

DATE: March 9, 2021

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Information Update Regarding the *Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2020–2029*

ORIGINATOR: Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Shauna Bland, Josephine Duquette, David Evans, Jenifer Elliott, Terri Gosine, Kim Holowatuk, Scott Humphrey, Roland Labbe, Valerie Leclair, Andrew Lowerre, Ron McGowan, Shaminder Parmar, Jennifer Thompson, Christopher Wright

REFERENCE: [Alberta School Capital Manual](#)
[Ten-Year Facility Plan \(2020-2029\)](#)
[Three Year Capital Plan 2021-2024](#)
[Growth Control Model Information Sheet](#)
[RFI 037: Multi-Year Block Funding Model](#)

ISSUE

The *Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2020–2029* was approved by the Board of Trustees on February 25, 2020. This report provides information on changes in context since The Plan was approved. If requested by the province, this report would be provided along with the *Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2020–2029*.

BACKGROUND

Learning for students in Alberta shifted from in-person to online mid-March, 2020, in an effort to slow the spread of the COVID-19 global pandemic. The impact of restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic impacted the economy in many ways, which was compounded by slow economic activity due to low natural resource revenues.

Specific to our Division, the overall enrolment declined by 1,274 students. This was the first decline in overall enrolment since 2007, in a year where the pre-pandemic projection was for a 2.1 per cent increase. The 2020–2021 school year also marks the first year of the new provincial funding framework for education in Alberta. The framework caused some anticipated enrolment declines across the province within specific areas of education delivery, particularly at the Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten and returning Grade 12 levels. The combination of the pandemic and the economy resulted in a 22.2 per cent decline in new students entering the Division across all grades in the 2020–2021 school year.

Economic recovery post-pandemic for Edmonton and Alberta will be challenging, and a slow recovery in the global energy sector is likely to exacerbate those challenges. These uncertainties remain a challenge to the Division’s forecasting for the planning and the allocation of Division resources. The strategic direction for Division facility planning is outlined within the Ten-Year Facility Plan.

CURRENT SITUATION**COVID-19 Pandemic:**

According to Statistics Canada, Edmonton's population reached 972,223 in 2019 and has been growing at an average rate of 2.6 per cent every year since 2016. The Division's student enrolment consistently outpaced this growth and had averaged 3.3 per cent over the previous seven years. Despite the economic challenges throughout the province as a result of the downturn in energy prices, Edmonton was still expected to grow by 2.1 per cent in 2019, which is 0.2 per cent higher than the rest of Alberta and 0.8 per cent higher than the rest of the country. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, economic challenges intensified to the point where more people left the province than moved in. The population overall has remained static given a slight rise in natural population growth (births versus deaths). Due to international and some inter-provincial travel restrictions or recommendations, immigration to Canada and temporary foreign student entry has been negatively impacted. A total of 206 fewer international students are attending our Division, due in part to these restrictions. The labour market softness also may have contributed to 277 more students leaving the Division than the previous year, and 1,556 fewer students entering the Division than the previous year.

New Provincial Funding Framework:

The new provincial Funding Model for School Authorities for the 2020–2021 school year and the 2020–2021 Special Education Coding Criteria provided the Division with details and clarity around funding criteria and eligibility for Program Unit Funding programming in the Division. As a result, the Division is offering programming for a total of 600 Pre-Kindergarten students for the 2020–2021 school year, down from 1,040 the previous year. A change of eligibility age moving from March 1 to December 31 for Kindergarten entry contributed to a decrease of 550 students enrolled in Kindergarten this year.

Division Enrolment:

The Division is projecting that student enrolment will likely return to “near-normal” levels in 2021–2022 and increase by 2.1 per cent, based on current conditions and knowns, and expect continual growth over the next three years. If the trajectory of the pandemic prolongs conditions that challenge economic recovery, and impact immigration and travel, enrolment growth could be lower.

Utilization:

The Division opened two new schools in 2020–2021: Soraya Hafez School and Thelma Chalifoux School. The number of students attending these schools was impacted by a lack of opportunity to showcase them in spring open houses. Combined with an overall decline in enrolment, the additional under-utilized capacity resulted in a decline in the Division's overall utilization rate from 81 per cent to 80 per cent. In 2021–2022, two new replacement schools (Aleda Patterson and Alex Janvier schools) and a modernization and new addition to Highlands School will reduce the operating school inventory in these areas by four schools, consolidating seven schools into three schools. Garth Worthington School and Dr. Anne Anderson School will also open in southwest Edmonton. In total, these new spaces will be needed to accommodate student growth, and a return to a utilization rate above 80 per cent is expected within one to two years. Two additional schools are being project managed by the province on behalf of the Division through a P3 delivery model: a K–9 school in the Keswick neighbourhood in southwest Edmonton and a high school in The Meadows area of southeast Edmonton, will help alleviate growth pressures in those areas.

High School Accommodation:

The Division experienced a slight decrease in the level of returning Grade 12 students in the 2020–2021 school year. A slight increase in returning Grade 12 students is expected in the short term (approaching normal pre-pandemic levels). The return of high school enrolment growth to normal levels and the larger cohort size in younger grades will mean continued accommodation pressure on the Division's existing high school infrastructure.

Dr. Anne Anderson School, opening in September 2021, will add 1,943 high school spaces in southwest Edmonton. On March 6, 2020, the Government of Alberta announced construction funding for a Meadows high school. The funding will allow the Division to provide 2,400 additional high school spaces in southeast Edmonton. Student residency is high in both southeast and southwest Edmonton compared to available capacity. These two new schools will increase capacity for current and future students in areas where it is most needed.

Growth Accommodation

For areas where demand for accommodation may outpace capacity, the Division will apply the [Growth Control Model](#). In some instances, access to space may be limited and a lottery held for new students and families. In those cases, a designated overflow receiving school would be established to accommodate students unable to gain access through lottery. Three schools in the Division are in this highest level of growth accommodation intervention for the 2021–2022 school year: Dr. Lila Fahlman, Dr. Margaret-Ann Armour and Svend Hansen Schools. When student residency and school enrolment permits, measures such as a lottery can be discontinued. An example of measure reduction is the reinstatement of Kindergarten and Grade 1 programming at Michael Strembitsky School for the 2021–2022 school year, after being redirected for the past six years.

Capital Investment and the Need to Address Deferred Maintenance:

In 2017, the Division reported on the completion of 171 school condition assessments to quantify the total value of deferred maintenance at \$757 million. Current valuation of deferred maintenance is \$812 million, and at recent funding levels, the total value of deferred maintenance in the Division is forecast to exceed \$1 billion in 2027. While the Division has been receiving a consistent amount of Infrastructure Maintenance Renewal (IMR) funding over the past 14 years (between \$15 million to \$30 million annually), topped by Capital Maintenance Renewal (CMR) funding in 2020, these funds have not been enough to address deferred maintenance needs of the rapidly aging Division buildings.

The most cost-effective approach to addressing deferred maintenance is a planned, preventative maintenance program informed by accurate system and component data, consistently funded to meet benchmarks for reinvestment or component replacement. Details to support these claims can be found in a Request for Information (RFI 037) submitted to the Board of Trustees in the 2018/19 school year. Funding for modernization projects and capital renewal has been consistently below the levels required to fully maintain the Division's aging infrastructure.

School modernizations and Space for Students in Mature Communities projects help to address the Division's mounting deferred maintenance deficit in the most rapid and effective manner. An example of addressing deferred maintenance comes in the form of replacement schools in the Westlawn and Highlands school clusters that will be completed for the 2021/22 school year. These will result in two new schools (Aleda Patterson and Alex Janvier schools) and a modernization/addition to Highlands School to create three new/modernized schools where there were previously seven older facilities with

high operating costs and significant deferred capital renewal needs. No new modernizations or replacement school projects are currently funded for the Division.

An ongoing and predictable funding of modernizations and replacement projects would align with comments in the McKinnon Report which '*strongly encourage the Government of Alberta to establish a stable and sustainable level of annual capital spending and put an end to the "boom and bust" cycles.*' Decreased investment in the Division's capital infrastructure would mean that building component failure and costly unplanned repairs become more common in aging facilities. While the Division's maintenance and repair program is excellent and ensures stakeholder safety, an increasing list of challenges would be anticipated in order to address emergent issues. Additionally, a reactive approach to planned maintenance and growth accommodation can result in student space challenges and accommodation planning, increased transportation costs, space reconfigurations within schools to accommodate instruction in unconventional spaces, potential disruptions to continuity of programming for students and families, and necessitate unnecessary investments in additional modular classrooms.

21st Century Learning Environments and Environmental Sustainability:

Providing equitable access to high quality, 21st Century learning environments remains an overarching goal and guiding priority in planning our Division's school facilities. Student learning diversity is best served in providing a variety of teaching and learning spaces that can be utilized to support that diversity. The flexibility for instruction to occur in a variety of classroom configurations, smaller gathering areas, or individual work areas within learning communities provides an alternative to the traditional model with fixed classrooms linked through a connecting hallway. More open environments allow for incorporating access to natural light and allow for observation between learning space types within the learning communities, to enhance safety and supervision. Other features such as exposing building systems to allow teaching and learning opportunities can turn the entire school into a working three-dimensional model to observe and analyze. A comprehensive description of what 21st Century learning environments represent is provided in Section 3.0.6 of the *Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2020–2029*.

New schools opening this year and next demonstrate the flexibility and value that 21st Century school designs can provide, including maximizing energy sustainability and minimizing operating costs. Replacement facilities represent the shortest path to addressing the deferred maintenance of our aging building inventory while ensuring equitable access to these types of environments. In addition, by delivering school capacity to accommodate students closest to where they live, transportation requirements can be minimized to reduce the environmental cost of student travel in vehicles and associated emissions. Reducing travel times and maximizing the environmental sustainability of the Division's buildings will remain key strategies to reduce the carbon footprint and operating costs.

A Changing City—Policies and Demographics:

Since the adoption of the *Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2020–2029*, the *City Plan* was approved by City Council. The *City Plan* confirms the goal to increase the share of all development in Edmonton to be 50 per cent infill (significantly more than the goal of 25 per cent infill from the previous plan). This will influence the Division's capital planning, as there will be a need to ensure that there are sufficient schools in mature communities available to accommodate new students that may come with the increased unit density.

The City Plan supports the concept of greater accessibility to neighbourhood services by advocating for the development of 15-minute districts throughout the city. The Division continuously strives to provide

educational programming close to where students reside. The City of Edmonton must prioritize the development of affordable, multi-family housing around existing and future school sites to provide the best opportunity for the Division to provide student accessibility to educational programming within the 15-minute concept.

KEY POINTS

- The Division’s overall enrolment declined by 1,274 students from the 2019–2020 to the 2020–2021 school year.
 - This was the first decline in overall enrolment since 2007.
- The new provincial funding framework for education in Alberta caused some anticipated enrolment declines within specific areas of education delivery, particularly at the Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten and returning Grade 12 levels.
- A change of eligibility age moving from March 1 to December 31 for Kindergarten entry contributed to a decrease of 550 students enrolled in Kindergarten this year.
- A total of 206 fewer international students are attending our Division.
- The pandemic and weaker economic conditions contributed to 1,556 fewer students entering the Division than in 2019–2020, and 277 more students leaving the Division than in 2019–2020.
- Even with the decrease in student enrolment in the 2020–2021 school year, the Division projects that student enrolment will likely return to “near-normal” levels in 2021–2022, and continue to grow steadily over the next 10 years.
- No new modernizations or replacement school projects are currently funded for the Division, as the delivery of two new replacement schools (Aleda Patterson and Alex Janvier Schools) and a modernization and new addition to Highlands School will be completed for the coming year.
- IMR and CMR funding will not be enough to address the deferred maintenance needs of rapidly aging Division buildings and will result in downstream costs in the form of increased demands on labour, equipment, and building materials as well as transportation costs and accessibility issues
- Providing equitable access to high quality, 21st Century learning environments remains an overarching goal and guiding priority in planning our Division’s school facilities over the remainder of the Ten-Year Facilities Plan.
- New schools opening this year and in subsequent years demonstrate the flexibility and value that 21st Century school designs can provide, including maximizing energy sustainability and operating costs.
- Replacement facilities represent the shortest path to addressing the deferred maintenance of our aging building inventory while ensuring equitable access to 21st Century learning environments.

SP: kk