note that School Boards are creatures of the Province and that Provincial leadership can have the final word when it comes to funding, process, and allocation of power. First I will explore the current policies shaping school closure process in Ontario, then I will examine the question of pedagogical ideology and how these two factors have led the charge in misplaced Accommodation Review objectives.

Two examples of this Provincial exercise of power stand out in recent decades as the key cause to the current effect of arguably unnecessary school closures. Under the mantra of neoliberalism, the ‘marketization of efficiency’ (Giroux 2004) became a priority for government resulting in legislation, policy directives, and on-the-ground pressure to make the provision of education a question of efficient use of resources. Under Premier Harris, the Provincial Legislature of Ontario introduced *The Fewer School Boards Act* (1997) and *The Education Quality Improvement Act* (1997), which are the foundations from which the current situation of school closures emerged. First, the *Fewer School Boards* legislation decreased the number of school boards in the Province from 168 to 72 through the amalgamation of existing Boards. This increase of geographic area for a given school board forced trustees to grapple with new deficits and varying enrolment fluctuations across one larger catchment area under a Board (Mackenzie, 2007; Irwin, 2012). In addition, the *Education Quality Improvement Act* implemented a funding formula that is a fundamental component of our current context. While the formula set to enforce a standard in educational equity by constructing a per-pupil allocation of funding, Mackenzie (2004; 2006; 2007) states that these calculations actually short-change the real costs on the ground. The formula is based on 1997 school numbers and does not reflect the changes in enrolment and produces arbitrary numbers for ‘viability’ (People for Education 2009). School Boards are put in the precarious catch-22 of having to make cuts while Provincial policy pulls the rug from under them. This provincial legislation could then be described as the determining factor in the closing of viable schools, the preferred solution of building new mega-schools, and the overarching pedagogical ethos of efficiency prevalent in school boards across the province. A school board faced with

mounting pressure to balance the budget from both the Province and the electorate could seek to find the quick and easy solutions in the face of such pressure. One example of these perceived ‘quick solutions’ is school closure and consolidation. Discussions of creative alternatives are even further crippled by the very nature of the legislation. Funding benchmarks were written in a way that yields a very narrow definition of education and how it is to be provided (Mackenzie, 2006). For example, the use of institutional buildings for adult education programs is limited due to the lack of funding those programs are capped to receive. Education, to the government, focused on the “development of core academic skills” (Mackenzie, 2007, p. 15) and nothing beyond that (narrow) spectrum. Therefore, education funding was limited to literacy and numeracy and a future in university education while very little focus was placed on any other vocational programs or on arts or music (Mackenzie, 2004). While the Conservative government under Premier Harris has long left office, the current Liberal government has not significantly altered the path on which the education system of Ontario is travelling. The formula still places a strong emphasis on enrolment numbers – a rational decision, yet an inadequate understanding of education. The delivery of education to students is not an individual teacher teaching an individual student, so why does the funding formula act in this way? If enrolment declines, classroom space and funds required may need an overall reduction, however, Mackenzie (2007) argues, it may not. The level of guidance considered necessary for a student remains the same, regardless of the number of students in the classroom; therefore the formula paints with a broad brush, when detailed strokes are necessary. An example of the limiting nature of the funding formula can be found in Appendix I, where the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board North

Accommodation Review Committee examines the utilization rate of its urban schools and performs a cost benefit analysis of closing two schools while opening a new facility. According to their analysis, closing two existing schools and acquiring the land for building one new school is cheaper than upgrading current facilities coupled with current enrolment projections.

In addition to the funding formula, this Provincial legislation removed the power of school boards to levy property taxes in their regions and gave this to the municipalities (Fredua-Kwateng, 2005). In the same way that the funding formula falls short of the actual operating budgets of school boards, this removal of funds only compounds the problem forcing a school closure (Ontario, 2006). Yet, closures remain the responsibility of the school board, not the Province. These policies are inconsistent as a board appears to have no choice but to drastically alter its structures, close schools, and provide a valuable public good all due to policies and funding decisions outside of their control.

In her 2006 book *Between Caring and Counting: Teachers Take on Education Reform*, Lindsay Kerr critiques the neoliberal vision for government, specifically the educational realm, which took hold of Provincial policies under the Harris government. In her research, Kerr (2006) argues for the “democratization of government and its institutions” (p. 5) while balancing the important realm of rational decision-making. Demographic trends and financial constraints do not disappear through a more collaborative process, but must be balanced with a full cost-benefit analysis that includes a re-assessment of running a government in a bottom-line, business-like fashion. Efficiency does not necessarily provide the best of both worlds and remains an over-used term for an end when it really should be the means (Stein, 2001). In Witten et al.’s (2003)

case study in Invercargill, New Zealand, an inquiry into the introduction of efficiency-based policies and government standards discovered that these policies undermined the important role that a school plays in the life of a neighbourhood and a community. The delivery of education became, to the government, an “investment in human capital rather than a public good.” (p. 204). Yet, standardization does not necessarily bring about better students nor does it adequately provide a public arena for meaningful citizen engagement (Stein, 2001; Witten et al., 2003; Irwin, 2012). What the literature has found is that these tenets of the current rational model are not bringing benefits to a local level. They are, in fact, bankrupting key components of our social infrastructure. Kerr (2006) calls this a “clash between the dominant economic paradigm of accounting logic...and an ethic of care at the centre of education practice” (p. 11). Fredua-Kwarteng (2005) makes this an issue of natural justice and procedural fairness based on the morality of the school closure process:

The board’s duty of fairness to their constituencies cannot be sacrificed on the altar of efficiency and predictability of outcome of community participation in closure decision-making. Boards have a moral obligation to be fair...and this moral obligation arise not only from the role itself but also from the principle of fairness that dictates that such a role should be performed. (p. 14)

2.4 Accommodation Review in Ontario

The Ontario Ministry of Education developed and implemented regulations for the closure process that has been followed by school boards for the past several decades. These regulations have been most recently updated in 2006. These policies lay out the requirements for a school board to present to the Ministry, including the public consultation process, the effects on the school area, and other minimum benchmarks

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). It is important to note that the regulations for community involvement do not specify whether this involvement is collaborative, but just denotes that the community must be brought into the fold (Fredua-Kwateng, 2005).

In the most recent updates to the Accommodation Review Guidelines, (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009a) the Province sought to strengthen the role of the local community in the Review process. The document itself outlines the process of public consultation in addition to criteria for the valuation of a given school to its community, its students, the local school board, and the local economy. These criteria are summarized in Table 1 (below) with examples of measurable factors, although local school boards are also encouraged to introduce their own to reflect local circumstances (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009a). The Ministry of Education states that it is up to the local school board to create and manage their own Accommodation Review process as long as it conforms to the guidelines. According to critics though, the Board still retains strong control over this process and they may dictate how this valuation takes place and what form it may take (Fredua-Kwateng, 2005).

An advisory committee appointed by the local school board undertakes accommodation review. The Provincial guidelines state that the Accommodation Review Committee (ARC) should be made up of members from the local community including parents, educators, board officials, and other community members. The local board will provide the ARC with the specific mandate for their review and will distinguish the various members and their roles on the Committee (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009a). The final result of the Committee's work is the presentation of alternative options for student accommodation and changes to existing facilities. Once this has been

presented to the board, the elected trustees will ultimately decide on whether the ARC recommendations are the best route forward.

Values	Factors
To the Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning environment and student outcomes - Course offerings and extracurricular activities - The ability of the school to support student learning and healthy physical activity - Safety of the school - Proximity of the school to students
To the School Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student outcomes and course offerings - Condition and location of the school - Value of the school if it is the only school in a community - Fiscal factors and operational costs
To the Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilities for community use - Programs offered for both students and community members - Green space for recreational use - Value of the school as an institution within a community
To the Local Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The school as a local employer - Availability for cooperative education, training opportunities and partnerships with local businesses - Attraction for families to the community

Table 1: Values and Factors utilized in Accommodation Review. Adapted from Ontario Ministry of Education (2009a).

The 2009 update to the Accommodation Review Guidelines places a strong emphasis on public consultation as a part of the process. This includes a minimum of four public hearings and strict timelines for the process. Yet, even with these most recent changes seeking to increase public participation and decrease the negative nature of the process, school closures and Accommodation Review remain a battleground for emotional debate and disenchantment from local residents and elected municipal officials (Irwin, 2012). Recent closure decisions have produced school board's that wish to reduce public input (Pecoskie, 2012), residents who feel cheated in the process (Gillespie, 2012),

and studies that show the lack of influence community residents really have in the process (Irwin, 2012; Tousignant, 2012). When these Provincial guidelines were introduced, the government recognized that “Accommodation decisions can be some of the most difficult faced by school boards” and the fact that these decisions must have “meaningful involvement of the local community” (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009b). However, it appears as though the Accommodation Review process remains a highly charged process – even with the introduction of greater local community involvement. In addition, while the new guidelines were introduced to address some problems in the old legislation, these Provincial guidelines also lack any sort of appeal process for the community. Neighbourhood residents and school users cannot appeal any closure and are therefore stuck either showing their displeasure at the ballot box every four years or using other, more aggressive, tactics that I will explore later in this review.

In reference to Arnstein’s (1969) rungs of citizen participation (Figure 2), school boards adopt certain methods of integrating the provincially mandated necessity for citizen participation. Public institutions, like school boards, usually incorporate public engagement through public information nights, participation in juries and advisory committees, or the sending in of written comments. However, many of these avenues are found to simply be “one-way” information sessions rather than meaningful dialogue (Roberts, 2004). Citizens find that at best they are taking part in a token consultation and at worst they are simply being manipulated into the process at the lower end of the participation ladder. As Seasons & Irwin (2013) appropriately state “it could be argued that school boards rely heavily on rational planning methods, and under-value planning models and processes that encourage meaningful participation by community

stakeholders in school closure reviews” (p. 22).

2.5 Themes in School Closure Literature

A study by Doern & Prince (1989) noted four themes in the literature of Canadian school closures: the school board’s response to changing demographics and the issues surrounding minimum enrolment numbers, challenges of financial considerations, the importance of pedagogical ideology, and the nature of community involvement in the whole process. These four themes will be utilized to outline the resulting consequences of current policy practices. In addition, I will discuss three supplementary themes including external costs, health and environmental concerns, and the dual school system in Ontario.

2.5.1 Shifting Demographics and Enrolment Numbers

The first theme is the respective school boards’ responses to shifting demographics. Researchers have argued that closure should be viewed as a last resort (Bureau of Municipal Research (BMR), 1980). Unfortunately, school boards view closure as a necessary policy response to the pressures of efficiency and cost saving. In a study by Burns et al. (1984), which examined 34 Northern Ontario school closures, the authors found a surprising ‘lack of imagination’ by the school boards involved in response to declining enrolment and financial concerns. This lack of creative solutions manifests itself in a variety of examples where school boards have instituted minimum enrolment figures (BMR, 1980). If the school drops below these figures, the quick and easy solution is closure. Minimum enrolment and ‘utilization’ rates are calculated at the School Board level and are the primary variable examined leading to closure.

From the Provincial level, the current funding formula provides a three-year ‘adjustment grant’ for schools facing declining enrolment to adjust their budgets while receiving this funding. In spite of this, the Provincial assumption that three years is sufficient time for a Board to adjust to enrolment changes does not have any supporting evidence (Mackenzie, 2006). In fact, the numbers show that the grant accounts for, on average, between 20 and 25 percent of the negative funding impact of declining enrolment (p. 16).

Continuing on the theme of a school board’s response to shifting demographics, regional and local politics play an important role in the understanding of the process of school closures (Bondi, 1987). In the Ontario context, years of neo-liberal principles at the provincial government level led to focus on cost-saving strategies and increased efficiency (Basu, 2004a). The resulting city amalgamations and other cost-saving strategies materialized at the school board level in the form of fewer trustees managing larger geographic areas in conjunction to more pressure exerted on school administrators to introduce cost-cutting measures (Valencia, 1985) including the closure of underperforming or underutilized schools. The results have been tremendous frustration at the community and board level due to the necessity to close viable programs for the sake of efficiency (Basu, 2004a).

A study undertaken in Denmark (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006) investigated the impact of school closures on rural communities based on the shifts in employment opportunities increasing in urban areas and the subsequent migration of people to those urban centres. Their findings included phenomena that can be found in declining regions in many other countries. When a region changes or declines, a school is a very difficult

institution to prop up without the demographics to sustain its students. These challenges become more difficult when Provincial policies are built around funding formula from a particular period of time with little consideration for unique circumstances faced by declining or shrinking regions. Enrolment in Ontario Schools is declining (People for Education 2009) if we look at overall numbers across the Province. Yet, the financial calculus and funding formula has not changed which is, in part, why School Boards are ill-prepared for the Accommodation Review process and the necessity of alternatives to closing key school sites based primarily on demographics and financial concerns.

2.5.2 Finances

Financial considerations are a very important theme when addressing the topic of school closures. A variety of situational factors play a role in the financial calculus leading to a closure (Riffel, 1979; Bondi, 1987), including questions of anticipated enrolment, conditions of the facility, educational facility adequacy, proximity to other schools, and the question of whether neighbourhood residents are organized in support for the school (Riffel, 1979). The assumption is also made that closing a school will automatically result in savings. Yet, in a report by Andrews (1974), only 12 of 35 school boards actually calculated the actual savings of a school closure. Furthermore, only 4 of those 12 actually reported savings, which were consistently less than initially projected (Andrews, 1974).

One of the contexts for this study is the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB). In 2011, the HWDSB gave a recommendation from the North Accommodation Review Committee to close two inner city schools on opposite sides of

the downtown core. Students would then be sent to a new “centrally located site” (North ARC, 2012). The closing of several schools for the purposes of establishing a new, centralized mega-school is not a new concept (Egelund & Laustsen, 2006). School size is addressed in Valencia’s (1985) public school closures research. In an analysis of the impacts of school closures, he investigates and hypothesizes on the assumptions made regarding school size, cost-savings, equity, and public support. Most importantly, the assumption that larger schools will offer more services and an improved education is contradicted by initial evidence (Valencia, 1985). Bigger may not necessarily mean a better education. In fact, research shows that students are, on the whole, more successful in smaller schools (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007; People for Education, 2009).

In their meta-analysis of empirical education studies, Leithwood & Jantzi (2007) scrutinized the claims of school size. First, they noted that contemporary studies are now pointing to smaller schools as the most efficient, cost effective, and their students graduate at a higher rate than their larger counterparts (p. ii). The evidence clearly favours smaller schools, but the authors are clear to delineate the relativity of the term “small”. To a community with large youth populations and several schools with over two thousand students, a school with one thousand could be small, while other districts would see that number as a larger school. Another finding of this analysis found that there is some evidence at the secondary school level that senior student achievement increases in larger schools (p.5). This relationship was found in situations where larger schools provided greater program and curriculum opportunities for senior students. The study did not find this positive relationship in regards to elementary or younger secondary students.

Finally, Leithwood and Jantzi (2007) discovered that students from lower socio-economic statuses found greater achievement and success in smaller schools (p.8-9).

The standardization of education funding across the Province assumes that one size can fit all, however according to Mackenzie (2007) “equity does not produce equality” (p.14). There are unequal distributions of needs across the Province for education yet local and Provincial governments are hesitant to introduce variances in standardized funding formula. The variances in operating costs of schools do not simply change through closing smaller institutions for the sake of larger, centralized schools. For example, Northern Ontario consistently has among the highest operating costs for the most part due to weather-related expenses (p.14). A colder climate increases heating, maintenance, and day-to-day operations costs, yet these schools receive the same treatment as their Southern Ontario counterparts.

Neo-liberal restructuring of governance and policy has produced a problematic model for the delivery of education. Instead of seeking the interests of local communities and its students, competition and self-interest has become the primary lens to view an Accommodation Review and fiscal efficiency has become a primary implement of governance (Witten et al., 2003). While these factors must have a role to play in the use of public funds, they cannot be the foremost factors in the provision of education for our future generations. Ultimately, finances cannot be the sole reason for a school to close its doors and other costly factors must be weighed in addition to the realization the two board actions of closing schools or building mega-schools are not necessarily a guaranteed cost-savings.

2.5.3 Ideology

Nonetheless, one of the most important factors in closures (Doern & Prince, 1989) was the underlying philosophy of the board. Those boards with a commitment to the education produced in smaller schools would seek the creative solution possibilities more readily than their philosophical counterparts – those boards with agendas of economic efficiency. Unfortunately, this positive avenue of school management is rare and most school boards carry a ‘divide and conquer’ (Valencia, 1985) mindset into an Accommodation Review. As was noted previously, a school board will employ Accommodation Review and cost-benefit analysis to project the utilization rate of its schools in addition to the projected benefits and cost-savings of closing a school. One issue that has been raised is the problem of ‘conceptualizing’ the costs and benefits of so-called immeasurable variables. The principle in Pearce (1976) of the limitations of cost-benefit analysis for environmental ‘goods’ also applies as a principle for public ‘goods’ or the desired outcomes of education exemplified in students. The decision to close a school building may actually reflect the philosophy of the school board as exhibited by its linear consequentialism. If certain variables of student success or neighbourhood vitality are difficult to measure qualitatively, then it is easy for a board to rubber stamp an accommodation review or cost-benefit analysis that contains only hard numbers. The philosophy of cost-benefit analysis has been criticized for this inadequate or complete lack of valuation for the intangible assets - also called ‘non-market goods’ (Hansson 2007). By delimiting the variables that require valuation, an organization is not performing a reasonable cost-benefit analysis and therefore risks greater social or environmental consequences.

In essence, a new building with new resources is easier to comprehend for a school board as opposed to the alternative complexities of re-purposing space. While the Provincial legislation does not provide easy alternatives to closure, creative alternatives are rarely sought due to this ideology of linear consequentialism. Abrahamson (2004) explores this notion of destroying to make space for creation. It is here where he advocates for an alternative method. Rather than destroying what exists to make space for the 'bright future,' Abrahamson (2004) encourages organizations to seek creative alternatives and therefore increase chances of success and decrease unnecessary waste of resources. Hargreaves (2007) echoes this point by identifying the concept of sustainable leadership in school governance. For greater success of the school board, its staff, and its students, resources (everything from teachers to physical structures) ought to be seen as "valuable, renewable, and recombinable resources" (p.226).

The fundamental problem that exists here comes down to the role and responsibilities of a school board. Any given school board is expected to provide academic programs and facilities, hire staff, and strategically plan and manage the use of school buildings and any land acquisitions. Yet, they are not responsible to the community for sustainable decision-making. They are not required to meet with Municipal planners, nor are they required to adhere to municipal growth or planning objectives. They may be encouraged to take part in the process and through this research I have discovered several instances of positive collaboration with municipal governments. However, these relationships remain informal and can sometimes simply be seen as a professional courtesy. The rarity of these instances has meant that when it comes to cooperation between school boards and municipalities, "constructive

relationships seem to be the exception rather than the rule” (Irwin & Seasons 2013, p. 10).

2.5.4 Community Involvement

The last of the four themes is community involvement. This takes shape in the process of school board reviews through four types of interaction (Doern & Prince, 1989). First, there is the conventional participation of parent-teacher associations in cooperative lobbying. Then, there is the establishment of advisory committees in conjunction with the closure process. The committees are typically presented as a way to aid the implementation of a closure plan while representing the community in a way that will make the unpleasant experience of closure less painful (Doern & Prince, 1989). Another type of interaction involves encouraging participation from the beginning by incorporating advisory committees to work alongside the board in the decision-making process. Finally, the fourth interaction manifests itself in the form of independent neighbourhood groups outside of the official policy structures. Due to the fact that a school board is an example of representative democracy, community involvement is limited to the ballot box or exerting public pressure on their representatives (Fredua-Kwateng, 2005). The latter avenue becomes so-called ‘protest groups,’ which focus on active political involvement and are more likely to directly confront a board. These groups have continued to emerge as a more effective community solution for addressing concerns (Lucas, 1982; Burns et al., 1984). Many communities are finding that, to have a voice in any political process, aggressive tactics are an acceptable and effective solution. Community members perceive themselves to be the real “owners” of schools and believe

that a community or neighbourhood is diminishing in importance to the Province and the City when closure is imminent (Fredua-Kwateng, 2005). Therefore, community groups and residents clash with the school board and other governing officials that have been given the administrative authority. If these community members feel as though their opinion was marginalized in a closure situation, they will find ways to fight back (p. 3).

2.5.5 The “Intangibles”

Beyond the four themes that have been discussed, schools provide external services beyond education of a specific age range. While governments and private agencies attempt to provide adequate services and advocacy, the construction of non-governmental associations fill the gaps and promote the continued operation of existing institutions (Putnam, 1993). Community involvement, social capital and neighbourhood vitality are all impacted by the presence of a school (Downey, 2003; Witten et al., 2003; Fredua-Kwateng, 2005). The opportunity for social and political linking is an example of schools as a centre for civic engagement. Downey (2003), in a report to the Ontario Ministry of Education expands these principles to rural areas as well as urban neighbourhoods stating that schools serve as a centre of activities and an important component in the shaping of ‘community identity.’ Basu (2004a) also acknowledges the importance of civic facilities in addition to the many ways social capital is built in a school’s neighbourhood outside of classroom time. Therefore, the decision-making at a macro level does not adequately integrate the human component of the equation and does not represent the important functions of a school beyond educational activities during regular daytime hours.

The effects of school closures on the surrounding community are an area that is limited in study. One Canadian study found reduced socialization in neighbourhoods affected by a closure (Bushrod, 1999). In other studies, the negative impacts of underinvestment in ‘public goods’ have been linked to income inequality and the overall neighbourhood vitality (Lochner et al., 1999; Fredua-Kwarteng, 2005). In conjunction to these neighbourhood impacts, planning goals for inner cities including intensification, downtown revitalization, and the mixing of uses, are undermined by underinvestment in public goods such as schools (Ontario, 2012). If social capital and planning goals are a prerequisite for the betterment of communities, then the process of school closures must take into account the all-inclusive impacts on local neighbourhoods. In addition, the impact of closures on displaced students is a primary concern as negative effects on student achievement before and after closure have become apparent (Torre & Gwynne, 2009; Mayo, 2011).

2.5.6 Health and Environmental Costs

In addition to the question of costs-benefits and student success at larger, centralized schools, there is the matter of student, parent, and neighbourhood mental and physical health and how it relates to ecological footprint. Witten et al. (2001) links comprehensive neighbourhood health consequences with the removal of a school from a neighbourhood. Through focus groups with parents, their research explored the question of social cohesion and how it linked to the overall mental and physical health of a community. Parents of students forced to relocate to a different school upon closure found that the “disruption of school-based social networks” led to some informants losing

their social circles entirely – even nine months after relocation (Witten et al. 2001, p. 315).

Studies have demonstrated that urban sprawl is one of the causes of increased rates of obesity in North America (Zhao & Kaestner, 2010) while further research has correlated greater obesity rates in adolescents with sprawling urban environments due to increased dependency on auto trips to various destinations (Dunton et al., 2009).

Therefore, when a smaller school is closed, forcing students to commute farther to school, the negative health possibilities are well documented. While a criticism could be raised that students have other activities available to decrease the possibility of negative health effects of auto commuting, a UK study by Owen et al. (2012) explored the overall activity patterns of elementary students. Using an activity monitor, children were asked to wear the device for 7 days during waking hours and the data was then correlated to a questionnaire regarding the students commuting habits to school. The results indicated that students who did not regularly walk or bike to school presented decreased levels of physical activity outside of their regular commute. Put another way, students who do not commute to school by car or bus are overall more likely to have more physical activity outside of the daily commute than their auto travelling counterparts (Owen et al., 2012). One of the problems though is that more and more data suggests that most children do not live within a walkable distance of their school (Owen et al., 2012).

In an American report by Beaumont and Pianca (2002) for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the question of policy and school size is brought into the spotlight alongside the connection to student and neighbourhood overall health. Specifically, current policies and funding formula and school board exemptions from local planning

and zoning regulations all point to a favoritism of newer school construction over maintenance of older buildings (Beaumont & Pianca, 2002). Quite simply, the status quo at the time of this 2002 study was unacceptable – why is the same still true ten years later? A larger centralized school may provide cost-savings, but how does it affect external issues including the well being of students and the environmental impact of increased commuting?

2.5.7 Dual School Systems

One final consideration that is rare to find in education research is the challenge of support for the public school system. The decision of parents to abandon the public system for the perceived benefits of the private system continues to hamper attempts of public schools to attract more students. A wide pattern of dissatisfaction with the public school system across North America has pushed parents with means to move their children to the private system (Valencia, 1985). The unique context of Ontario introduces this complexity to the debate of school funding and allocation of resources. However, due to the limitations of this study to the policies and processes of Accommodation Review, this subject will have to be explored further in future research.

2.6 Planning Policies and Objectives

A Municipal Planning department receives its mandates and powers from Provincial legislation, in a similar form to a local school board. In Ontario, *The Planning Act* (1990) outlines the various powers given to a local municipal planning department. These powers include the creation of planning tools such as Official Plans, Zoning By-

laws, and various committees to provide expert advice to municipal policy-makers. Provincial Policy Statements (PPS) are another tool utilized by the Provincial government to demarcate the policies and processes of public consultation and government accountability to its community.

As was previously mentioned, a fundamental challenge exists between the objectives and mandates handed down to a local school board and the community planning objectives and goals put forward by municipalities. While schools are a cornerstone institution in the formation and resiliency of neighbourhoods and communities, the municipal representatives who are given a mandate to build strong communities have no formal say in the process of school closures or even Accommodation Review. In fact, there are no ways for a municipality to challenge a school board's decision in the Ontario context (Doern & Prince, 1989; Irwin, 2012).

Urban planners currently see a major transitions taking place in how we plan our communities. In the post-world-war era in North America, travel became more car-oriented and therefore an auto-oriented model of development became the norm (Levy, 2009; Filion & Bunting, 2010). Big-box malls, sprawling low-density development, and the migration away from the inner city are all hallmarks of this epoch. However, the long-term costs associated with this form of development are now the driving force for change in our community forms. Costs such as ecological damage, loss of social capital, and perverse subsidies and policies (Blais 2010) that were previously unaccounted for, are now recognized as the primary reasons for drastic changes in how we plan and how we live.

For these reasons new planning models moved out of the back-rooms of municipal government and introduced a more nuanced approach; recognizing the importance of community input and a local understanding of community issues (Irwin & Seasons, 2013). For planners to provide comprehensive goals and objectives for the provision of services, encourage public safety and health, and develop plans that account for economic and environmental objectives, community residents must be involved in the process (Levy, 2009). By encouraging real participation of the public, residents take ownership of public policy in the form of neighbourhood plans, transportation strategies, and strategic visions for their locale. This shift to a more inclusive and participatory process is arguably the status quo in any municipal planning department in Canada.

Collaborative planning, in conjunction with full-cost accounting of economic, environmental, and social consequences, addresses the fundamental challenge of planning: a rapidly changing society (Allmendinger, 2009). The unceasing pace of technological innovation along with the instantaneous nature of global connections and decision-making, policy-makers cannot allow out-dated legislation to govern present-day decisions, therefore planners actively engage professionals, experts, and community residents alike to address current issues.

When it comes to citizen participation, I would argue that urban planning sits in the mid-range of Arnstein's (1969) ladder (Figure 2) – especially in comparison to the School Board process. Planners have not achieved a perfected policy system, yet one of the arguments of this research is that school boards and education professionals could benefit from the expertise of planners and the ideology of collaborative policy creation and implementation. In fact, instances of mandated collaboration between municipalities

and local school boards have produced fruitful and promising interaction and end-results (Lees, Salvesen, & Shay, 2008) and communities facing more school closures strongly advocate for a more involved planning process with the municipality (Jones, 2002; Mayo, 2011).

2.7 In Closing

This study seeks to analyze the relevant policies and processes of a school board to further understand the cause of the range of community impacts of a closure. In addition, this research will consider whether the decision-making model surrounding the closure process could benefit from improved ties to the frameworks and expertise offered by urban planning professionals. Using the four main themes of Canadian school closures (Doern & Prince 1989) to analyze the collected data, this research will provide recommendations for the improvement of school board policy and process to best reflect the principles of community building and foster creative solutions to shifting demographics and changing neighbourhoods.

Chapter 3 - Methods

3.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the introduction to this research, this investigation seeks to address five main questions:

- What roles do school board and provincial policies play in the school closure process?
- How do these policies affect the pedagogical landscape?
- What is the impact of school closures on their respective communities?
- How do these educational governance methods compare to community planning policies?
- Can school board objectives be reconciled with community planning objectives?

Studies on the subject of school closures have focused on qualitative research strategies and have addressed this subject through interviews (Witten et al., 2003; Kearns et al., 2009; Irwin, 2012) and content analysis of key documents (Valencia, 1985; Bondi, 1987; Doern & Prince, 1989; Fredua-Kwateng, 2005). For the purposes of this research, a qualitative analysis through an online survey and key document analysis. This chapter will outline the rationale for this methodology, groundings in theoretical perspectives, its strengths and limitations, and the construction of the online survey.

3.2 Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods

In the field of academic research, there are three general categories for research design. The first is qualitative research. This is an approach for the exploration of individual meaning given to phenomena (Creswell, 2009). In other words, qualitative strategies allow the researcher to collect observations and ascribe interpretation based on general themes or trends. The ultimate goal of this research strategy is to see through the lens of research participants (Bryman, Bell & Teevan, 2012). The second approach is

quantitative research. This strategy focuses on relationships through the testing of measurable variables. It is the norm that this form of research utilizes variables to test for statistical significance through the process of testing and controls to produce replicable results (Creswell, 2009). Finally, the mixed methods approach is a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. This methodology has gained traction in research due to an increased strength of the results with both research strategies working together (Creswell, 2009).

The argument is made that quantitative research is grounded in data and therefore presents a neutral perspective that can be replicated in any context. On the other hand though, the argument for qualitative research asserts that to understand ‘meaning’ does not require measurable variables. In fact, proponents of qualitative research argue that quantitative data limits the comprehension of unique contextual circumstances (Palys & Atchison, 2008). This research does not seek to choose one side over the other though simply because researchers today champion the complimentary nature of both methodologies (Palys & Atchison, 2008; Creswell, 2009). Therefore, the initial goal of this research’s methodology was to use both qualitative and quantitative methods. However, the ultimate decision was made to focus on qualitative analysis due to a low response rate. A further explanation of the chosen research strategy and rationale is found in the following section.

3.3 Research Strategy

The study of accommodation review and school closures has fluctuated in importance over the past three decades. In the 1980s, declining birthrates and negative

economic conditions pushed many to explore the implications of school closures and the processes leading to such phenomena (Berger, 1983; Valencia, 1985; Bondi, 1987). However, the economic boom of the 1990s produced very little in the way of school closure discussion. It has only been in the wake of another economic crisis that the continued decline in enrolment and neoliberal ‘efficiency’ policies have brought about an increased awareness of this issue. While decades have past, the key issues still remain the same: enrolment and financial considerations, the philosophy of policy-makers, and the nature of community involvement (Doern & Prince, 1989; Fredua-Kwateng, 2005; Irwin, 2012). Therefore, it is the goal of this research to address a small portion of the complex processes including the creation of public policy, the delivery of education, and the effects of school closures and relocation.

Due to the nature of the data sought for this research, an online survey with both qualitative and quantitative components was deemed the most suitable and economical choice for collection. This method produces a snapshot of both elected and appointed public officials working in the realm of the delivery of the public good that is education. For the most part, the survey is qualitative in nature as quantitative questions are bookended by sections where respondents can qualify their answers.

The first challenge that we came up against was reaching statistical significance. Due to the conflict-ridden nature of the Accommodation Review process, it came to my attention that most school boards would not be willing to participate in the study. One of the school boards contacted for this survey responded that this research would “directly interfere” with their own assessment of the Accommodation Review process and therefore, they could “not support [my] research” (School Board Employee A, email

communication, November 13, 2012). Other school boards also declined to have their staff involved in the process and that they were “advised by [the] Director that the timing is not appropriate for [staff] to be participating in the survey” (School Board Employee B, email communication, January 23, 2013). In addition, upon completion of the results section of the paper, three of the individuals interviewed asked to remain anonymous. The reason for this is explained by the negative nature of Accommodation Review. In fact, one official who asked to remain anonymous cited a very significant falling out with another public official due to the nature of the process. There is a significant stigma around talking about School Board issues and Accommodation Review.

For every negative response though, there emerged individuals who were enthused to talk about Accommodation Review. Therefore, I decided to explore the answers provided through a qualitative lens. This method is justified by the fact that qualitative answers encourage a flexible and interpretive approach (Cresswell, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). For that reason, I conducted exploratory surveys and interviews on the perceptions of accommodation review from other professionals and elected officials that are relevant to the process. The qualitative lens was an appropriate method for this research due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the challenges faced in collecting data. Future research on the subject of school accommodation review will have to find alternative methods to achieve ‘insider’ status with school boards and policy-makers for the purpose of finding quantitative data. Ultimately though, the qualitative data successfully highlights key trends identified in the literature in addition to building a strong foundation for recommendations.

3.4 Policy creation and structure

Conceptually, a school board and a planning department follow a similar pattern for policy creation. Both are given power through Provincial legislation, specifically the Education Act (school board) and Planning Act (planning department) in the Province of Ontario. This legislation outlines the Provincial goals in the creation of these two organizations and therefore the school board and planning department may construct a vision unique to their

context. These visions, coupled with other specific Provincial legislation, inform the various official policies for governance. The focus of this study remains primarily on the question of policy and process in Accommodation

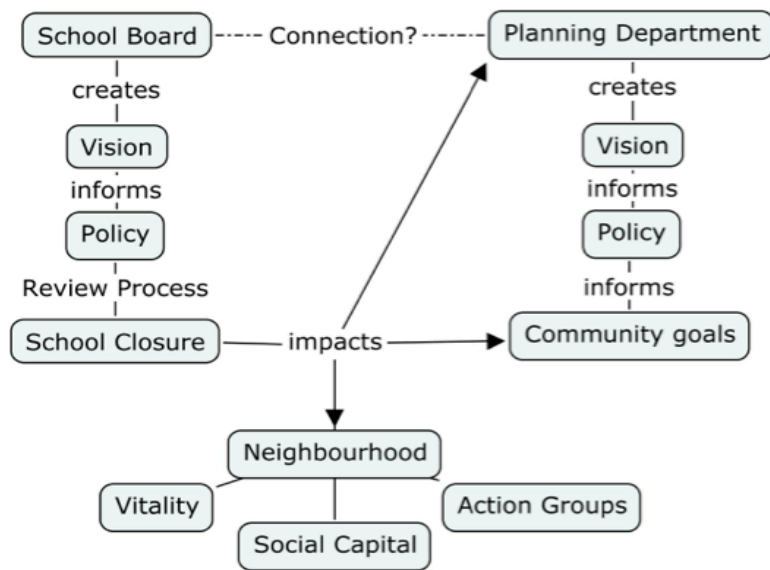


Figure 3 - Simplified model of decision-making process and impacts

Review. In Figure 3, a simplified model of the simultaneous inputs and outputs of a school board and a planning department presents the process in addition to the streams of impact of a closure. While the scope of this research will not exhaust these consequences, the model conceptualizes the interconnectedness of a school board decision to close an educational institution.

3.5 Surveys and Interviews

The main method utilized in this study of inner city school closures involved targeted surveys and interviews of key stakeholders. This sample included municipal councilors, municipal planners, school board trustees, school planners, and any other relevant experts. Municipal councilors and planners contribute professional expertise and further insight into municipal policies and documents relevant to local community building and the importance of institutions. School Board Trustees and planning staff contribute expertise in educational governance and further explain the visions behind important education policies.

These methods were carried out in two parts – a structured online survey and open-ended interviews. First, a set of structured questions was created in conjunction with the relevant literature and the University of Waterloo Office of Research Ethics. Then, this online survey was sent to all potential participants along with a letter of introduction (See appendix III) for the purpose of comparing responses. Upon completion of the online survey, respondents were given the option of taking part in structured interviews to gain further insight into their positions. This second part of the investigation process was meant to accommodate the opportunity to explore historical information and questions specific to the participant's profession and expertise. Due to the nature of this research in the comparison of two organizations (school boards and municipalities), an open-ended portion of the interview facilitated further comparison between municipal and school board policies. Structured interviews were audio recorded and transcribed after the interview. Participants were given the option to view the transcripts and clarify or remove any of their statements.

3.7 Benefits and limitations of online surveys

In the process of choosing a research framework, the questions of feasibility and response rates were the most important factors in the decision to incorporate an online questionnaire. Limited by the resources available and the amount of elected and appointed officials required for adequate data, this framework of data collection presented itself as the best possible option.

The advantage to this method is that I was able to explore the issue through the perspective of key stakeholders. The survey participants were encouraged to answer in a concise and efficient format that employs key words to capture a comprehensive perspective of the research issues. Online activity has becoming increasingly affordable and an excellent method for reaching a larger sample size, saving time, and saving on costs (Wright, 2005). In addition, the feature of online surveys that participants could take part at their own pace was advantageous. The sensitivity of the subject of closures – especially for school board trustees – would be addressed by the added anonymity that an online survey provides. Online surveys do not require email addresses or any other personal information therefore this medium gave my thesis the best chance of gaining participants that may have otherwise declined to be involved (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

There are also several disadvantages to the online survey method as outlined by Wright (2005) and Sue & Ritter (2012). First, there are some limitations in regards to sampling. To participate in the survey, the potential participants must decide that the research is worth their time. This means that we have limited our sample size simply because participants must volunteer to take part. Second, there is the issue of response

rate and survey abandonment. If a survey is too long or if the participants begin another task, they may abandon the survey and it may be left incomplete. Finally, online surveys are limited as a consequence of the absence of the interviewer. In an interview, I have the opportunity to delve deeper into the responses of participants, whereas an online survey only asks what has been developed ahead of time by myself, and is answered only by what the participant is willing to divulge.

To address these issues, the survey was constructed with multiple-choice answers with the available option to add further clarification or comments. In this way, participants were not pressured to provide long written answers, yet the option was available to them if they desired to clarify their response. In addition, the multiple choice answers considerably shortened the time it would take to finish the survey and would therefore decrease survey abandonment. When it comes to the issue of volunteer response rates, the survey and the accompanying letter were constructed to highlight the importance of this investigation and the benefits to those taking part and the greater benefits for public policy. After that, it is left in the hands of the respondents to take part.

3.8 Survey Construction

As outlined in Figure 4 below, survey questions were structured and grounded in the relevant school policy literature to address the research inquiries. When it came to the literature in conjunction with the research questions, seven categories were delineated for the creation of the survey. The work of Sue & Ritter (2012) is also utilized in the construction of both survey and interview questions. At this point, the pilot online survey was constructed to test the relevance and usefulness of these questions. Pilot surveys or

Research question	Survey Questions	Literature	What you want to know?
Why are schools important in a community?	What are the most important indicators of school success in a community?	Putnam, 1993 Witten et al. 2001 Basu 2004a Kearns et al. 2009	What do professionals, elected officials, and community members think are the most important roles?
Why is the closure process conflict ridden?	How is the work of a school board viewed in your community? How is the process of school accommodation review viewed in your community? Based on your answer to the previous question, why do you think this is the case?	Doern & Prince, 1989 Basu, 2004a Kearns et al. 2009	To establish the foundation for this research – is this process conflict-ridden by nature or in the way it is carried out in Ontario?
Who creates the policies?	When it comes to school accommodation review, who should create the governing policies for a region? What do you see is the key rationale of the ARC process?	Doern & Prince, 1989 Council of the Region of Niagara, 2012 Pal, 1987, 2006, 2010 Irwin, 2012	The literature will aid in the answer to the research question, however, what do community members think about who should be making these decisions?
Who puts the policy in place?	When it comes to school accommodation review, who should implement the governing policies?	Bondi, 1987 Basu, 2004b Pal, 1987, 2006, 2010	What do community members think about who should implement these policies?
What decision-making models are used?	How would you describe the accommodation review process in your community?	Valencia, 1985 Arnstein 1969 deLeon 1994	To explore the idea of how decisions are made during the ARC process
Why do they follow this model?	In your opinion, does this decision making model result in the best possible outcome for a community? In the accommodation review process, what factors, in your opinion, are most important? In the accommodation review process, what factors, in your opinion, are most important to policy makers?	Burns, 1984 Basu, 2004b Valencia, 1985 Andrews, 1974 Doern & Prince, 1989 Pal, 2006	To explore the comparison of the importance of schools and the key components to the current ARC decision making process
What can be done?	What do you see as the benefits (and challenges) of the Accommodation Review Process?	Council of the Region of Niagara, 2012 Irwin, 2012	Are changes necessary? What level of government needs to take responsibility for change?

Figure 4: Research Questions and Rationale

pretesting is an invaluable way to test the validity of collected data and other issues that may arise such as skipped questions (Sue & Ritter, 2012). The pilot survey was conducted with three individuals including a former city councilor and current community activist, a former ARC committee member, and a private planning consultant with experience in the school closure process.

Upon completion of the pilot survey, it was confirmed that the questions from the literature were useful and that respondents found the survey easy to follow with a good range of questions based on the topic. The use of the multiple choice answers and the Likert scale (Table 2,3) increased the speed in which a respondent could respond to the questions as opposed to open-ended questions that typically require more time and are typically skipped by online respondents (Sue & Ritter, 2012). The following tables provide examples of two questions asked on the survey.

In your opinion, how is the process of school accommodation review viewed in your community?					
Very Negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Very Positive	Do not know
Additional comments:					

Table 2: Sample Survey Question with Likert Scale

What level(s) of government or organization(s) should CREATE the policies of accommodation review (Rank by importance, 1 (most important) to 6 (least important))						
Ranking	1	2	3	4	5	6
The Province						
The Region						
The Local Municipality						
The Local School Board						
Planning Department						
Community Organizations						

Table 3: Sample Survey Question with Ranking

Survey anonymity was crucial for the reason of gaining respondents from all organizations involved. No personal identifiers were used in the online survey collection and respondents could request the project results without putting any identifiers (i.e. email address, contact information, community of residence) into the online survey database. When analyzing the results, the data was simply sorted based on generic job descriptions (i.e., elected school board official). This anonymity was specially designed to allow all of the individuals involved to speak freely on the topic of closures and accommodation review policy. In accordance with the University of Waterloo's Office of Research Ethics, all respondents were asked for authorization for the use of quotes from their qualitative responses.

3.9 Sample Population

As was mentioned previously, the sample population chosen to address the key research questions of school closures, accommodation review, and community planning included elected municipal officials, elected school board trustees, municipal planning staff, and school board planning staff. The communities of Kitchener-Waterloo, Hamilton, Halton Region, and the City of Toronto were chosen to conduct the survey based on two criteria:

- Proximity to the researcher for the feasibility of interview data collection
- Timeline for the meeting schedule of School Board Research Committees

As was discussed previously, this research was limited in scope based on geographical concerns. However, most importantly, early discussions with school boards revealed that to speak with some staff and trustees, the boards required an application to

their own research committees in addition to the UW Office of Research Ethics. Upon further research, the communities chosen in the sample corresponded directly to the school boards that had a research committee convening within the proposed research timeline. Once the school board research application moved forward in the proposed community, then planners and councilors from those communities could be contacted.

Potential respondents were identified by first compiling a list of all municipal councilors, board trustees, and potential planning participants in each community. Planners were chosen by contacting the local planning departments and requesting interested parties to contact myself for a link to the survey. Potential planners would have previous experience in the ARC process or would be involved in community or strategic long term planning at their municipality. Consideration was made for the diversity in unique board and municipal planning situations – however the results show substantial patterns emerging across municipal and regional boundaries.

Introductory emails with a link to the online survey were sent to 233 potential participants including 39 Municipal Planners, 114 Municipal Councilors, and 80 School Board Trustees. Of the six School Boards contacted, only one allowed the survey to be distributed to their planning staff.

3.10 Interviews

The strength of the open-ended interviews is the flexibility to incorporate questions that will directly engage the literature from the content analysis and integrate the stakeholders' perspectives on these documents. Conversely, the key informant interview methodology has three limitations. First, due to the sensitive nature of the

school closure process, a number of stakeholders may not adequately address my inquiries or decide not to participate in the research. The second limitation is the filter through which information is extracted. While participants will provide expertise on the questions of policy and process, answers will be filtered through personal perspectives – of both the interviewee and the interviewer. Furthermore, while the sample size will seek to incorporate many stakeholders, not all participants will contribute exemplary articulation of their own perspective. In this case, I may have to further explain their perspective and therefore risk the introduction of bias to the collected data.

Interviews were carried out over the months of December 2012 and January 2013. Participants identified themselves through the online survey process and were asked to expand on their answers from the survey (interview questions – Appendix V). Interviews were either recorded or transcribed based on the preference of the participant. Those that asked to be interviewed included 3 School Board Trustees and 3 Municipal Planners.

3.11 Methods for Data Analysis

Due to the mix of qualitative and quantitative data, analysis of the results had to be conducted using two different methods. In addition, because the data was collected from four different groups and had to be analyzed in those separate groups, statistical significance is not an option. However, through discussions with survey experts, it was decided that the results of the quantitative questions could be shown, with the caveat that they should not be viewed as statistically significant results. Rather, they should be viewed as exploratory in nature.

When it comes to qualitative data – from both the survey and interviews, coding is a methodology utilized to identify key patterns and themes within the data set. Coding is described as a method to identify meaningful passages in text with the purpose of constructing repetitive phrases or ideas (Taylor & Gibbs, 2010). This method aids in the collection and comparison of large patterns and ideas. While there is much promise for machine or automated coding (Crowston, Liu & Allen, 2010), time and resources may limit a researcher to manual coding (Basit, 2003). For the purposes of this project, manual coding is deemed as the best option.

The first step in the coding process is to analyze the principal ideas expressed by each of the six participants. The data was carefully read and recurring themes and issues presented by respondents were noted. A familiarity with the data and the process of conceptualizing the responses is an important step in analyzing qualitative results.

The second step in the coding process is to compare these emerging themes and concepts with those ideas presented in the accommodation review and school closure literature – with strong emphasis on the four themes presented in Doern & Prince (1989) including the school board’s response to changing demographics and the issues surrounding minimum enrolment numbers, challenges of financial considerations, the primary importance of pedagogical ideology, and the nature of community involvement in the whole process. In addition, other themes presented themselves including the Provincial funding formula and the characteristics of successful students.

Coded results are presented in the results section (Chapter 4). Specific quotes from the short answer section of the online survey and the interviews are utilized throughout the results and conclusions sections to support the findings of the survey and

the final recommendations of this project. These results will all draw back on the key research questions on how school closures and the Accommodation Review process is viewed in communities across Southwestern Ontario and how these processes are compared to community planning goals and objectives.

Chapter 4 – Results and Findings

4.1 Introduction

The foundation of this research can be distilled to the lack of discussion and literature on the subject of school closures – and specifically the accommodation review process in the Province of Ontario. Municipal officials – including planners – are charged with the designing of economically successful and socially vibrant communities, however when faced with the closing of a fundamental public good, municipalities have very little formal say in the policies or processes. A growing consensus of literature (Witten et al., 2003; Fredua-Kwarteng, 2005; Kerr, 2006; Mackenzie, 2007; People for Education, 2009; Kearns et al., 2009; Irwin, 2012; Seasons & Irwin, 2013) recommends that policy and process components such as citizen participation, financial efficiency, the school funding formula, and collaboration between municipal and school board players must be addressed. If comprehensive student success and neighbourhood vitality are the primary focus of school board and municipal planners, then the system itself contains inherent roadblocks on the way to these goals.

Therefore, my thesis has sought to build on this discussion by drawing attention to the policy, process, and stakeholders involved in Accommodation Review. This objective was distilled to 5 main research questions:

- What roles do school board and provincial policies play in the school closure process?
- How do these policies affect the pedagogical landscape?
- What is the impact of school closures on their respective communities?
- How do these educational governance methods compare to community planning policies?
- Can school board objectives be reconciled with community planning objectives?

Based on these questions, an online survey containing 19 questions was fully or partially completed by 50 participants from the chosen four communities of Waterloo Region, Halton Region, City of Hamilton, and the City of Toronto.

4.2 Survey Respondent Breakdown

Of the 233 possible participants, 50 respondents clicked on the link, while 39 fully completed the survey. Of those participants who responded, 15 indicated they were municipal planners, 11 indicated they were elected school board trustees, 11 indicated they were elected municipal officials, and 2 indicated they were school board planners. For the purposes of anonymity no other identifiers such as location or specific position were required from respondents.

Upon completion of the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to take part in a formal 20-30 minute interview to further explore the policies guiding the Accommodation Review process and the role of schools in their communities. Of the 50 respondents, 3 planners and 3 trustees requested to be interviewed.

To analyze the survey outcome, I have broken down the survey results by questions and then the three respondent groups. In addition, quotations from both the survey and interviews are used to augment and elaborate on the results. The purpose of this assessment is to explore trends and investigate qualitative results in reference to the original research questions. As was explored in the Methods chapter, the limited scope and response rate culminates in an exploratory survey. While discussion will include the mean of responses and response rates for the purpose of understanding preliminary trends, the data will and should not be utilized for quantitative analysis. This pilot

research is ultimately descriptive in nature. In addition, due to the very low response rate of School Board Planners, responses were coded with little exploration of the quantitative results save for a comparison to their elected school board colleagues.

4.2.1 Indicators of School Success

For the first survey question respondents were asked to rank seven indicators of school and student success. These indicators included academic success, neighbourhood vitality, efficient use of public funds, social belonging, healthy students, community building, and a range of academic programs (Doern & Prince, 1989; Putnam, 1993; Witten et al., 2001; Basu, 2004a; Kearns et al., 2009; Irwin, 2012). The ‘mean’ represented is the average response for each indicator. A lower number for the mean indicates a factor is more important to respondents.

4.2.1.1 Elected School Board Trustees

Based on the responses of 11 school board trustees, Table 4.1 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’ (6).

Table 4.1: Indicators of School Success – Elected School Board Trustees	
Indicators	Response Mean
Academic Success	2.55
Social Belonging	2.91
Healthy Students	3.45
Range of Programs Offered	3.64
Efficient use of Public Funds	5.00
Community Building	5.00
Neighbourhood Vitality	5.45

Trustee participants response trends indicate the importance of academic success and a student-centred measurement of success. Student based indicators such as

academics, belonging, and health ranked higher than community/neighbourhood based factors. In addition, factors including academic success, social belonging had greater importance while neighbourhood vitality had lesser importance. This ranking of importance corresponds with the values outlined by the Province's "Values and Factors Utilized in Accommodation Review" (Table 1: pg. 17) (Ministry of Education 2009a).

Anthony Piscitelli, Trustee at the Waterloo Catholic District School Board expands on the importance of student well-being:

[S]tudent achievement, is the number one goal, we need to have students that are successful, however as I am talking about that a lot of time people have defined that in terms of academic success, but I like to take a...balanced approach. So it isn't just the academic, it is also about the physical, it's looking at the spiritual, it is looking at what type of people are we graduating from our system. (A. Piscitelli, personal communication, November 15, 2012)

Some Trustees do place a strong emphasis on community building and the importance of social networks around their students. However, the main findings from this particular question was that, from the perspective of elected school board representatives, students are the first priority for their schools and the neighbourhoods surrounding. One participant in the online survey denoted that the success of students would inform the success of the whole community.

Schools where there is academic success and strong student engagement will enhance and support strong communities. (Elected School Board Official 2).

4.2.1.2 School Board Planners

School Board Planner participants generally agreed with Trustees when it comes to the importance of academic success, programs offered and healthy students. They also ranked community impact and neighbourhood vitality on the lower end of the scale.

4.2.1.3 Elected Municipal Officials

Based on the responses of 11 elected municipal officials, Table 4.2 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’ (6).

Indicators	Response Mean
Academic Success	2.80
Social Belonging	3.10
Community Building	3.70
Healthy Students	4.10
Range of Programs Offered	4.30
Neighbourhood Vitality	4.40
Efficient Use of Public Funds	5.60

Democratically elected municipal representatives did show agreement with their school board colleagues in regards to the importance of academic success and social belonging. However, just as trustees placed a strong emphasis on a student-centred ranking, municipal representatives comparatively emphasized community building and neighbourhood vitality as indicators of greater importance. This was also reflected in short answer responses:

Schools are social gathering places, as much as places of education. The diversity of programming offered to reflect the surrounding neighbourhood is key to success - and this will vary by community. (Elected Municipal Official 2)

Schools need to function as community centres as much as centres of learning. They should also provide life long learning possibilities. (Elected Municipal Official 4)

Offering great programs should ensure that students are successfully academically but it is also important to create a sense of community where students feel that they belong. (Elected Municipal Official 8)

Municipal Officials have drawn attention to a comprehensive mandate as elected officials – to oversee the big picture in their community. Student success is important, as long as the ultimate focus is the broader community. It appears as though municipal officials believe that schools are placed for the purpose of education and to provide a venue for further services and community focal points.

4.2.1.4 Municipal Planners

Based on the responses of 15 municipal planners, table 4.3 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’ (6).

Table 4.3: Indicators of School Success – Municipal Planners	
Indicators	Response Mean
Academic Success	2.73
Community Building	2.80
Neighbourhood Vitality	3.27
Healthy Students	3.47
Social Belonging	4.53
Range of Programs Offered	5.27
Efficient Use of Public Funds	5.93

Of all the groups of respondents, planners found the most agreement on the overall ranking of indicators. For example, most planners agreed that the “efficient use of public funds” should be least important on the scale compared to the other factors.

Planners agreed that academic success is important and likewise agreed with their elected municipal colleagues that community building deserved a higher ranking overall.

To planners, a school is not just the building. As Bill Janssen, Director of Strategic and Business Planning at the City of Hamilton, identifies:

I think from a municipal perspective, schools are the heart of the community; this is how people have an identity in community. Not just the students who go there, but students who have previously gone there or maybe even people in the neighbourhood. It becomes a focal point.

Hopefully, in many cases, it doesn't just become a structure or a piece of property, but it is something that is used after school and there are programs that build this social centre (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

School success, from a planner's perspective hinges on how students interact with their peers and their community. A Senior Planner at the City of Kitchener describes this interaction: "Student success comes down to how well they integrate in a community, whether they are good citizens, leaders, achievers, and of course, individually, that they have success academically" (Planner A, personal communication, January 10, 2013).

Why is it that planners place such a strong focus on the community? The answer lies in the *raison d'être* of most public sector planners – the planning of healthy, vibrant communities (Hodge & Gordon, 2008). Public Official A characterizes this point from a school perspective: "It is extremely important that we move towards healthier communities by creating functional nodes and destinations – schools are the most important destination for our kids" (Public Official A, personal communication, November 19, 2012). Bill Janssen also discussed this idea of how we plan our communities.

[F]rom a traditional planning perspective you would put [a school] in the centre of a neighbourhood and you would plan the rest of the neighbourhood around that school. You also create other institutional uses around it to enhance that focal point (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

To Public Official A and Janssen, a key question must be asked when addressing the policies and processes of school Accommodation Review – are we planning better and healthier communities?

On a final note for the first question, I would draw attention to the lesser importance of 'Efficient Use of Public Funds' for all participants. Municipal officials and

planners agreed strongly that this indicator was of lesser importance. While school board officials did not rank this indicator as low as their municipal counterparts, they did agree that this factor was less important than the literature review would suggest. This factor will be revisited further in the following questions.

4.2.2 – Community Perspectives on the School Board/Trustees

Survey Respondents were asked to express the community perspective of the work of the local school board. They were given a Likert scale ranging from very negative to very positive. Answers >3 are characterized as ‘positive’ and answers <3 are ‘negative’.

4.2.2.1 – Elected School Board Trustees

Based on the responses of 11 school board trustees, the response mean was 3.73 (neutral to somewhat positive). Elected Trustees agreed that their local community views the school board in a somewhat positive light. However, many Trustees commented on the fact that they do not see parents and residents interacting with the school board or trustees with any regularity. Therefore, they would say that the community does not think about the school board. One trustee aptly commented:

The community doesn't really relate to the school board directly, they tend to relate to the local schools. Most people are very happy with their local schools. (Elected Trustee 11)

Another Trustee observed in an interview that they did not “think that the community at large necessarily knows what a trustee is or does” (Trustee A, personal communication, December 14, 2012). When it comes to parents, the school board exists, but there is little connection to the organization unless a controversial issue arises. Trustee Piscitelli

remarked that parents “don’t really think about us [school board and trustees] unless they are upset about things. So they say ‘the school board is the one that says we can’t have chocolate bars in our schools’” (A. Piscitelli, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

The role of a Trustee is to democratically represent a municipality and its interests and to provide a link between parents, residents, students, and taxpayers with the school system governance (HWDSB, 2013). From the perspective of a Trustee, this link is seldom used. One respondent commented forthright that their “board has little connection with the community” (Elected Trustee 9). Others, though, commented on the greater complexity at play:

A big part of the role of a Trustee is – and some people do connect to the Trustee as a link to the school board – basically system navigation when a parent wants an issue addressed. There are some positive things too that people see from the school board but for the most part they [school board] are the ones that deal with complaints or people don’t think about it much at all. (A. Piscitelli, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

4.2.2.2 School Board Planners

School Board Planners agreed with the sentiment that most people do not think about their local board. From their perspective too, most complaints disappear once the process is completed.

Some people are upset but the majority of people don't complain. We've had some really positive results as the result of school closures and after the process is complete people calm down. Schools are also facilities that provide additional recreational space within a community and this is generally favoured (School Board Planner).

One participant noted that as a staff member of the school board, planners are in the

difficult position of having to engage the more aggressive reactions to the results of demographic changes and financial constraints.

As planners we are not part of the "good news" items around academic success and student achievement. We are always seen as the people who are "tearing" communities apart by boundary changes and school closures (School Board Planner).

4.2.2.3 Elected Municipal Officials

Based on the responses of 11 municipal officials, the response mean was 2.45 (neutral to somewhat negative). Municipal Officials agreed that their local community views the school board in a somewhat negative light.

Comments from the online survey placed a strong emphasis on the negative perspectives of the school board. In addition, most comments brought the subject back to the issue of closures as the main lens through which a school board is viewed. One official noted that the school board is viewed as "inflexible" (Municipal Official 3) due to financial parameters. Other respondents saw the "lack of tangible actions" and "barriers to public input" (Municipal Official 10) as deterrents to a positive perspective on the school board. The same respondent also commented that:

Trustees are not known in community, [and they are] seen as ineffectual. People look to the province for education information. (Municipal Official 10)

To this municipal official, most residents and parents see that the Province provides the funding for education and therefore are the avenue for addressing broader school issues. The local board is irrelevant to them. Another comment expands on the perceived challenges with the local school board:

Lack of accountability to the community; sense that resident's views are tolerated (barely) but have no impact on final decisions. [E]lected trustees have little power to speak out on behalf of their constituents when they have a different perspective than the board; [there is an] unwillingness to engage difficult conversations in a constructive public forum. (Municipal Official 1)

On the whole, from the perspective of a municipal official, school boards have not adequately provided the link between taxpayers and the education system. As one respondent commented “there have been a number of issues that school boards have fallen short [when] connecting to parents and families” (Municipal Official 8).

While School Board Trustees may see the work of the School Board as a higher rung on the public participation ladder (Arnstein 1969, Figure 2), Municipal representatives argue that based on their experiences, the lower rungs of the ladder (very little citizen empowerment and participation) would best describe the process. The problem we have uncovered is that the literature tends to agree that citizens wish to be involved (O'Connor & Jose, 2011; Irwin & Seasons ,2013). Therefore, while Trustees and School Board employees may believe that the public seldom wishes to be involved, it appears that citizens do express their frustration and wishes to have greater involvement. The only response to this missed connection is that there must be other factors and barriers in play.

4.2.2.4 Municipal Planners

Based on the responses of 15 municipal officials, the response mean was 2.62 (neutral to somewhat negative). Municipal planners are in agreement that their local community views the school board in a somewhat negative light.

Comparable to their counterparts on regional and municipal councils, municipal

planners tend to agree that school boards are not typically thought of in their community. In addition, planners noted that any coverage of the school board appears to be negative.

School boards are often not visible to the community until some action is taken that affects the community (positively or negatively). All too often the information presented is to address a problem or to change something that the community does not see as positive. (eg close a school, sell off land, eliminated programs) (Municipal Planner 4)

[M]ost of the media coverage of school board issues is related to controversial topics. (closures, violence in schools, test scores etc.) (Municipal Planner 11)

While it is clear that local municipalities see a large amount of negativity surrounding a school board – in large part due to Accommodation Review – there may also be another factor in the perception of this organization. In an interview with Hamilton planner Bill Janssen, a very important point was made regarding the division of powers at a local level.

It is very difficult for communities to determine the difference in roles and responsibilities of various governmental organizations. They just see that it is a government property. So they have a real difficult time understanding why a school has to be closed, why another government agency has to buy it to keep it when it is already in community hands. (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013)

Members of a community do not necessarily stay informed with all levels of government – especially when there are representatives at the same level for different mandates (education and municipal affairs) that share many of the same goals and responsibilities (provision of public goods and community planning). We know that better communities and better citizen empowerment takes place when the community can take part in the process (Sanoff, 2000), so why are residents so disenchanted by the School Board participation processes?

4.2.3 Community Perspective on Accommodation Review

Similarly to the previous question, survey respondents were asked to express the community perspective of the process of Accommodation Review. They were given a Likert scale ranging from very negative to very positive. Answers >3 are characterized as 'positive' and answers < 3 are 'negative'.

4.2.3.1 Elected School Board Trustees

Based on the responses of 11 school board trustees, the response mean was 3.00 (neutral). Elected Trustees agreed that their local community views the process of Accommodation Review as equally negative and positive. An equivalent number of trustees chose the answer "somewhat positive" and the answer "somewhat negative". It can be argued that responses are directly connected to recent Trustee experiences of Accommodation Review.

Those who responded that their community has a negative perspective of Accommodation Review described the extended and challenging nature. The process is "never easy," commented Elected Trustee 7. Other respondents shared this sentiment:

A very long, protracted accommodation review process, complete with legal challenges [was] divisive for the community [and was] not handled well. (Elected Trustee 1)

The reason for an [Accommodation Review] is to consider school closures, which are difficult for communities to accept. (Elected Trustee 4)

Individuals who have participated in an accommodation review seem to be unhappy about it. I don't feel like this is restricted to individuals who've "lost" and had to move schools, but others seem unhappy too as the process is very stressful. (Elected Trustee 11)

Trustee A describes the problem as an issue of change: “people automatically and often put up a resistance to change of any kind - change is a scary thing when you are used to the status quo” (Trustee A, personal communication, December 14, 2012). To community residents, an Accommodation Review always results in a closed school. However, “nobody wants their local school to close” (Elected Trustee 2).

In spite of this perspective, a handful of Trustees pointed out that closure is not the only outcome of the process. In the experience of Trustee A:

[W]e did not automatically close a school in the AR process. Closure is not always the outcome. We need to be clear about this fact. The AR is an opportunity to have a conversation with a community that could perhaps be uncomfortable, but it does not always end in closure. (Trustee A, personal communication, December 14, 2012).

Overall, a general trend has emerged from the Trustee perspective. Yes, the Accommodation Review process can be challenging, but it does not always end in closure and in many instances, according to respondents, it is a positive exercise for the community.

Our board recently expanded the [Accommodation Review] process to provide more timely information to stakeholders, and seek more public input. I believe this has been seen as positive. Any school closure, while necessary financially, and arguably better pedagogically, is very difficult for the community that is impacted. (Elected Trustee 9)

In a conversation with a Trustee (Trustee B) at a larger municipality, the complexity of Accommodation Review was addressed from a larger city perspective. On the one hand, she had experienced Reviews where the community had significant input into a challenging issue. On the other hand, she had experienced Reviews where visceral reactions overwhelmed the process.

Accommodation Review is viewed very differently in different parts of the community. Those areas where they have had experiences of working together and achieving their new schools...people have a much less adversarial or political view of the process. This is because they have seen that they get something out of it. They get new schools – change comes and it is positive. There are communities...that are bound and determined that they have an absolute right to have a high school – even though the numbers are small. They do not see themselves are part of the amalgamated municipality and they only see themselves are part of the smaller former municipalities. So then any changes that are suggested are going to be met with huge amount of opposition...but by no means is there one view in the community of the school closure process (Trustee B, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

This kind of municipal autonomy is directly related to the amalgamation of municipalities and school boards under the Harris government. Regardless of demographic changes and financial pressures, some communities are simply hard-pressed to engage the school board without aggressive and antagonistic measures.

[I]t is our experience that these residents are very antagonistic to the fact that this is now one board and they are not part of a small municipality. So they see any changes to their schools as part of the “big brother” taking over – they feel they have lost their autonomy as a small municipality and they are now part of the larger municipality. That very much colours their view of a school closure process...the [Accommodation Review] process is a worthwhile one, although in some instances it goes off the rails (Trustee B, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

Nevertheless, while individual communities may create unexpected challenges for the process, another difficulty of Accommodation Review lies in the guiding policies. This challenge will be discussed further in the following survey questions.

4.2.3.2 School Board Planners

Overall, the Accommodation Review is polarizing and School Board staff will find themselves in the middle of those who find the process well organized and those

who find the process enigmatic.

Some people hate [Accommodation Review,] but these are typically the people that would hate any process. Some people really like our process and find it comprehensive. We have been very successful in our review process having had no appeals and minimal delegations (School Board Planner)

The process is generally appreciated - opportunity to voice concerns, however, outcomes are not always appreciated. Some can make the process work for them, whereas others cannot. The process is ultimately very political - Trustees make the political decision in the end (School Board Planner).

4.2.3.3 Elected Municipal Officials

Based on the responses of 9 elected municipal officials (2 skipped the question), the response mean was 2.11 (somewhat negative to very negative). Elected Municipal Officials agreed that their local community views the process of Accommodation Review as an overall negative experience.

From the perspective of elected municipal representatives, Accommodation Review is divisive. It divides neighbourhoods against one another to save their local school and it further divides urban and rural areas – especially for larger boards with vast catchment areas.

[Accommodation Review] pits neighbourhoods against each other - have and have-nots. Also creates friction between [French Immersion] and English track programs, is often perceived to favour [French Immersion Schools] over creating neighbourhood-based school communities (Municipal Official 5).

I have seen [accommodation review process] split entire communities into two separate schools and dividing connections that children and families have built (Municipal Official 7).

[Our catchment area] is too large and a [there is a] perceived rift between rural and urban needs. Accommodation reviews often result in school

communities being pitted against one another to "save" their school or programs (Municipal Official 8).

In contrast to the position of surveyed Trustees, municipal officials see the process as an undeniably negative bureaucratic process. Hamilton Planner Bill Janssen explains one possibility for this reaction:

The politicians get very bitter towards the school board because they take a lot of the flak. The [local] politicians take the flak for a school board decision. Although a trustee may get some pushback, I think it is the local politicians that get a lot of pushback and pressure from the community to find a way to keep the lands and government ownership of the school (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

According to Janssen, community residents take their frustration to their municipal representatives – even if the decision does not fall upon their local councilor's authority. Just as was addressed in the first question, residents do not necessarily know or understand the division of responsibilities. They view all governing organizations as linked. As this research continues to examine, we find that this is not the case when it comes to educational governance and local government.

Another issue raised by Municipal Officials is the idea that Accommodation Review is not an exercise in public consultation. Rather, it is a government-mandated process for "pre-determined conclusions" (Municipal Official 9).

Residents assume it [Accommodation Review] is simply an exercise to justify a school closure in their neighborhood; assume decisions have already been made - that the momentum is in place and outcomes have more or less been determined, and the public review is simply an ineffective dog and pony show to tell residents what will be, rather than ask what they think (Municipal Official 2).

The perceptions of a process that has pre-determined outcomes are confirmed by the literature that describes the push for government efficiency over the public good

(Stein, 2001; Witten et al., 2003; Kerr, 2006; Irwin, 2012). Municipal Officials see the need for greater justice and fairness in the process, yet these objectives are left behind and are replaced by systematic streamlining of processes (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2005).

In response to the idea of pre-determined conclusions, Trustee B defends the process as a worthwhile venture when conducted appropriately:

The sort of complaints of the process are ‘it’s really just window dressing, we’re not going to have any input, what we say is not going to make any difference,’ but in fact, where communities think about their kids and their needs, they can make a significant difference and actually change the direction of the where the recommendations go. But the [Accommodation Review] committee is in a consultative, advisory role, and is not making the final decision. I can’t imagine a process where you don’t have input. However difficult this process is, we can’t have a process without the opportunity to hear from people and hear what the community sees (Trustee B, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

One survey participant did indicate that the media coverage of Accommodation Reviews is a determining factor for the community mindset moving forward. To this official, the “media often reports the rifts and challenges, not the success and benefits” of the process (Municipal Official 9).

4.2.3.4 Municipal Planners

Based on the responses of 14 elected municipal officials (1 skipped the question), the response mean was 1.93 (very negative to somewhat negative). Elected Municipal Officials are in agreement that their local community views the process of Accommodation Review as a strongly negative experience.

Overall, most planners cite similar examples as their municipal counterparts. They mention the frustration of community members due to the nature of the process and the lack of adequate (from the community perspective) consultation.

[It is] Difficult to engage in the process, and [any] engagement is not well reflected in the product of the [Accommodation Review Committee] process (Municipal Planner 4).

Any school closure will be viewed in a negative way. Complaints about the process include lack of transparency [and] poor consultation (Municipal Planner 6).

There is a sense in our community that the review process is token[ism] - as it relates to...public consultation (Municipal Planner 9).

I think the process is perceived as a sort of winner and loser outcome too – once community gets to keep their school open and another has theirs closed (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

A Planner from the City of Kitchener (Planner A) directs attention to a principal factor for the difficulties of the consultation process and the perceived challenges of community residents in having input:

[T]he process is viewed as being largely negative – in the sense that it seems that the underlying main point is dollars and cents. I get it, it is obviously a very important part of decision-making, but for a school board, if something is not financially viable enough, then it should be closed regardless of the importance to the community or the neighbourhood that it is in (Planner A, personal communication, January 10, 2013).

Financial considerations are an important factor when it comes to the provision of education and the division of resources. Unfortunately, many outsiders see the process as mainly governed by financial constraints, rather than other important factors when considering the development of early education (Fredua-Kwateng, 2005). Planners especially identify the question of public resources and Provincial growth management legislation.

[The] perception is that the last review was not done in a transparent manner. Criteria were not made public, at least at the time that the decisions were made. People felt they did not have an opportunity to participate in the process and the criteria were primarily financial and

didn't take other provincial policy such as planned intensification, walkability, [and] complete communities into account (Municipal Planner 13).

[School closure] is seen [to the community] as a present day "current" solution and not a forward thinking solution recognizing the gentrification of neighbourhoods. School lands are a finite resource and should be preserved so that they are available in the future when population densities warrant it use (Municipal Planner 1).

[T]here are concerns about the long term use of the property and pressures on the City to purchase the properties for long term community use (Municipal Planner 14).

Trustee Piscitelli openly spoke about the issue of funding and the finances of local school boards. For a Trustee, it can appear that there is very little flexibility in the process because of the funding formula that comes from legislation from the 1990s.

It is not necessarily the Accommodation Review policies that are driving things – it is really the rules in regards to funding. Right now, you will see boards across the province closing small schools. They are going to be doing that because there are decisions that have been made around this optimum number for the size of a school – about 450 students. If you are below that significantly, there is a substantial cost to running that school. There are some other steps that the province has talked about taking out of the last budget that will penalize schools even more for being outside of that number. There is some real pressure on us to make sure that small schools just don't exist. (A. Piscitelli, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Municipal planners have found an important point. The negative experience of community consultation, the process that appears to be over before it starts, and the aggressive tactics of community members to stop closures all point to an outdated funding formula that handcuffs the local school board to a fixed set of options.

ARC is so locked into the funding formula that they pit communities against each other – whereas two schools need to be consolidated and one community will be the loser. This is irresponsible from a public governance perspective. The process leaves much to be desired. I have empathy for the school boards because of the funding formula. (Public Official A, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

With the financial question becoming one of the most influential factors, even unique school programs for underprivileged youth or the relocation of an important school board building become symbols for an unfair process to the local community. When finances become the ultimate factor, other important, and typically social, issues become secondary.

[There] resentment about the handling of the latest accommodation review process, both from a city/community building process, community consultation, and transparency perspective. One large issue was the [site placement] of a new school board building. A historic building in the downtown has been torn down and a new school board headquarters is being built in the suburbs. This was not appreciated by urbanists and community activists...Further, many community based schools are closing, with students who could previously walked to school now having to bus. People are not happy about the step backwards in regards to walkable neighbourhoods, healthy children, and the community building function of schools (Municipal Planner 13).

Currently, the only criteria [are the] number of students and the need to close schools to build other ones. That pits neighbourhoods against neighbourhoods (Municipal Official 2).

The financial problem persists across the Province. The work of Mackenzie (2007) emphasizes the problematic nature of the 'one size fits all' funding formula while other authors criticize this methodology of funding as primarily focused on fiscal efficiency rather than the value of education beyond financial assets (Witten et al., 2003). In a discussion regarding the Accommodation Review of two schools in a small community recently amalgamated into the larger municipality, Trustee B described the provision of academic problems and how they related directly to the size of the school.

The long-term enrolment figures showed that there is no need for two high schools in this small municipality. One of the high schools is currently underutilized. The AR showed that one of the schools would get as low as seven hundred students. Once you are below one thousand students for a high school you start to get into difficulties as far as what you can offer.

When you have one thousand students you can start to offer a whole range of academic programs. If you get to be around seven hundred, then you are in to things like the academic math program is offered only once every three semesters (Trustee B, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

For School Board Trustees, the entire scenario is a dilemma on the road to providing top-notch education for their students. To provide special programs, the funding must be in place. For the funding to be in place, a certain number of students must be achieved. For the community, the current funding model is a “myopic approach” for the provision of a public good. (Public Official A, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

4.2.4 – The Creation of Accommodation Review Policy

In the next portion of the survey, participants were asked to rank six different levels of government and organizations based on where they should lie for importance in the policy creation process. This question was based on their personal ideal scenario for policy creation. According to respondents, organizations ranked higher (1) are more important to policy formation while organizations ranked lower (6) are less important. The organizations provided included The Province, The Region, The Local Municipality, The Local School Board, The Local Planning Department, and Community Organizations. The purpose of this question was to explore whether respondents agreed with the current division of powers in regards to Accommodation Review policies.

4.2.4.1 – Elected School Board Trustees

Based on the responses of 11 School Board Trustees, Table 4.4 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’ (6).

Organizations	Response Mean
The School Board	1.64
The Region	3.64
The Province	3.64
The Municipality	3.73
The Planning Department	3.73
Community Organizations	4.64

Trustee participants placed an emphasis on the role of the School Board when it comes to policy creation in the Accommodation Review Process. However, many trustees were split over the importance of other levels of government in their ideal order of importance. For example, respondents ranked ‘The Province’ at the highest importance while an equivalent number of their colleagues ranked it at the lowest importance. Finally, Trustees placed less emphasis on the role of ‘Community Organizations’ in the policy creation process. One possible reason for this outcome could be the results of the previously mentioned challenges of public consultation.

Those Trustees that placed ‘the Province’ as an important organization in the creation of Accommodation Review policies described the multi-governmental approach as a benefit for local communities.

The template for [Accommodation Review’s] should come from the Province for consistency and then Boards can then customize them to their local needs (Elected Trustee 6).

[The] broad general principles regarding school closures should be established by our elected provincial [representatives]. School board trustees should develop policies based on these principles with staff and community input (Elected Trustee 9).

One point that also emerged from the respondents was a perceived disconnect between municipalities and local school boards. One trustee remarked that there was a

“complete disconnect presently in planning [for schools].” While municipalities create visions and plans to encourage growth areas, a school board then is asked to provide education in these new areas “even if many schools are empty elsewhere. Planning for schools has to be seen in terms of providing equity across a district of programming opportunities for students” (Elected Trustee 5). To this Trustee, the work of planners undermines and actually contributes to the closing of local schools.

At an Ontario legislative level, a school board and a municipality are two separate entities. They each are created and given power through separate Provincial legislations (The Education Act and The Planning Act). Currently, there is no formalized connection between the two organizations other than Provincial recommendations for “local entities” to work with the school board for “sustainable partnerships.”

The objective of improving support for students while managing declining enrolment requires long-term enrolment, staffing and capital planning; consultation; and the engagement of co-terminous school boards and local entities that are candidates for forming effective, sustainable partnerships (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009b).

With no formalized connection and very little in the provincial language for encouraging partnerships, the dichotomy of municipal and school board policies is perpetuated. At the same time, the literature encourages further work in cooperation to these two vital organizations in the provision of public goods (Jones 2002, Lees, Salvesen & Shay 2008, Mayo 2011).

4.2.4.2 School Board Planners

For those School Board Planners who responded to this question, the question of policy creation should fall only to the local school board. This was underlined by the respondent’s assertion that municipalities have no reason to be involved in the process.

Since the municipality, region and community organizations contribute no funding for schools, they should not be involved in establishing policies. The Province and the Board will have to work within the context of the community planning process (Official Plans, Community Plans, etc.); however, these are the only policies that they should be establishing, not education-related policies (School Board Planner).

The region and municipalities should have no involvement in creating accommodation review policies because they have no understanding of the education system. Community organizations should also not have input into this process (School Board Planner).

The following responses beg the question of whether School Board Planners understand why municipalities would want to be involved in the process. Due to the comprehensive impact of public institutions, one would think that School Boards and Municipalities would understand why cooperation would be necessary. Unfortunately, it appears as though those School Board Planners that responded to this research lack an understanding of the importance of the co-dependent nature of School Boards and Municipalities (Jones 2002; Lees, Salvesen, & Shay, 2008; Mayo, 2011; Irwin, 2012; Irwin & Seasons, 2013).

4.2.4.3 – Elected Municipal Officials

Based on the responses of 10 Municipal Officials (1 skipped question), Table 4.5 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ to ‘less important’.

Table 4.5: Policy Creation – Elected Municipal Officials	
Organizations	Response Mean
The School Board	1.80
The Municipality	2.60
The Planning Department	3.30
Community Organizations	3.70
The Region	4.80
The Province	4.80

The importance of various organizations in the policy creation process shifts quite substantially for Elected Municipal Officials in comparison to School Board Trustees. While Municipal Officials tend to agree that the local school board should have the ultimate say in policy creation, a strong emphasis on the importance of local governments and planners also appears in the results.

In addition, municipal participants stressed the value of community participation in the process. Officials commented that:

Residents in a community are best positioned to balance the needs of students and should be at the forefront of determining appropriate criteria. (Municipal Official 2).

The School board must work in cooperation with school councils and parent groups to create positive approaches to school accommodation [reviews] (Municipal Official 8).

The emphasis for locally Elected Municipal Officials is the value of local input. While there is valid criticism for the current state of Accommodation Review public consultation (Irwin, 2012; Seasons & Irwin, 2013), the local community needs a platform for contributing to the discussion of school resources.

On a final note, one respondent raised the question of linkages between the school board and the local municipality. According to this Official, “the School Board and municipality should work more closely, to identify needs and trends and future development area needs” (Municipal Official 7).

4.2.4.4 Municipal Planners

Based on the responses of 15 Municipal Planners, Table 4.6 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’ (6).

Table 4.6: Policy Creation – Municipal Planners	
Organizations	Response Mean
The School Board	1.87
The Municipality	2.87
The Province	3.60
The Region	3.93
The Planning Department	4.07
Community Organizations	4.67

Similar to other respondents, local planners agreed strongly that the School Board should be the first stop for the creation of Accommodation Review policies. In addition, they placed an emphasis on the importance of local municipalities in the process, followed by the Provincial and Regional governments; however, similarly to school board trustees, there was disagreement for the ranking of ‘the Province’. An equal amount of respondents placed it at the top of the scale as those that placed it at the bottom. In contrast to their municipal counterparts, planners did not place themselves highly on the scale of importance and they also positioned ‘community organizations’ on the lower end of the scale.

Those planners that placed a higher importance on the Province commented that the Province should have the overall structure of these processes constructed.

As this is tied to Provincial Government financing and funding requirements, the Provincial role is the most important and influential agency, far above the potential role of other agencies (Municipal Planner 15).

However, while the Province may have an important role, inconsistencies in overall Provincial policy need to be addressed.

I think the policies should be provincial, perhaps taking into account regional and municipal challenges and differences, but based on a consistent provincial approach to policy. Right now two ministries set land use planning policy and the Minister of Education policies are contradictory to those ministries (Municipal Planner 14).

This planner is referring to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and the Ministry of Community and Social Services as the governing policy-makers for land-use planning policy. Unfortunately, while schools are intrinsically tied to neighbourhood impact and community vitality, the Ministry of Education's policies end up contradicting Provincial objectives such as smart growth and intensification (Ontario, 2006).

Schools are a community resource that needs to be designed and maintained to address community needs. Provincial budgeting should not require the sale of school buildings or lands to finance future growth or rehabilitation. The inter-relation of school lands and the community needs identified through school planning and municipal planning is important to retain. School lands often contribute to the common public space in a neighbourhood (Municipal Planner 4).

The region has a growth management plan [informed by Provincial policy] and I believe that accommodation review should be integrated with this planning so that way we are doing what is best for the community overall and tying the pieces together rather than fragmenting the community planning (Municipal Planner 10).

The alleged fragmentation of community planning is a direct result of outdated funding formulas and a public consultation process that pits communities against one another. In the City of London, Ontario, Lorne Avenue Public School contained regular programs during the day in addition to English as a Second Language Programs, day care, and extra-curricular programs. Yet, according to a Public Official at the City of London, the provincial policies and funding formula "only saw the utilization rate for regular hours...[this is] strict criteria that creates blinders, forcing school boards to play a black and white numbers game" (Public Official A, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

One reason for the range of responses from trustees, officials, and planners alike is this challenge of re-inventing the current delivery of academic programs and physical

school building. The current process lacks adaptability for local community solutions that are grounded in unique circumstances. When an organization's primary purpose is to provide educational programs but is caught in cost-benefit analysis of property rather than of various academic programs and community impact, something is misplaced:

The school boards are subject to Provincial requirements so they don't have a whole lot flexibility in a closure situation. I think that the main function of the school board is to deliver academic programs so the whole idea of maintaining and keeping a building is probably a little more of an offshoot of their primary responsibilities (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

An example of this need for flexibility is exemplified by the story of Central Elementary School in the City of Hamilton – a building that was built in 1853.

Years ago, [Central Elementary] had a dropping enrolment so low that the school was in danger of closing. What the school board did, around the 1980s, is they leased the top floor of the school to an insurance agency [temporarily]. [N]ow the building is fully occupied by the school because the numbers have gone up again. At that time, they had the flexibility to do that, to be able to use empty space, get some income, and change it back...If there was more money and more flexibility in the system, the school board could probably operate in a much different manner (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

A flexible and context-based approach is lacking from the experience of many authors in regards to the provision of educational resources (Valencia, 1985; Doern & Prince, 1989; Stein, 2001; Witten et al., 2003; Roberts, 2004; Fredua-Kwateng, 2005; Kerr, 2006; Mackenzie, 2007; Irwin & Seasons, 2013). The culture of efficiency does not adequately address the concerns the local community and removes community resources from the picture.

4.2.5 The Implementation of Accommodation Review Policy

Participants were also asked to rank six different levels of government and

organizations based on where they should lie for importance in the policy implementation process. This question was based on their personal ideal scenario the implementation of government policies and directives. According to respondents, organizations ranked higher (1) are more important to policy fulfillment while organizations ranked lower (6) are less important. The organizations provided included The Province, The Region, The Local Municipality, The Local School Board, The Local Planning Department, and Community Organizations. The purpose of this question was to explore whether respondents agreed with the current division of powers in regards to the Accommodation Review process.

4.2.5.1 – Elected School Board Trustees

Based on the responses of 11 School Board Trustees, Table 4.7 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’ (6).

Table 4.7: Policy Implementation – Elected School Board Trustees	
Organizations	Response Mean
The School Board	1.45
The Municipality	3.55
The Region	3.64
The Planning Department	3.82
The Province	4.00
Community Organizations	4.55

Through the analysis of responses to this particular question, responses from all four categories of participants told a similar story. First, the school board should be the primary agency in policy implementation in conjunction with local government entities (Municipal and Regional governments). Regardless of the funding formula issues, the response trend is that implementation should be governed by local government organizations.

The Board should implement with funding from the Province for capital. The Municipality then needs to coordinate the ARC decisions with its planners (Elected Trustee 4).

4.2.5.2 – School Board Planners

For participant school board planners, one important point was addressed by their response. In the current policy climate, other organizations outside of the school board do not have the ability to implement Accommodation Review policies.

Only the school board should be implementing the policies, as they do not relate to any other organizations. There is no possible way that anyone other than the school board COULD [*sic*] implement an accommodation review policy (School Board Planner).

Therefore, Provincial policy directives (and mis-directives), and the relationship of municipalities to school boards becomes clearer, a question must be raised: Although other municipal governments and community organizations do not have a direct or formal link to the Accommodation Review Process, should the current climate of consequences lead policy-makers and planners to push for greater collaboration? Perhaps this School Board Planner’s emphasis on the word “could” is referencing the fact that no other organization has the explicit ability or expertise to deal with Education policy. Regardless, this comment directly summarizes the limitations of neo-liberal policies of efficiency (Stein, 2001; Witten et al., 2003; Irwin 2012). . If other organizations cannot take part in the process that directly influences their own public resources, how can we expect *not* to have hostile Accommodation Reviews?

4.2.5.3 – Elected Municipal Officials

Based on the responses of 10 Municipal Officials (1 skipped question), Table 4.8 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’

(6).

Organizations	Response Mean
The School Board	1.40
The Municipality	2.70
The Planning Department	3.50
The Region	3.90
The Province	4.40
Community Organizations	5.10

There is a strong belief in the responses of all participants that greater collaboration is a necessary step between school boards and local municipalities. A “partnership between school boards and municipalities” is a necessity for the overall structure of accommodation review and long-term planning (Municipal Official 9).

4.2.5.4 – Municipal Planners

Based on the responses of 15 Municipal Planners, Table 4.9 displays the mean of each indicator in order from ‘more important’ (1) to ‘less important’ (6).

Organizations	Response Mean
The School Board	1.53
The Municipality	2.87
The Province	3.00
The Planning Department	4.07
The Region	4.33
Community Organizations	5.20

Again, to all stakeholders in the Accommodation Review process, the direction of the review is ultimately shaped by Provincial policy. There is not only a division between those administrators of Reviews (municipalities and school boards), but there is a division between policy-makers in various Provincial Ministries.

It is the provincial policies and requirements that direct accommodation review. Those policies need to be consistent across ministries or the other organizations almost don't matter (Municipal Planner 14).

4.2.6 The Factors Influencing the Accommodation Review Process

Participants were also asked two related questions regarding the factors that influence the Accommodation Review Process. First, participants were asked to choose the factors that they perceived to *currently* influence the Accommodation Review process to the greatest extent. This question is based on their own perception of what components of the Accommodation Review cost-benefit analysis are currently most important in the process. Second, they were asked to choose the factors that they thought *should* influence the Accommodation Review process. The purpose of this second question was to analyze how they would change the priorities of the Review. Participants could choose from a list including Demographic Changes, Enrolment Numbers, Financial Resiliency, School Size, Programs Offered, Community/Neighbourhood Impact, Collaboration with All Stakeholders, and Other Factors. The purpose of this question was to explore whether respondents found agreement with the importance of particular factors over others.

4.2.6.1 – Elected School Board Trustees

Based on the responses of 11 School Board Trustees, Tables 4.10 and 4.11 display the percentage and the count of respondents choosing each factor. Participants could also add their own factors in the “other” column.

Table 4.10: Current Perception of Accommodation Review Factors– Elected School Board Trustees	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Enrolment Numbers	81.8% (9)
School Size	54.5% (6)
Demographic Changes	45.5% (5)
Financial Resiliency	45.5% (5)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	45.5% (5)
Programs Offered	27.3% (3)
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	18.2% (2)
Other Factors	Age of and state of building, funding formula, all are important

Table 4.11: Factors That Should Be Most Important – Elected School Board Trustees	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Programs Offered	72.7% (8)
Enrolment Numbers	63.6% (7)
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	54.5% (6)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	45.5% (5)
Demographic Changes	36.4% (4)
Financial Resiliency	36.4% (4)
School Size	18.2% (2)
Other Factors	Age and state of the building, impact on families

Elected School Board Trustees are in an excellent position to evaluate the importance of the various considerations in Accommodation Review. To Elected Trustees, primary importance should be placed on the provision of programs when assessing a school. One trustee linked the importance of programs offered to the overall impact of other factors: “programming excellence is the most important factor [and] program decisions/changes come from low enrolment, school size and demographics” (Elected Trustee 6). For the School Board, the provision of excellent programs is most important, yet the provision of programs is linked directly to the impact of shifting enrolment and the school size influenced by the funding formula.

One change in the responses between the two questions is the ranking of School Size as an important factor. Municipal Officials and Planners previously commented on the impact of finances in the overall Accommodation Review process and it is at this point that Trustees point to the Provincial financial model as a major influence on what drives Accommodation Review.

The way the province has set up the process [it is the] finances [that] need to take priority. Therefore enrolment and school size drive the process. If we don't have schools of roughly 450 it's financially stressful for the Board (Elected Trustee 11).

Sometimes leaving small schools alone (who are working well) would be the best thing - but the [financial constraints] don't allow it. Other times, programs create need for change in otherwise working schools (Elected Trustee 1).

Under the current structure, a larger school is more advantageous for School Boards to consider. To some Trustees, this is a concern due to the new and unforeseen challenges of larger schools. To others, it is an opportunity to provide the best possible programs to their students, especially if the building is well maintained.

Larger schools can often offer more. I've talked about 1000 students in a secondary school provides an opportunity to provide a whole range of both academic and cooperative education. You can't have these if you have a small school. Also, the small elementary school can't offer specialized programs and may not even have a specialized phys ed (*sic*) teacher, a music program or an art program...so you don't get a rounded education (Trustee B, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

School size is not the be-all, end-all [*sic*] - but it does help provide programs, and financial resiliency (Elected Trustee 1).

A crumbling school that is ill equipped and cannot provide many programs, brings down the local neighborhood...as it does not help to attract residents to the neighborhood (Elected Trustee 3).

One final consideration brought up by surveyed and interviewed Trustees is the relationship between municipal planners and the school board. Of the three Trustees

interviewed individually, this topic of conversation emerged through discussion of school size and neighbourhood dynamics. Trustee A explained that from the Trustee perspective, the municipality and the school board should not exist in separate silos.

To me, one of the biggest factors is not to just look at what is happening in the community at the present moment, but to look at things like future development. What if there is a subdivision planned in a nearby neighbourhood? I want to know what the planning factors are for the long term (Trustee A, personal communication, December 14, 2012).

Anthony Piscitelli takes this conversation one step further. He describes the desire to work closer with municipal colleagues in contrast to the current structures of communication (or lack-there of).

It would be nice if there were more opportunities to work with cities and say ‘what are the planning priorities you have right now?’ Right now we are more of just an information-taker from the municipality regarding where new subdivisions are going in and things like that...instead of a more proactive partner that says ‘our goal is to re-vitalize this neighbourhood and work together on that’ (A. Piscitelli, personal communication, November 15, 2012).

Moving from an ‘information-taker’ to a ‘proactive partnership’ does not appear on any formal policy documents at the local or Provincial level. However, the conclusion could be reached that this is a perceived need from the perspective of local Trustees who find themselves knee deep in a quagmire of outdated policies and process.

4.2.6.2 – School Board Planners

School Board Planners are also in an excellent position to evaluate the current influential Accommodation Review factors. Of those that took part in the survey, there was general agreement of the current importance of school size and enrolment over any other factors. One planner did express the importance of the process for informing the

local community of the options and allowing residents to take part in the discussion.

The intention of the process is to engage the community/stakeholders and make sure that they understand all the demographic, program, community issues, etc. that the board needs to consider. The process can't ensure that everyone participates; however, allows them the opportunity to engage, but it also doesn't ensure an outcome. The collaboration with stakeholders brings out new information that the board will consider in its decision-making process (School Board Planner).

4.2.6.3 Elected Municipal Officials

Based on the responses of 10 Municipal Officials (1 skipped question), Tables 4.12 and 4.13 display the percentage and the count of respondents choosing each factor.

Table 4.12: Current Perception of Accommodation Review Factors– Elected Municipal Officials	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	70.0% (7)
Programs Offered	50.0% (5)
Enrolment Numbers	50.0% (5)
School Size	40.0% (4)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	30.0% (3)
Demographic Changes	20.0% (2)
Financial Resiliency	10.0% (1)

Table 4.13: Factors That Should Be Most Important – Elected Municipal Officials	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	80.0% (8)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	40.0% (4)
Enrolment Numbers	40.0% (4)
Programs Offered	40.0% (4)
School Size	30.0% (3)
Demographic Changes	20.0% (2)
Financial Resiliency	20.0% (2)

The responses of participant Municipal Officials present very little change between the responses of the questions. Yet, in the comments collected, there is a general frustration with the current state of affairs without suggestions for change. One reason for

this could be suggested to be the lack of connection and collaboration between municipalities and their local school boards. Municipal Officials receive criticism and the backlash for School Board actions, and it could be suggested that they only see the negative side of Accommodation Review.

We are not trying to use schools to create stronger communities. We are distributing them like franchises and ordering their programs (Municipal Official 4).

I don't agree with these [factors,] but that seems to be what the school board considers (Municipal Official 7).

[The process] seems to be more reactive than proactive (Municipal Official 10).

Despite the prevailing gap of Municipal and School Board relationships, Municipal Officials are fairly communicative when it comes to the re-alignment of priorities for the sake of the students and communities.

There is an ebb and flow to school enrolment, which is why it's a very risky determinant. Once a school is closed because it is in a period of low enrolment, it is lost to the community forever, even when there is an upswing in enrolment in the future (Municipal Official 2).

Alignment with municipal planning and community reality: Diversity, changing demographics, streamlining of French immersion to catchment schools for a better use of resources (Municipal Official 10).

4.2.6.4 Municipal Planners

Based on the responses of 15 Municipal Planners, Tables 4.14 and 4.15 display the percentage and the count of respondents choosing each factor. 13 Planners responded to the second question (2 skipped).

Table 4.14: Most Important Accommodation Review Factors– Municipal Planners	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Demographic Changes	86.7% (13)
Enrolment Numbers	66.7% (10)
Financial Resiliency	66.7% (10)
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	46.7% (7)
School Size	40.0% (6)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	13.3% (2)
Programs Offered	6.7% (1)
Other Factors	Future projects and policy direction

Table 4.15: Factors That Should Be Most Important – Municipal Planners	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	84.6% (11)
Demographic Changes	69.2% (9)
Enrolment Numbers	46.2% (6)
Financial Resiliency	30.8% (4)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	23.1% (3)
Programs Offered	15.4% (2)
School Size	7.7% (1)

Of the factors selected by Municipal Planners for both questions, two factors significantly changed in response count. For planners, the current process places a strong focus on demographics, enrolment and finances. While these still are important factors overall to respondents, Community/Neighbourhood Impact ranked much higher in the second question, while School Size was selected by only one respondent as a factor that should be most important for Accommodation Review.

Planners raised issues previously mentioned such as the cyclical nature of neighbourhood demographics.

Factors will change over time and will likely go through a cyclical process that takes a school site from viable to non-viable and back to viable (Municipal Planner 4).

Planner A and Bill Janssen reflected on their own experience in an Accommodation

Review and connected these experiences it to the idea of neighbourhood change and the long-term needs of a community.

What I find very ironic in the one Accommodation Review that I participated in...the school board sold the land to a developer who is potentially putting younger families in that neighbourhood...if we could have gotten [*sic*] younger families in [the neighbourhood] beforehand, then that school would have been able to stay open. If we do have the kind of development happening in that neighbourhood, and as a neighbourhood does turn over – based on the cyclical nature of neighbourhoods – perhaps there will be a need for that school down the road in that location, but [the building] is gone (Planner A, personal communication, January 10, 2013).

Once you let a school go in the developed areas it is almost impossible to get another facility in place. It is one thing in a Greenfield area where a secondary plan has identified where a school should go – it is just a matter of acquiring it and building it. But in the build area you won't get the land back so easily. The school board sold a high school many years ago in the inner city and [now,] part of the most recent Accommodation Review, they are possibly trying to buy it back as a place to put another school. It is a great spot where we are looking at LRT [Light Rail Transit], but they can't afford to buy it back. (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

Ultimately, the factors presented all contain greater complexities. Municipal Planners are a part of the governance models put in place to provide public goods, yet they are mostly powerless to influence Accommodation Reviews. One planner observed that all the factors are “relevant and important...the problem is that too few are selected as paramount” (Municipal Planner 14). In the School Closure literature, demographic changes and financial considerations are cited most often as the primary reason for closure (Basu, 2004a; People for Education, 2009), yet shifts in demographics can be accounted for based on the cyclical nature of neighbourhoods. What may exist today as a homogeneously “young professional” suburb will exist as an aging population in 30 years (or vice versa). The needs of today may be a school, but that need will shift. Therefore, the idea of closing a school because of an aging population is missing the mark on long

term strategic planning. There is little flexibility for policy alternatives, few channels of communication, and problems with the current consultation process. The status quo is cannot be an option any longer.

4.2.7 Decision-Making Ideology

Participants were also asked two questions regarding the style of decision-making that best describes the Accommodation Review Process and whether this style produces the best possible outcome for a community. The purpose of these questions was to evaluate the perception of how the process is conducted. Participants could choose from a list adapted from Arnstein’s (1969) ladder (Figure 2, pg. 11) including Authoritative, Informing, Consulting, Partnership, and Collaborative.

4.2.7.1 – Elected School Board Trustees

Based on the responses of 11 School Board Trustees, Table 4.16 displays the percentage and the count of respondents choosing each decision-making type. The final row of the table presents the response mean of the second question: does this decision-making model result in the best possible outcome for a community? Respondents were given a Likert scale from ‘strongly agree’ (1) to ‘strongly disagree’ (5)

Table 4.16: Decision-Making Ideology– Elected School Board Trustees	
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Response Percent and Count</i>
Authoritative	0.0% (0)
Informing	0.0% (0)
Consulting	36.4% (4)
Partnership	9.1% (1)
Collaborative	54.5% (6)
Is it the best possible outcome?	
<i>Response Mean</i>	
2.00 (somewhat agree)	

In summary, participant Trustees judge the Accommodation Review process, as currently governed, as a consulting/collaborative endeavor that does bring about the best possible outcome for a community. From the educational governance perspective, the whole process “should be collaborative,” yet, as was previously mentioned, the community sometimes perceives the collaboration as a veil for a “predetermined” outcome (Elected Trustee 4). A strong optimism for the current structures runs through the responses of school board officials despite media coverage and community activist tactics.

If it is done properly with "good" data then the community has increased acceptance and understanding of the need to consolidate schools (Elected Trustee 4).

In response to the negative perspectives on the process itself, Trustee A describes the need for structure, but also empathizes for those that see the process as authoritative or pushing for a pre-determined outcome.

I can see why people would feel that the process is authoritative in nature, but I think that all stakeholders go into the process with the best intentions of having an open and unrestricted discussion. There does need to be control in the process and that does come from the school board and from the employees who are trained in how to do community facilitation [*sic*]. I think that sometimes whenever you use some of those [facilitation] skills on people that they feel that they were somehow handled. Really, we have to have some control or it would be chaos. If someone has not been exposed to the kind of conversation facilitation, they might feel that the discussion was authoritative. We need to have that control though, because it is a sensitive topic (Trustee A, personal communication, December 14, 2013).

It appears as though there is no ‘silver bullet’ for the difficulties of public consultation.

While Trustees believe that an open and collaborative process is necessary, structure and facilitation is used as protection against the derailment of the process. From the community perspective, this facilitation and structure could cause frustration for the

whole exercise and complain of being ‘handled’ and used for tokenism. In comparison to the literature, School Board Trustees do not see the whole picture, as frustration and the limitations of current consultation practices are an undeniable theme throughout previous studies (Berger, 1983; Marshall, 1985; Valencia, 1985; Doern & Prince, 1989; Witten et al., 2003; Basu, 2004b; Kearn et al., 2009; Irwin, 2012; Irwin & Seasons, 2013).

4.2.7.2 – School Board Planners

One of the school board planners surveyed provided an astute observation regarding the greater difficulty of consultative processes and community expectations.

This process raises too many expectations around outcomes. Everyone looks at consultation in a different way. No matter how much consultation the board does, the silent majority often gets overrun by the vocal minority in the final political decision. There are many people that equate consultation to asking people what they want and giving it to them, boards cannot promise this. The process itself is intended to look at the system as a whole; however, stakeholders get caught up in their personal impact rather than the greater good (School Board Planner).

At the core of this statement is an overall frustration with public consultation. However, further questions that take account of the comprehensive perspective to education materialize: What is the ‘greater good’ in the provision of educational facilities and programs? Does the current system of policies and processes actually provide room for the best possible outcome – regardless of the challenges of public consultation?

4.2.7.3 – Elected Municipal Officials

Based on the responses of 10 Elected Municipal Officials (1 skipped question), Table 4.17 displays the percentage and the count of respondents choosing each decision-making type. The final row of the table presents the response mean of the second question: does this decision-making model result in the best possible outcome for a

community? Respondents were given a Likert scale from ‘strongly agree’ (1) to ‘strongly disagree’ (5).

Table 4.17: Decision-Making Ideology– Elected Municipal Officials	
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Response Percent and Count</i>
Authoritative	3.0% (3)
Informing	3.0% (3)
Consulting	11.1% (1)
Partnership	11.1% (1)
Collaborative	11.1% (1)
Other	All of the above
Is it the best possible outcome?	
<i>Response Mean</i>	
3.80 (neutral to somewhat disagree)	

In contrast to Elected Trustees, the majority of Municipal Officials see the process on the opposite end of the ladder – authoritative and informing (greater than 3). In addition, there is a general agreement that this ideology does not bring about the best possible outcome for a community.

4.2.7.4 – Municipal Planners

Based on the responses of 15 Municipal Planners, Table 4.18 displays the percentage and the count of respondents choosing each decision-making type. The final row of the table presents the response mean of the second question: does this decision-making model result in the best possible outcome for a community? Respondents were given a Likert scale from ‘strongly agree’ (1) to ‘strongly disagree’ (5).

Table 4.18: Decision-Making Ideology– Elected Municipal Officials	
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Response Percent and Count</i>
Authoritative	46.7% (7)
Informing	26.7% (4)
Consulting	20.0% (3)
Partnership	6.7% (1)
Collaborative	0.0% (0)
Is it the best possible outcome?	
<i>Response Mean</i>	
3.53 (neutral to somewhat disagree)	

From the perspective of Municipal Planners, the Accommodation Review Process typically lands on the authoritative end of the spectrum. In addition, the majority of planners see the process as counterproductive to the best possible outcome for a community. On the whole, Planners argue that the all-inclusive analysis required for community planning does not factor into Accommodation Review. One planner opined that instead of providing the best outcome for a community, the whole process instead “allows the Board to ignore other important factors that should be part of the decision” (Municipal Planner 14).

I asked each of the planning interviewees what their perspective was on the ideology brought to the table in each Review. Planner A, in his experience at a Review, suggests that through the email correspondence of Accommodation Review Committee members there was an underlying dissatisfaction.

Seeing the frustration from that [the whole process] was a *fait accompli*, it was already decided from the get go that the school was going to close. I don’t know if they blamed the trustees, but the tone was that this had already been decided and that we were just going through the motions here...being on that committee gave me appreciation for [the School Board’s] job – and it is not an easy job at all (Planner A, personal communication, January 10, 2013).

It is easy for those that are dissatisfied with the process to not sympathize with those making the tough decisions. Those planners that spoke about the whole process were quick to defend their local School Board for the community perception of Reviews. While the community views the process as authoritarian, Bill Janssen linked the current structures of consultation facilitation to the policies that govern the system.

I see [the process] as authoritative, but I don't blame the school board. They have their marching orders and a framework they have to operate in. To me, the whole system, the way it comes across, is authoritative. I think the school board likes to consult as much as possible and they have actually expanded their consultation process. But it is almost viewed in the community as a pre-determined process. So then the consultation process becomes a fight for the community to keep their school – then it comes across as not consultative. I don't even know if it is viewed at all as a consultation, maybe it is viewed more as an information presentation (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

In addition to the awareness of the complexities of Accommodation Review and the limiting demands placed on School Boards, two themes emerged from planner respondents. First, a School Board is restricted by Provincial policy and intimidating public consultations. However, second of all, School Boards overall do not adequately address all of the costs of a school closure and lack the kind of long term planning coupled with creative solution making that could limit the hostile interactions experienced at Accommodation Reviews. There are issues to address at the Provincial level, but there are also local problems that fall under the jurisdiction of local School Boards.

I think it is just the bottom line that the whole process is designed around the school needs and their operating costs and not necessarily all of these questions of why a school is important to the community – all of the factors are not coming into play. Certainly, these social factors are important to residents, but it just doesn't play a role in the process. I understand that the board has to provide services in newer suburban areas,

but neighbourhoods do go through demographic change. I'm not sure they have considered the long-term planning policies that are in place that show where growth is going to occur and where people are moving. We are starting to get a lot of activity in the downtown that is attracting more people with children downtown. We're getting a tonne of people coming from Toronto because of the cost of housing out there. While we are starting to see more families here, we need the schools to provide those services. If we keep going down this road we could eventually start to see the same problems of overcapacity in the older areas because of increased enrolment (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

4.2.8 – Benefits and Alternative Solutions

At the end of the online survey, participants were given the option to answer two open-ended questions. The first inquired about the benefits that could be gleaned from the current Accommodation Review process. The second question asked how respondents would change the overall process if they were in a position to do so. Responses to these two questions will segue this research into the recommendations chapter.

4.2.8.1 – Elected School Board Trustees

Of the 11 School Board Trustees surveyed, 8 responded to the first question (benefits) while 6 responded to the second (changes to the system). In regards to the first question, responses from Trustee participants included the positives of community engagement and including a variety of perspectives at the Committee. In accordance with Provincial policy, a minimum number of public meetings must be held and the Accommodation Review Committee must be made up of staff, trustees and community members from the schools and municipalities involved. While financial realities are a driving force behind the decision-making process, Trustees believe that public consultation is beneficial and necessary.

It is very beneficial for all stakeholders to understand the various elements of the decisions that need to be made and to have a voice in the process (Elected Trustee 2).

[Accommodation Review] allows the community to examine the issues facing the school board; it allows local input into solutions, which may be different from those suggested by the school board staff (Elected Trustee 3).

By having a variety of “different perspectives at the table” and a “buy-in” from the local community leads to a positive way forward, despite the realities of closing some schools (Elected Trustee 1, 6, 7). Trustees classify the public consultation component of the process as a vital part in working through the process and looking at alternative suggestions.

The second question allowed Trustees to express their ideas for changes to the current process. The resulting responses revealed two specific issues that, from their perspective, require an overview and policy changes. The first problem encompassed communications with the public:

[We need to] find some way of ensuring that the stakeholders are made aware of all meetings and opportunities for input (Elected Trustee 8).

One difficulty from our latest Review was a lack of clear communication. An Accommodation Review does mean that will most likely close a school and it is a process that takes time and money. However, this was not conveyed up front – that we had to close a school and the community input is needed so we can talk about the options (Trustee B, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

One thing I do hear is that people don’t feel that the meetings were advertised well in their neighbourhood or in their schools in regards to the possible outcomes of AR. It has to be clearer to residents. We need to do a better job of informing people about this process (Trustee A, personal communication, December 14, 2013).

Second of all, a few respondents broached the topic of alternative solutions and the flexibility to think beyond the choice of closing one school or another. Some

advocated for multiple Committee recommendations while others proposed greater flexibility in creation of the Committee recommendations in the first place.

I would require the accommodation review committee to recommend multiple options to the Board of Trustees (Elected Trustee 11).

Need to actually be able to do the best thing - not necessarily only what fits in current box. Sometimes best solution would be to move location of school - rather than renovate or change boundaries. Also, have to look far enough into future (Elected Trustee 1).

I would never give a staff recommendation at the beginning of the process as it feels predetermined by the community and the targeted school has to defend itself from the beginning. The data should guide the committee to the correct decision (Elected Trustee 4).

4.2.8.2 – School Board Planners

In response to the question of benefits of Accommodation Review, School Board Planners echoed the importance of public consultation. In particular, the dissemination of demographic numbers and the financial constraints at the board level is, to Board Planners, a tool for controlling uninformed speculation.

Thorough public process that is very comprehensive. Ensures that the community fully understands the reasons for the review and any decision that comes out of it (School Board Planner)

The process mandates community consultation/involvement, ensuring that all boards are consistent from this perspective. For those individuals that participate, they learn about the difficult choices that need to be made - understanding that these are not easy decisions. Within each board, process is consistent from review to review. The requirements for transparency and openness ensure that those who participate have all the information available to them (School Board Planner).

While the overall structure of Accommodation Review consultation is an asset for School Board Planners, some components of the process limit the school board's ability

to act for immediate needs. One planner explains that an overall “reduction in timelines” would improve the process.

[The] ministry mandated time frame is too long (e.g. 60 days minimum between ARC report and board decision is too long when implementation needs to occur within a short time frame). There is no special consideration for schools that have undergone a natural disaster or "acts of god" (e.g. school burns down and board has to decide if it will be rebuilt - a board must go through a year-long process to determine this) (School Board Planner).

Variation across the Province in the makeup of Accommodation Review Committees and the design of the consultation process is also a significant challenge for Trustees and Board staff. Therefore, one staff member noted the difficulty to making changes to the whole process and gauging its effectiveness across a diversity of contexts.

The process is going to vary from board to board in the Province, so it is difficult to answer this question. For example, some have chosen to include Trustees on their Accommodation Review Committees; whereas others have not. Boards also operate public meetings very differently. There is no consistent approach in the Province - this may be something to consider for change; however, there may not be one approach that works for every community. The process needs to be more tightly tied to an accommodation plan (board-wide) rather than isolated study areas. Currently a decision in one area can impact the overall operation of the board and fundamentally change a board's accommodation plan. Since we cannot preclude the outcome of an accommodation review in our Capital Plans...boards can only include construction of new pupil places, not closures. This is not productive long-term planning. This planning could be better tied to municipal planning processes (e.g. OP) to ensure a holistic approach (School Board Planner).

The respondent's final point is an important one. Each community has different needs for education in addition to municipal planning. The necessity of connection between school boards and municipalities for the purposes of long-term planning is undeniable.

4.2.8.3 – Elected Municipal Officials

Of the 11 School Board Trustees surveyed, 8 responded to the first question (benefits) while 6 responded to the second (changes to the system). Comparably to School Board employees and Trustees, Municipal Officials also find the benefits of the process in community engagement and consultation. It is an “opportunity” for community engagement and perhaps to find alternatives to closures (Municipal Official 2). Others consider the “collaborative” nature of the process as an “appropriate” way to “validate trends and changes in neighbourhoods” (Municipal Official 6).

One official agreed that *if* the whole process is balanced and is truly collaborative, *then* the Review is an excellent method for aiding in the fiscal responsibility and transparency of a board (Municipal Official 9). However, a perceptively unbalanced or un-collaborative process clouds certain elected official’s perception of the entire system. One councilor noted that they saw no benefit to the current process as it caused “rancor and dissatisfaction” in the community while they, as a councilor, had “zero influence” on the chain of events (Municipal Official 7).

If Municipal Officials could change the Accommodation Review process, they would invest in more public and municipal consultation. Unlike the suggestions of Trustees and Planners regarding the streamlining of the process, Officials from town councils of the communities surveyed would invest in “seeking information and understanding from community stakeholders [including] residents, elected officials, [and] planning staff” (Municipal Official 2). The relationship between school boards and municipalities must no longer exist in separate silos, but must be a “partnership” with greater involvement from “municipal planners and council” (Municipal Official 9, 7). To

increase this relationship while alleviating the financial pressures placed on School Boards, one Official suggests that “ownership of school properties [should] rest with the municipalities (Municipal Official 1). This suggestion addresses the challenge of revitalization core areas due to the fact that municipalities are faced with pressure to create growth boundaries and intensify key neighbourhoods.

Think long-term and align with local municipalities - the City of Waterloo has been left without elementary schools in the core, which makes revitalization of the core an uphill battle (Municipal Official 11).

4.2.8.1 – Municipal Planners

Of the 15 Municipal Planners surveyed, 7 responded to the first question (benefits) while 7 responded to the second (changes to the system). In comparison to other survey participants, Municipal Planners also find agreement on the benefits of Accommodation Review consultation. Communication between a local school board and stakeholders yields “potential for collaboration and joint success for the school board and municipality” (Municipal Planner 1). The rationale for Accommodation Review itself is a positive for Planner respondents. They believe that the existence of a process for addressing a schools future while resolving financial concerns and consulting all stakeholders (Municipal Planner 5, 6, 7, 15) is a necessity for local communities.

While the motivation for Accommodation Review is not in question for Municipal Planners, the way in which these policies have manifested on the ground is reason for discussion. They recommend greater transparency in the process in addition to greater involvement of the municipality.

[We need to] change the way that schools are administered first...have them affiliated with municipalities in some way so that school

accommodation reviews can be done in concert with other community building initiatives (Municipal Planner 9).

Have the [school] planning occur with the growth management strategy in order to integrate planning [departments] and not have two different systems planning and not talking to one another (Municipal Planner 10).

[There has to be] deeper involvement of the municipality. Start the [Accommodation Review] process earlier so that alternatives to closures can be explored (i.e. partnerships to bring in more community programs etc.) (Municipal Planner 11).

Public Official A spoke about recent successes in the City of London in regards to the municipality working with the local School Board. However, while some financial issues can be resolved locally, action is required from a higher level of government.

In London, we have had successful collaboration regarding a memorandum of understanding for recreational use for schools. There has been cooperation in the addressing of financial constraints municipally. Ultimately, the pressure needs to be put on the province (Public Official A, personal communication, November 19, 2012).

Flexibility for alternative solutions is an important change that Planners would create in the system. Currently, school boards operate “in a vacuum, separate from other community building that is largely done by municipalities” (Municipal Planner 9).

Therefore, Municipal Planners advocate for adaptability within the current Accommodation Review policies.

[We need to] allow for greater flexibility for local decision-making, consideration of provincial policies in the decision making process (eg. need for community facilities to support intensification), [and] the ability of surplus schools and lands to remain in public ownership (Municipal Planner 15).

Accommodation review should consider the long-term maintenance of the facility with interim uses that could occupy the building when the school use itself is in a temporary non-viable state (Municipal Planner 4).

Bill Janssen of the City of Hamilton takes the necessity for alternatives one step further. He suggests an overhaul of facility ownership and financial models currently utilized at the board level.

I think there are other models out there for delivery of programs. Could the municipality own the buildings and control maintenance? Then the school board becomes solely responsible for academic programs. I think I would look at different financial models from a provincial perspective, because I think that would drastically change how things work in terms of the board's funding. We need some flexibility for alternative uses of the buildings or short-term operations to keep the facilities rather than letting them go. The short-term gain of a closure is a potential long-term loss (B. Janssen, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

Planner A also agrees that School Boards should perhaps not be in the business of sole ownership of public facilities. His reasoning returns to the issue of neighbourhood turnover. Planners do not want to lose institutional lands – especially in core neighbourhoods.

Perhaps keeping the facilities and cost sharing with the municipality are solutions. They could maybe look for alternate uses of those buildings, with the idea that they could be returned to the school board – bearing the cyclical nature of cities and neighbourhoods in mind. If the young families start coming back then they could somehow reuse the sites for schools if they need them. Perhaps they could look at intensifying the sites but keeping a school function on those sites in some formal capacity (Planner A, personal communication, January 10, 2013).

4.3 Summary of Key Findings

The key findings of this study can be grouped into four themes. The following is a summary of the qualitative results based on the online survey and key informant interviews.

4.3.1 Student Success and Neighbourhood Success

The results indicate a difference in priorities for local School Boards versus local

municipalities. While these two organizations share the resolve to foster healthy and successful students, municipal councilors and employees see the success and health of students intrinsically linked to neighbourhood vitality and the surrounding community. Trustees see the importance of community within the school, however the influence of neighbourhood factors does not rank higher in importance. Although they are democratically elected, Trustees are put in a position where their role revolves around schools and any work with municipalities that pushes beyond that mandate requires extra time and effort. School Board's operate within an educational bubble, yet the effect of a neighbourhood school has far-reaching impact on neighbourhood demographics and social capital within a community.

4.3.2 Accommodation Review – Collaborative or Pre-determined?

Also similar to the literature on school closures was the perception of the Accommodation Review process (Doern & Prince, 1989; Witten et al., 2003; Basu, 2004b; Kearn et al., 2009; Irwin, 2012; Irwin & Seasons, 2013). All respondents could see the positives and negatives to the current process citing the positives of community input juxtaposed against the negatives of the 'authoritarian' nature of the process. Trustees argue that the process, when done right, is an overall positive experience where communities have a say and School Board staff listen. On the other hand, Municipal Officials and Planners see the pushback from local residents and the local impact of closing smaller inner city schools in favour of large suburban mega-schools. Many Municipal councilors spoke of the anger from local residents they had experienced due to a perception that they were 'handled' through the process by the Board and that the decision had already been made before the public had any input. While Trustees and

School Board Planners spoke in part about tightening up the structured nature of the process, Municipal employees recommended a more flexible approach to decision-making and policy implementation. Despite these challenges at the local level though, all respondents recognized that there are greater pressures at play.

4.3.3 Funding Formula and Flexibility

The greatest influence on the entire Accommodation Review process and outcome is outside of the control of local officials. It is outdated portions of Accommodation Review policies that have handcuffed local officials and planners. Trustees are, in many instances, put in a position where closure is the only option – even if the school slated for closure is not under-capacity (Seasons & Irwin, 2013). The amalgamation of urban catchment areas with large rural regions pits communities against each other in zero-sum decisions for local School Boards. These no-win scenarios spring directly from a funding formula that was best suited for the policies of economic efficiency rather than the provision of public goods and comprehensive student success.

4.3.4 The Relationship between Education and Community Planning

The final theme that emerged from the online survey and key informant interviews is the relationship, or lack there-of, between local planning departments, municipal governments and the local school board. The relationships that exist today are a collection of informal relationships and a culture of information taking. Municipalities inform the school board where neighbourhoods will be built, and the school board plans the provision of new schools. Yet, the School Board is not in the business of Smart Growth, as outlined by the influential Provincial Growth Plan (Ontario, 2006).

Municipalities must conform to this Provincial legislation, yet the actions of School Boards, driven by short-term demographics shifts and financial pressures, have no mandate to conform to these documents. If planners or Trustees wish to encourage local collaborative relationships, there is no formal arena. Any professional relationships must be forged individually and rarely exist at the local level. Local government agencies must work together and, in addition, Provincial Ministries cannot exist in mutually exclusive worlds.

Chapter 5 - Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

As was discovered through the process of researching this paper, the delicate nature of the topic validated the claim that schools closures and Accommodation Review in Ontario are in need of a sincere discussion of alternative policy directions. To some, the system may appear to be doing what it is meant to do; yet an overwhelming amount of evidence is incompatible with this ‘status-quo’ perspective. Currently, the status quo represents an authoritative and fracturing process (Doern & Prince, 1989; Basu, 2004a; Kearns et al. 2009) that leaves community residents outraged, municipal governments powerless, and school boards exhausted and frustrated.

While the argument for efficiency of resources is an important factor in the long term planning of school facilities, policy-makers cannot ignore the fundamental need for change in the accommodation review legislation and implementation processes. To continue with the status quo is to ignore that fact that schools are working with outdated formula, misplaced resources, and unacknowledged consequences of closure. In order to address and elaborate on these policies and processes, the following questions were brought forward for this research with the hypothesis that an urban planning lens would shed light on alternative solutions to the current approaches of educational governance:

- What roles do school board and provincial policies play in the school closure process?
- How do these policies affect the pedagogical landscape?
- What is the impact of school closures on their respective communities?
- How do these educational governance methods compare to community planning policies?
- Can school board objectives be reconciled with community planning objectives?

To address these questions, an online survey was conducted with 50 respondents (39 completed surveys) in addition to interviews conducted with 6 voluntary participants. This chapter will reference the key findings of these surveys and their connections to relevant literature for the purposes of constructing recommendations for all stakeholders in accommodation reviews, school closures, and neighbourhood planning processes. Finally, this chapter will conclude with further questions and present topics for further research generated by this project.

5.2 Recommendations

5.2.1 Accommodation Review and Full Cost Accounting

Blais (2010) explores the market failures and lack of full-cost accounting in the Canadian planning context. She argues that the cards are stacked against any attempt to curb the impact of sprawling development from the very start due to a false economy of cross subsidies. In simple terms, poor policies lead to the subsidizing of undesired development and the increased cost of desired development.

This principle of cross-subsidies can be directly applied to the factors involved in the Accommodation Review process. When poor Provincial policies and a lack of comprehensive analysis at the local level are combined, an incomplete picture of education and the greater community is the result. If Provincial policies focus on the per-student cost of education, then Accommodation Review will act as a financial exercise. If local School Boards lack the creativity to seek out alternative solutions outside of school closure (in part, due to Provincial policies, but there is some fault at the local level), then social elements and neighbourhood dynamics take a back seat in the process.

Currently, finances and demographics are the deciding factors when School Board staff members discuss the provision of education and allocation of resources. Should it not be the mandate of these meetings to focus on student engagement, community building, and the comprehensive health of both? Full-cost accounting represents an all-encompassing look at the problem. Hard numbers such as demographics, finances, and test scores are easily quantifiable, but a complete cost-benefit analysis takes into account social and environmental costs – even if they are unquantifiable in the traditional sense. This mixed methods approach is a methodology typically found in the analysis of any planning department.

Therefore, from my perspective, the **Accommodation Review process is in need of full-cost accounting**. Provincial policies need to be strengthened in favour of a complete approach to the impact of schools on not only students, but also local neighbourhoods and the larger community. More recent legislation has attempted to push for a full cost-benefit analysis (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009a) – therefore this push must happen in conjunction with the following recommendations. Otherwise, the entire process will remain “out of balance in terms of its stated intent as a vehicle dedicated to promoting democratic principles” (Irwin 2012, p. 242).

5.2.2 The Role of Municipal Government

In a report prepared for the US National Trust for Historic Preservation, Beaumont & Pianca (2002) present an argument for saving smaller neighbourhood schools and identifying policy biases and conflicts that undermine municipal government and school board collaboration. In addition, their report outlines success stories of local

policy makers working together to find alternative options to school closure. The key element in these success stories is the cooperation and partnerships created between the local school board and the local municipality. States where the Department of Education advocates for formal relationships between these two local organizations found greater success in educating local Trustees and Boards about Smart Growth policies and even saving several schools (Beaumont & Pianca, 2002). From a Canadian perspective, it is both the Province and the local government agencies that need to **formalize municipal and school board relationships**. Both School Boards and Municipalities are elected to be responsible for their local community, therefore they must be required to work in partnership to further all Provincial mandates (People for Education, 2009). This includes all Growth Management policy in conjunction with educational goals and objective. In a research study conducted in Florida, USA, researchers found that a combination of resources and formal collaboration lead to greater achievement of creative solutions and enthusiasm for joint projects (Lees, Salvesen & Shay 2008).

One recommendation brought to light through discussion with key informants was the suggestion that school boards should not be in the land development business. While joint-use agreements and formalized joint-committees will aid in resource sharing and cooperation, perhaps the Province of Ontario needs to take this one step further and **place the ownership of school buildings and properties under Municipal jurisdiction**. The result of this change would be School Boards that can focus directly on programming and move away from land development while also strengthening connections with local municipalities for the betterment of shared resources and capital. Integration of school

boards and municipal resources is the best way to balance the needs of students and the needs of the larger community (Jones, 2002; Community Schools Alliance, 2009).

5.2.3 Provincial Legislation and the Education Funding Formula

One of the most consistently cited problems for School Boards and the Accommodation Review process through the course of this research has been the limiting and outdated funding formulae. In addition, many respondents spoke of the perceived lack of coordination between Ministries at the Provincial level – especially when it came to land-use planning for school facilities. **Funding formulae must be constructed in a way that does not create bias towards certain types of school development or even certain school sizes.** Currently, funding formulae and Ministry of Education policies create perverse subsidies towards larger ‘mega schools’ in greenfield areas while smaller urban neighbourhood schools struggle to keep up. In addition, school funding is provided on a set square footage per student basis. This method then short changes any shifts in demographics as unused square footage goes underfunded. Any changes that have been undertaken over the past decade under a new Provincial government have made little or no impact on the number of funding related school closures.

To clarify, the term ‘large/mega’ and ‘small’ schools are typically relative to their community. There are arguments for maintaining a school size above a certain number (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007). This research recommends that based on the location of mega-schools in greenfield suburban areas, these schools will not be viable from a long-term planning perspective. While larger schools do provide students with unique program opportunities, the impact of placing a school in an un-walkable and car-oriented

environment is not the solution. If neighbourhoods have a demographically cyclical nature, then larger schools will only continue to be viable if the majority of students are driven or bussed to the school. From a community development perspective, our understanding of the consequences of decades of individual-car culture outdates this perspective on educational facilities.

What the Province must do immediately is **re-visit all Education legislation and school board funding formulae to ensure consistency with other Provincial policies and objectives**. In particular, the Places to Grow Act and other Smart Growth policies must be used as a benchmark to conform Education policies to best practices of Planning. In some US states, this means State legislation actually favors the renovation of older schools, rather than the construction of new ones (Beaumont & Pianca, 2002). Ultimately, School Boards need access to the funding they need for their local context and students (Jones, 2002; People for Education, 2009) and this begins at the Provincial level.

In the City of Thorold, frustration with the dichotomy between School Board and Municipal Planning objectives boiled over and resulted in a resolution sent to the Council of the Region of Niagara. This document outlines exactly the issues highlighted with inconsistent Provincial policies. I highly recommend that this resolution be used as the blueprint for change at the Provincial level (Council of the Region of Niagara 2012). This document can be viewed in Appendix II.

5.2.4 Alternative Solutions to School Closure

The current structures of Accommodation Review in the Province of Ontario are an example of ‘creative destruction’ or the perceived need to deconstruct the past for the

sake of the future (Abrahamson 2004). Many School Boards see closure as an inevitable finishing line for any shift in demographics or financial pressures for their catchment area. However, this endless cycle of closing schools for the sake of reopening other schools does not necessarily lead to the provision of better education (Hargreaves, 2007; Irwin & Seasons, 2013).

In Bill Janssen's example of a smaller urban school in the core of the City of Hamilton, a creative use of assets and resources resulted in municipal, school board, and private partnerships. Instead of closing the school and selling the land, the building was partially leased to a private organization. The result of this seemingly simple decision is that Hamilton still has an inner city elementary school near its urban core neighbourhoods. What would happen if School Boards had the capacity to use such creative solution making today? Perhaps the majority of the closed schools in the last decade would actually still exist – whether as schools, community centres, or other public spaces.

Creating policies from a macro level does have its advantages. Previous Ontario governments will have argued that centralized educational policies create an efficient and equitable system for schools across the Province. However, critics have discovered (Basu, 2004a; Basu, 2007; Irwin, 2012; Irwin & Seasons, 2013) that this model restricts local circumstances and the flexibility for alternative solution making. Instead, **upper tier governments must make room for creativity and flexibility in Accommodation Review while adapting to the necessity of facility sharing, after-hours use, and other municipal partnerships** (People for Education, 2009). Even adaptive public re-use of

previously used School Board buildings should be added to the toolbox of School Board and Municipal planners alike.

Alternative solutions to school closure should be the first instinct of any School Board. Yet, without a true consultative process, municipal partnerships, and overhauled funding formulae, participatory planning and full cost-benefit analysis will not become a reality for the Ontario Education system.

5.2.5 The Importance of Community Planners

As it has been noted, planners play a key role in the provision of public goods and services. They act as gatekeepers for their community and protect against poor development practices and unsustainable designs. Therefore, when it comes to the Ministry of Education's policies, local School Board practices, and the necessity of long term and strategic school planning, community planners must be engaged. Planning for communities is a practice built on the central ideal of building for people (Hodge & Gordon, 2008). The residents, businesses, and visitors in any community are the reason we plan and they are consequently a necessity in the centre of every decision regarding the provision of goods and services. Residents desire adequate living space, safe streets, and places of gathering so we build neighbourhoods, design better streets, and create vibrant town centres. Businesses require adequate space to build, acquire customers, and interact with the local and global economy so we build commercial space, design accessible job centres, and places of commerce. Visitors look for interesting places and experiences, so we provide facilities for arts, culture and recreation. Why is it though, that we are handcuffed when our children require neighbourhood schools and adequate space for work and play?

Planners are the canary in the coalmine. The interdisciplinary nature of their profession places a strong focus on understanding the economic, social, and environmental costs of any policy decision (Hodge & Gordon, 2008; Rees, 2010). For that reason, when a planner sees the alarming rate of school closures, the misguided funding formula, and the increase in suburban mega-schools, they must step into the discussion. Their expertise on the provision of public goods means that **planning departments and municipalities must engage in the Accommodation Review process in addition to lobbying the Province for policy changes.** Whether it is taking part in Accommodation Review, pushing council to lobby the Province (Council of the Region of Niagara 2012), or taking the time to forge partnerships with local Trustees and School Board Planners, there is no waiting on the sidelines for this pressing issue. While it may be difficult, at times, to engage Trustees that have lost faith in the public consultation process or encourage School Board staff to consider Smart Growth legislation, the need to build a better community should be the most important factor. Financial responsibility and demographic shifts will still affect a School Board's ability to act, but they cannot be the primary elements of Accommodation Review.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

There is considerable momentum for the research and understanding of the policy missteps and the emotionally charged nature of the Accommodation Review process. This issue ultimately stems from policies and ideals created in times of growth without consideration for true cost-benefit analyses or an understanding of the interconnectedness of schools, neighbourhoods, and communities. Both the Province and local School Boards must be part of solution making for an alternative to the misplaced priorities of

the current policy structures. In addition, the local Municipality must have a formalized role.

In spite of this growing understanding that the status quo is not working and a localized and flexible approach is a necessary alternative, this research was limited in scope and there is room for further research and understanding. The following questions resulted from the undertaking of this Accommodation Review policy and process research.

- How can the public consultation process in Accommodation Review be improved while still adhering to the necessary structures that keep the process moving forward? Can the public give meaningful input and feel empowered by the process?
- What kind of political capital is required to change the current funding formulae? Is a Provincial policy adjustment enough? How can the Province provide room for flexible alternatives based on local contexts?
- Should the Province have full control over education funding? Should the levying of property taxes could be put back in the hands of local school boards for the purpose of enhancing local flexibility?
- How can local municipal officials and school board trustees formalize their relationships? Does this require a Provincial mandate or is there flexibility for local municipalities and school boards to reach out to each other?
- Should School Boards own their buildings? Is there an alternative option for building ownership that allows the local board to focus their attention completely to programming and the well being of their students?

- How can local planners become specifically involved? Under the current system, how can planners continue to advocate for Smart Growth and good planning principles?

5.4 Conclusion

School closures are not always inevitable. However, misplaced priorities and policy missteps have pushed School Boards into no-win situations due to the constraints of centralized funding formulae and the lack of collaborative decision making at all levels of government. At the Provincial level, Ministries cannot exist in separate silos. We have to see the interconnectedness of our communities and the consequences of efficiency based policy. Accommodation Review is ultimately one example of an entire system of governments and organizations that stand to provide essential services and public goods, yet misplace prioritization due to our culture of efficiency.

These recommendations have stemmed from a study of contexts from the Province of Ontario. However, the problems associated with school closures and a lack of cooperation between school boards and municipalities are not specific to Ontario. Nationally and internationally, governments must assess how education is provided and how they address shifts in demographics and financial pressures. Those communities that work to achieve meaningful collaboration and a full cost accounting process will be equipped to negotiate creative solutions that will protect public resources while improving the overall quality of life for local residents and their children.

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Appendices

Appendix I

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board North ARC 2011

Utilization Rates and Projections

Table 1: Historical and Projected Enrolment (Current Situation)

Secondary School	2010 OTG Capacity	2010/ 2011	% Utiliz.	2015/ 2016	% Utiliz.	2020/ 2021	% Utiliz.
Delta	1,431	775	54%	635	44%	641	45
Glendale	1,122	930	83%	883	79%	809	72%
Orchard Park	1,290	1,137	88%	1,096	85%	1,133	88%
Parkview	534	266	50%	244	46%	229	43%
Sir John A. Macdonald	1,569	1,122	72%	793	51%	726	46%
Sir Winston Churchill	1,089	1,191	109%	992	91%	806	74%
Total	7,035	5,421	77%	4,643	66%	4,344	62%

Financial Projections for Current Situation versus North ARC Recommendations

Table 3: Estimated Renewal Needs (Current Situation)

Secondary School	2010	2010 FCI	2020	2020 FCI
Delta	\$14,381,717	31%	\$26,132,092	57%
Glendale	\$4,448,173	18%	\$9,280,413	38%
Orchard Park	\$6,795,521	21%	\$12,102,735	37%
Parkview	\$4,142,059	33%	\$6,892,082	56%
Sir John A. Macdonald	\$15,475,567	41%	\$20,419,480	55%
Sir Winston Churchill	\$9,923,629	32%	\$15,191,957	49%
Total	\$55,166,666		\$90,018,759	

Table 4: Estimated Renewal Needs (North ARC Recommendation)

Secondary School	2010	2010 FCI	2020	2020 FCI
Delta	\$14,381,717	31%	--	--
Glendale	\$4,448,173	18%	\$9,280,413	38%
Orchard Park	\$6,795,521	21%	\$12,102,735	37%
Parkview	\$4,142,059	33%	--	--
Sir John A. Macdonald	\$15,475,567	41%	--	--
Sir Winston Churchill	\$9,923,629	32%	\$15,191,957	49%
Total	\$55,166,666		\$36,575,105	
Difference vs. Current Situation			(\$53,443,654)	

Funding Recommendations for New School

Table 9: North ARC Recommended Funding Strategy

Estimated Costs		
1.	New Construction (1,250 Pupil Place School)	\$32,513,395
2.	Land Acquisition (15 acre site @ \$400,000/acre)	\$6,000,000
3.	Program Strategy	\$2,700,000
4.	Other (i.e. parkland dedication, moving costs, etc.)	\$350,000
5.	Sub Total (Line 1 through 4)	\$41,563,395
Potential Funding Sources		
6.	Proceeds of Disposition (@ \$400,000/acre)	(\$8,945,000)
7.	Ministry of Education (New School)	(\$32,513,395)
8.	Sub Total (Line 4 + 6)	(\$41,458,395)
Potential Cost to the Board (Line 5 – 8)		\$105,000

Appendix II
Council of the Region of Niagara 2012

WHEREAS Smart Growth principles are a key part of urban design at the Municipal and Provincial level in Ontario;

AND WHEREAS a great deal of time and resources are being spent by Municipalities to conform to Smart Growth principles, so as to develop integrated neighbourhoods that are walkable and provide a variety of services, including education;

AND WHEREAS the closure of a school has the potential to dramatically disrupt urban planning that seeks to apply Smart Growth principles...

...THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED the Council of the Region of Niagara requests:

That the Government of Ontario to direct Ontario School Boards to respect the principles of Smart Growth and abide by the Provincial Policy Statement and Places to Grow Act;

That the Ontario government, through the Ontario Ministry of Education, direct the District School Board of Niagara to refrain from closing schools, since doing so would go against smart Growth Principles and the places to Grow Act, and that the District School Board of Niagara respect catchment areas;

That the Government of Ontario, through the Ontario Ministry of Education, direct all School Boards in Ontario that, when it comes to school closure, expansion, or location of new schools, a decision making process be developed that collaborates with local municipalities to ensure Smart Growth principles and policies are addressed effectively (Council of the Region of Niagara 2012).

Appendix III Survey Letter of Invitation

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I am conducting as part of my Master's degree in the School of Planning at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Dr. Mark Seasons. I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you decide to take part.

Many communities are forced to make difficult financial and space allocation decisions which may result in the possible re-purposing of an educational facility. This process is a highly charged issue for school boards, teachers, neighbourhoods, and the students. This project will send an online survey to elected municipal councilors and school board trustees, and appointed municipal and school board planners from the communities of Hamilton, Waterloo Region, Halton Region and the City of Toronto in the hopes to capture the importance of schools to local communities while examining the current policy framework for the accommodation review process.

Voluntary participation in this anonymous web-survey takes approximately 15 minutes. You may decline to answer questions and can withdraw at anytime by closing your browser. The web-survey will not collect any information that could potentially identify you (such as machine identifiers). Survey data^[1] will be stored on a secured password-protected computer for two years and accessed only by the researchers. If you do choose to participate, we would ask that you take part in the survey before December 31st, so we are able to begin analyzing the results.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 226-789-7395 or by email at sandres@uwaterloo.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, Dr. Mark Seasons at 519-888-4567 ext.35922 or email mseasons@uwaterloo.ca.

Here is the survey link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/schoolsandplans>

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Maureen Nummelin in the Office of Research Ethics at 1-519-888-4567, Ext. 36005 or maureen.nummelin@uwaterloo.ca.

Yours Sincerely,

Spencer Andres

2012 President - Association of Graduate Planners

Bachelor of Arts in Geography

Candidate for Master of Arts in Planning

sandres@uwaterloo.ca

schoolsandplans.org

[1] This survey uses Survey Monkey(TM) which is a United States of America company. Consequently, USA authorities under provisions of the Patriot Act may access this survey data. If you prefer not to submit your data through Survey Monkey(TM), please contact one of the researchers so you can participate using an alternative method (such as through an email or paper-based questionnaire). The alternate method may decrease anonymity but confidentiality will be maintained

Appendix IV
Online Survey

Policies and Processes of Accommodation Review in Ontario

Thank for taking part in this survey!

The purpose of my research is to explore the importance of schools and the policies that govern them - specifically, how these policies connect to community planning objectives.

This survey will ask 17 questions regarding the importance of schools and the policies currently in place to govern accommodation review. It should take no longer than 20 minutes.

Participation in this survey is voluntary, so you may stop at any time or choose not to answer any of the questions. All answers will remain anonymous and will be stored in a password-protected hard drive in the researcher's office.

1. I agree to the use of quotations, identified by my position (e.g., elected school board official), from the open-ended response questions.

Yes

No

2. From your own perspective, what are the most important indicators of a school's success in a community? (Rank from 1 (most important) to 7 (least important))

Range of programs offered

Efficient use of public funds

Academic success

Neighbourhood vitality

Healthy students

Social belonging

Community building

3. Comments related to answers to this question (optional)

Policies and Processes of Accommodation Review in Ontario

4. In your opinion, how is the work of a school board viewed in your community?

Very negative

Somewhat negative

Neutral

Somewhat positive

Very positive

Do not know

5. Based on your answer to the previous question, why might this be the case?

6. In your opinion, how is the process of school accommodation review viewed in your community?

Very negative

Somewhat negative

Neutral

Somewhat positive

Very positive

Do not know

7. Based on your answer to the previous question, why might this be the case?

5

8. What level(s) of government or organization(s) should CREATE the policies of accommodation review? (Rank by importance, 1 (most important) to 6 (least important))

The Province

The Region

The Municipality

The School Board

Planning Department

Community Organizations

9. Comments related to answers to this question (optional)

Policies and Processes of Accommodation Review in Ontario

10. What level(s) of government or organization(s) should ultimately implement the policies of accommodation review? (Rank by importance, 1 (most important) to 6 (least important))

The Province

The Region

The Municipality

The School Board

Planning Department

Community Organizations

11. Comments related to answers to this question (optional)

12. What factors ARE CURRENTLY, in your opinion, most important in the Accommodation Review Process? (Select up to three (3) that apply and add further descriptors in the "Other" section)

Demographic Changes

Enrolment Numbers

Financial Resiliency

School Size

Programs Offered

Community/Neighbourhood Impact

Collaboration with all stakeholders

Other (please specify)

13. Comments related to this question (optional)

Policies and Processes of Accommodation Review in Ontario

14. What factors SHOULD BE, in your opinion, most important in the Accommodation Review Process? (Select up to three (3) that apply and add further descriptors in the "Other" section)

Demographic Changes

Enrolment Numbers

Financial Resiliency

School Size

Programs Offered

Community/Neighbourhood Impact

Collaboration with all stakeholders

Other (please specify)

15. Comments related to this question (optional)

16. What one style of decision-making would best describe the Accommodation Review process? (Please add any other descriptors in the "Other" section)

Authoritative
Informing

Consulting

Partnership

Collaborative

Other (please specify)

17. In your opinion, does this decision-making model result in the best possible outcome for a community?

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neutral

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Do not know

Policies and Processes of Accommodation Review in Ontario

18. What are the benefits (from your perspective) of the Accommodation Review process?

19. How would you change (if at all) the Accommodation Review process?

20. What is your position?

Elected School Board Official

School Board Employee

Elected Municipal Official

Municipal Employee

Community Organizer

Other (please specify)

Thank you!

Thank you for completing this survey!

If you would like to receive more information regarding this study or receive the results upon completion of this research, please send your contact information to sandres@uwaterloo.ca with the subject heading "Please Send Me The Results." Results will be made available in May of 2013.

In addition, if you are interested in taking part in a formal interview process, interviews will be taking place in the month of January. Interviews will provide the researcher with further insight into the data collected from this survey. Please send an email to sandres@uwaterloo.ca if you are interested in being interviewed.

Appendix V

Formal Interview Questions

1. What are the most important indicators of school success in a community?
2. How is the work of a school board viewed in your community?
3. How is the process of school accommodation review viewed in your community?
 - a. Based on your answer to the previous question, why do you think this is the case?
4. What do you see is the key rationale of the ARC process?
5. How would you describe the ideology that a school board may carry into accommodation review process?
6. In your opinion, does this decision making model result in the best possible outcome for a community?
7. In the accommodation review process, what factors, in your opinion, are most important to policy makers? What about policy implementers?
8. What do you see as the benefits of the Accommodation Review Process?
9. What do you see as the challenges of the Accommodation Review Process? Would you change the process?
10. Any other comments?

Appendix VI

Data Tables with Standard Deviation

In conversations with several research experts, there was division as to whether Standard Deviation was appropriate to include in this research. On the advice of my committee, here are the data tables from the Results Chapter with Standard Deviations.

Indicators	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Success	2.55	2.02
Social Belonging	2.91	1.22
Healthy Students	3.45	1.91
Range of Programs Offered	3.64	2.01
Efficient use of Public Funds	5.00	1.61
Community Building	5.00	1.84
Neighbourhood Vitality	5.45	1.69

Indicators	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Success	2.80	1.87
Social Belonging	3.10	1.65
Community Building	3.70	1.71
Healthy Students	4.10	1.91
Range of Programs Offered	4.30	2.23
Neighbourhood Vitality	4.40	1.18
Efficient Use of Public Funds	5.60	2.31

Indicators	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Success	2.73	1.67
Community Building	2.80	1.66
Neighbourhood Vitality	3.27	1.62
Healthy Students	3.47	1.64
Social Belonging	4.53	1.88
Range of Programs Offered	5.27	1.80
Efficient Use of Public Funds	5.93	1.49

Table 4.4: Policy Creation – Elected School Board Trustees		
Organizations	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
The School Board	1.64	1.50
The Region	3.64	1.50
The Province	3.64	1.96
The Municipality	3.73	1.19
The Planning Department	3.73	1.35
Community Organizations	4.64	1.50

Table 4.5: Policy Creation – Elected Municipal Officials		
Organizations	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
The School Board	1.80	1.03
The Municipality	2.60	1.42
The Planning Department	3.30	1.25
Community Organizations	3.70	1.64
The Region	4.80	0.91
The Province	4.80	1.81

Table 4.6: Policy Creation – Municipal Planners		
Organizations	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
The School Board	1.87	0.99
The Municipality	2.87	1.06
The Province	3.60	2.10
The Region	3.93	1.44
The Planning Department	4.07	1.49
Community Organizations	4.67	1.63

Table 4.7: Policy Implementation – Elected School Board Trustees		
Organizations	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
The School Board	1.45	1.51
The Municipality	3.55	1.29
The Region	3.64	1.50
The Planning Department	3.82	1.54
The Province	4.00	1.41
Community Organizations	4.55	1.57

Table 4.8: Policy Implementation – Elected Municipal Officials		
Organizations	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
The School Board	1.40	1.26
The Municipality	2.70	1.06
The Planning Department	3.50	1.43
The Region	3.90	1.29
The Province	4.40	1.58
Community Organizations	5.10	0.99

Table 4.9: Policy Implementation – Municipal Planners		
Organizations	Response Mean	Standard Deviation
The School Board	1.53	0.83
The Municipality	2.87	1.06
The Province	3.00	2.04
The Planning Department	4.07	1.22
The Region	4.33	1.17
Community Organizations	5.20	0.94

Table 4.10: Current Perception of Accommodation Review Factors– Elected School Board Trustees	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Enrolment Numbers	81.8% (9)
School Size	54.5% (6)
Demographic Changes	45.5% (5)
Financial Resiliency	45.5% (5)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	45.5% (5)
Programs Offered	27.3% (3)
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	18.2% (2)
Other Factors	Age of and state of building, funding formula, all are important

Table 4.11: Factors That Should Be Most Important – Elected School Board Trustees	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Programs Offered	72.7% (8)
Enrolment Numbers	63.6% (7)
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	54.5% (6)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	45.5% (5)
Demographic Changes	36.4% (4)
Financial Resiliency	36.4% (4)
School Size	18.2% (2)
Other Factors	Age and state of the building, impact on families

Table 4.12: Current Perception of Accommodation Review Factors– Elected Municipal Officials	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	70.0% (7)
Programs Offered	50.0% (5)
Enrolment Numbers	50.0% (5)
School Size	40.0% (4)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	30.0% (3)
Demographic Changes	20.0% (2)
Financial Resiliency	10.0% (1)

Table 4.13: Factors That Should Be Most Important – Elected Municipal Officials	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	80.0% (8)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	40.0% (4)
Enrolment Numbers	40.0% (4)
Programs Offered	40.0% (4)
School Size	30.0% (3)
Demographic Changes	20.0% (2)
Financial Resiliency	20.0% (2)

Table 4.14: Most Important Accommodation Review Factors– Elected Municipal Officials	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Demographic Changes	86.7% (13)
Enrolment Numbers	66.7% (10)
Financial Resiliency	66.7% (10)
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	46.7% (7)
School Size	40.0% (6)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	13.3% (2)
Programs Offered	6.7% (1)
Other Factors	Future projects and policy direction

Table 4.15: Factors That Should Be Most Important – Elected Municipal Officials	
Factors	Response Percent and Count
Community/Neighbourhood Impact	84.6% (11)
Demographic Changes	69.2% (9)
Enrolment Numbers	46.2% (6)
Financial Resiliency	30.8% (4)
Collaboration with all Stakeholders	23.1% (3)
Programs Offered	15.4% (2)
School Size	7.7% (1)

Table 4.16: Decision-Making Ideology– Elected School Board Trustees	
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Response Percent and Count</i>
Authoritative	0.0% (0)
Informing	0.0% (0)
Consulting	36.4% (4)
Partnership	9.1% (1)
Collaborative	54.5% (6)
Is it the best possible outcome?	
<i>Response Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
2.00	0.89

Table 4.17: Decision-Making Ideology–
--

Elected Municipal Officials	
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Response Percent and Count</i>
Authoritative	3.0% (3)
Informing	3.0% (3)
Consulting	11.1% (1)
Partnership	11.1% (1)
Collaborative	11.1% (1)
Other	All of the above
Is it the best possible outcome?	
<i>Response Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
3.80	1.32

Table 4.18: Decision-Making Ideology– Elected Municipal Officials	
<i>Ideology</i>	<i>Response Percent and Count</i>
Authoritative	46.7% (7)
Informing	26.7% (4)
Consulting	20.0% (3)
Partnership	6.7% (1)
Collaborative	0.0% (0)
Is it the best possible outcome?	
<i>Response Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
3.53	1.19