



Public Schools of North Carolina
State Board of Education
Department of Public Instruction
Financial and Business Services
Division of School Support
School Planning Section

School Closing Procedure

Relating to the
Public Schools of North Carolina

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School Closing Procedure

North Carolina Department of Public Instruction
School Planning Section

The following procedure is intended as a guide to be used when school closing is contemplated, and upon which local board policy may be based. The procedure is presented in a sequential manner; however, its sections may be used separately or together as local conditions require. It is primarily intended to identify the various kinds of information to be considered, as well as the particular processes to be undertaken by the local board of education prior to closing a school.

Publications of the School Planning Section, referenced herein, may be accessed at the website, www.schoolclearinghouse.org.

General Statutes

Whenever it is contemplated that a school may be closed, the local board of education should review, with an attorney, the applicability of General Statutes 115C-72 and 115C-518(a) to the proposed action, as well as the applicability of other statutes.

Evaluation of Facility

A facility evaluation shall be undertaken when it is apparent that physical condition will influence the decision to close a school. The evaluation should be performed by an individual qualified to make technical judgments, such as an architect, engineer, or other appropriate consultant.

A report should be submitted to the local education agency (LEA) superintendent, properly identifying the general condition of the facility and detailing any special problems relating to age, adaptability to Educational Program needs, North Carolina Building Code violations, the structure, or the utility systems. The report should include an estimate of useful life expectancy and, in particular, an accounting of repairs to be made if the facility is continued in service. (Some schools may be closed regardless of age and condition.) It may be beneficial to refer to the “Feasibility and Cost Analysis Form” published by School Planning Section, NCDPI, at www.schoolclearinghouse.org/pubs/costfeas.pdf.

Capacity of Facility

Useful capacity may be calculated in terms of the numbers of students the facility can accommodate, using formulas approved by the local board of education. Each local board of education will determine its own formula for capacity calculation. Some suggested methods to determine capacity are as follows:

- Capacity may be determined by multiplying the pupil-teacher ratio established by the board of education by the number of classrooms.
- Capacity may be determined by dividing the square footage in an instructional area by the per-pupil square footage recommended for the purpose for which it is used.
- Capacity may be determined through the standard procedure of the School Planning Section, DPI, using the “School Capacity Worksheet” provided on the website, at http://www.schoolclearinghouse.org/pubs/space_profiles.htm.

The capacities calculated may not exceed the class-size limits mandated by the General Statutes.

Membership

Present and projected membership should be a necessary part of any decision to close a school. The local board of education should calculate pupil population projections for a period of time beyond the year the school closing is considered – normally a minimum of five years – so that the decision will not be adversely effected by normal fluctuations in the population. This should be done for the school system as a whole, all schools included. See, for example, the “10-Year ADM Growth Projections” (a summary for each LEA), and “ADM Growth Analysis” (with details for each grade level), both available from School Planning. These are reports of statistical calculations, and do not account for local variances caused by manufacturing plants opening or closing, or similar influences.

The local board should be aware of two other factors in projecting membership. They are (1) the relationship between increases or decreases in the general population and school membership, and (2) the need to project membership in a given attendance area where it is anticipated that a school may be closed.

It could be appropriate for the local board of education to create a policy that any school whose membership falls below a certain number (e.g., 100) will be closed after due process, and all pupils and school personnel reassigned. The board may, of course, choose its own minimum membership number.

Organization of the School System

Any proposal to close a school should address the operational needs of the school system, to focus on the possibility of reorganizing the school rather than closing it. For example, a change from the traditional Grade 6-8 Middle School to a K-5 Elementary School may prevent a sound facility from being removed from service. Even adding or removing grades at the elementary level may permit a facility to continue in service.

Every five years, all local boards of education are required by G.S. 115C-521(a) to submit a Facility Needs Assessment (Long Range Plans) to the State Board of Education. The results of this survey will assess projected facility needs for the next 5-10 years. Current tabulations of the results can be viewed at “Facility Needs Survey,” published by School Planning.

It will, therefore, be expedient for the local board of education to understand the long-range programmatic needs of the school system before deciding to close a school. It may be appropriate to close a school for some temporary purpose which, in the final analysis, will serve the long-term goals of the school system. Organization should be examined in light of solidly established purposes.

Costs of Operation

For the local board to be justified in its assessment to close a school, it must calculate the financial costs of operating the facility and, more especially, the funds to be saved by closing the facility. These costs may be compared to per-capita costs of operating other similar

schools, to determine the savings (if any) of educating the displaced student body at another site.

These financial assessments normally include, but are not restricted to, the areas of (1) personnel reassigned or eliminated, (2) utilities for a designated time period, such as a year, (3) maintenance and repair costs per year, (4) custodial costs per year, (5) transportation costs, and (6) insurance costs. If the facility is to be closed and not replaced, a substantial capital outlay may be avoided.

Transportation

It is not always possible to realize cost savings in transportation by closing a school, since reassignment of pupils sometimes increases transportation responsibilities. However, this aspect must be included in the decision to close or not to close.

Specifically, rerouting buses and the effect upon time and distance should be examined. There may be a need for fewer buses, or additional buses. Maintenance costs, number of drivers needed, economy of routing, etc. should be assessed.

Diversity

Local school boards recognize that diversity is a sensitive factor in school enrollment. No school board should take an action which so seriously affects pupil assignment as does closing a school, without being completely aware of its ramifications on diversity. The probability is that diversity alone will not determine whether or not a school is closed; however, it is an important matter that should not be overlooked.

Alternative Uses

The total program needs of the school system should be examined before a conclusion is reached that a closed school has no useful alternative purpose which is compatible with the mandate of the local board of education to teach children. Instructional programs as well as auxiliary services should be examined.

A number of possible alternatives suggest themselves. They are (1) special education, (2) special purpose schools, (3) social and community purposes, (4) maintenance and repair services, (5) storage, and (6) office space. Current expense and capital outlay costs always ought to be included in any assessment of alternative uses.

Program Considerations

Before closing a school, the local board of education should understand where students will be reassigned and what effect closing will have on program opportunity, resulting from staff reassignments and the reallocation of resources.

Tentative Decision

After the local board of education carefully studies the facility evaluations, facility capacity, school membership, school organizations, costs of operation, effect on transportation, alternative uses for the facility, effect on diversity, and effect on local governmental planning, the board should make a tentative decision. If the tentative decision is to close the school, the board should schedule informational meetings and hearings.

Informational Meetings

General Statute 115C-72 requires a local board of education to hold a public hearing prior to closing a school. Even without this mandate, the board should, in order to ensure good public relations, hold certain informational meetings with their various publics prior to closing a school. These activities are for the purpose of providing information, answering questions and, most important of all, establishing in the mind of those affected that their reactions and opinions are being evaluated. Closing schools is much easier with public support. These meetings should involve but should not necessarily be restricted to (1) parents, (2) school-related groups, (3) board of county commissioners, and (4) other public officials in local government.

It is incumbent upon the board to keep a displaced faculty as well informed as can be. Personnel reassignment plans should be prepared and given to affected individuals as soon as possible.

Closing Decision

After all essential information has been obtained and evaluated by the local board of education and after all essential activities, as determined by the board, have been carried out, then the board should vote in official session regarding closing the school. If the board votes to close the school, the motion should be specific as to termination date and it should be accomplished in conjunction with applicable general statutes.

Disposition of Surplus Property

The local board of education has a number of options available to it in deciding what to do with a closed facility which has been legally declared to be surplus or “unnecessary or undesirable for public school purposes.” These options are fairly standard in most cases and the usefulness of a particular one will depend upon the needs of the school system as perceived by the board.

General Statute 115C-518(a) requires surplus property first to be made available to the board of commissioners. If the commissioners do not want or need the property, the local board of education has the following options: (1) surplus facilities may be leased to eligible clients, (2) surplus facilities may be sold at public auction to eligible customers, (3) surplus facilities may be exchanged with another governmental body, and (4) surplus structures may be demolished and the site sold at public auction to eligible customers.

One successful reuse of structurally-sound schools has been conversion into housing, especially for the elderly. When considering such an option, however, evaluate the cost of modifications required by the Building Code, and any other applicable regulation. Local zoning regulations may impact this and similar decisions.

Demolition of School / Construction of new School

The General Statutes of North Carolina prohibit a local board of education from investing any construction money in a new school building to replace an existing school building unless it submits to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction an analysis that 1) compares the feasibility and costs of building the new building and of renovating the existing

building; and 2) clearly indicates the desirability of building the new building. The State Superintendent is required to forward such analyses to the North Carolina Historical Commission.

The School Planning Section of the Department of Public Instruction provides a form which may be used to conduct and submit the required analysis. See the “Feasibility and Cost Analysis Form” on the website, at www.schoolclearinghouse.org/pubs/costfeas.pdf. All analyses, regardless of format, should be forwarded to School Planning, which acts as designated agent for the State Superintendent. (Forms will be forwarded to the N.C. Historical Commission for their review.) The process of review can be expedited by the inclusion of 1) an address and location map for the existing building; 2) a site plan showing the placement of the existing and proposed buildings; 3) a floor plan of the existing building; and 4) a photograph of the exterior of the existing building; 5) the report resulting from an evaluation by an architect, engineer, asbestos consultant, environmentalist, etc.

Changes to the DPI School Name and Address (SNA) file

The local board of education may finalize the closing of a school by submitting a modification of the School Name and Address File, online at <http://sna.dpi.state.nc.us/>. If there are any questions, contact the SNA Coordinator at 919-807-3700. Only SNA “authorized users” at each LEA have the ID and password necessary to log into the system and to edit and update their information.

DPI School numbers are assigned to populations, not to buildings. If the LEA builds a new building at a new site, closes an old building, and moves the students and staff of the old building to the new site, the school number goes with them. If the LEA moves another pre-existing school into that old building, it would bring its school number (of the relocated school) with it. If the LEA is dividing a school or schools to fill the old building, then a new number would be assigned.

Changes to the records of the School Planning Section

The School Planning Section also assigns tracking numbers to schools, but its designation is for the campus itself, not the population. Therefore, if a particular school building is closed (and demolished, or sold, or given over to an alternative use) its school number would cease to exist. The LEA should notify the School Planning Section of DPI about any such change.

Changes to the records of the Insurance Section

(If the LEA is insured by the DPI Insurance Section)

Any closing or demolition of any building should be reported to the Insurance Section of DPI. To discuss the appropriate format for this notification, contact the Insurance Section at 919-807-3521.

February 2008

Checklist for School Closing Procedure

The following checklist of information and activities necessary to school closing is intended to provide a quick reference to be used in implementing the procedure.

- Evaluation of Facility
 - Examine by architect, engineer, or other appropriate consultant
 - Report on physical condition
 - State useful life expectancy
 - Identify specific maintenance or code problems
 - Adaptability to the needs of the Educational Program
- Capacity of Facility; Determine useful pupil capacity by approved formula:
 - Division of School Planning recommendations
 - North Carolina law allowances
 - Staff formula
- Membership
 - Project membership five years as minimum
 - Identify minimum membership for automatic closing
 - Project membership for specific attendance area
- Organization of School System
 - Needs of total school system
 - Reorganization required by closing
- Costs of Operation
 - Current expense and capital outlay savings because of closing
 - Per capita costs in comparison to other schools
- Transportation
 - Rerouting needs including additional buses
 - Cost savings, if any
- Diversity
- Alternative Uses
 - Total school system program needs
 - Auxiliary uses
- Program Considerations
- Tentative Decision
- Informational Meetings
 - Parents, county commissioners, public officials
 - School-related groups
- Closing Decisions
 - General Statute 115C-72
 - General Statute 115C-518(a)
- Disposition of Surplus Property
 - Other school system needs
 - Lease to local government or private enterprise
 - Exchange with governmental agency
 - Sell
- Inform NC DPI
 - School Name and Address file (SNA)
 - School Planning section
 - Insurance section (if applicable)

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