
As the provincial association representing the interests of urban municipalities in Saskatchewan, SUMA should assist its members in ensuring that when a school in their community is slated for closure or discontinuation of grades, that a proper consultative process takes place to protect the interests of urban municipalities affected by that decision.

A school is a vital component of any community as it plays an important role in economic development by attracting families to a community and providing employment opportunities. A school also assists a community in providing a quality of life for residents by also serving as a recreational and meeting facility for the community. It is for these reasons, that when a school is slated for closure a community can be significantly impacted. More than often residents look to their municipal councils to assist in keeping the school open. However, municipalities do not have any legislative jurisdiction over the administration of a local school.

The authority to operate and make decisions on such matters as closing a school is delegated by the Ministry of Education through legislation to local school boards. These boards are comprised of duly, elected representatives chosen by the citizens of Saskatchewan to operate our province's schools. *The Education Act, 1995* outlines the process that must be followed if a school board wishes to close or discontinue grades at a school. As part of this process, local municipalities will be consulted on the decision; however, the end result is ultimately up to the school board.

SUMA will support its members, as an observer; to make certain that the proper protocol, as per *The Education Act, 1995* is followed. Should a school board not follow the legislated process, SUMA will work with the municipality to explore options available to hold the school board accountable.

Background

In 2004, the Government of Saskatchewan imposed a two-year moratorium on the closure of schools throughout the province as part of the school division amalgamation process. Following the two-year period, several divisions began the process of reviewing a number of schools for possible closure. In 2007, there were approximately twenty-four schools slated for closure, twenty-one of those were to be closed within the year. School division pointed to declining enrollments and a population shift from small urban communities and rural areas to the larger towns and cities as a reason for these proposed closures. Residents affected by these closures began a province wide campaign to have the provincial government become involved and direct the divisions to keep the schools open. Many of these residents looked to their local municipal councils for help in this endeavor. In May of 2007, in response to residents and member councils, SUMA in partnership with SARM formally requested the provincial government to extend the moratorium for school closures for one more year. The associations argued that the province was in an economic boom and these closures would have a significant impact on the ability of these communities to attract economic development. SUMA and SARM stated that an additional year would provide these communities enough time for these communities affected to evaluate their situation and to take the necessary action needed to ensure their school remains open.