

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: A. McBeath, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Provincial Utilization Rates

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RESOURCE
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INFORMATION

This report outlines how school capacity and utilization is currently calculated by the province and the district's position with respect to suggested improvements in the formula and its' application. The current provincial formula is based on an "area per student" concept to calculate school capacity and an "adjusted enrolment" system to measure how school space is used.

The utilization rate is important because it is used by the Alberta Infrastructure to determine school districts' eligibility for new school construction. The formula is also used to calculate Plant Operations and Maintenance allocations to districts whereby jurisdictions with lower utilization rates receive lower allocations for a given amount of school space.

As the district moves forward with initiatives designed to improve school utilization, and as utilization rates increase in importance to districts and local communities, it is essential that school utilization rates are an accurate and realistic measure of how much capacity is available and how effectively it is being used at the individual school level. The capacity must reflect the ability of a school to accommodate students while measures of enrolment must consider the different space requirements of students based on their individual characteristics.

A. Measuring School Capacity

Prior to the current system, Alberta Learning calculated a school's capacity by counting instructional spaces and assigning capacity in multiples of 25 for each classroom. Alberta Infrastructure currently calculates the capacity of a school by using the concept of "area per student" adjusted for the grade level of the student. This method is based on the assumption that each student requires an allotment of school space comprised of 60% instructional space and 40% non-instructional support space. In other words, a student requires classroom instructional space as well as support spaces such as hallways, washrooms, administration areas, and mechanical rooms. This method allows for simplicity in calculation and consistency in application across the province. While the method works well for setting standards for the construction of new schools, there is room for improvement when calculating the capacity of individual existing schools. The following outlines the district's

position on how the formula could be improved to result in more accurate measures of school capacity:

Variations in Construction

Issue: As architectural styles and design standards have changed over the years, schools built in different eras have large variations in the ratio of instructional to non-instructional space. For example, older schools built before 1950 generally have much wider corridors, smaller classrooms, and, in some cases, thicker walls. When an area per student factor based on current design standards of 60:40 is applied, it results in the school having a larger rated capacity than is realistic. For example, North Edmonton School has wide corridors and large separate boys and girls mud-rooms. The school's 14 classrooms rated at 25 students would generate a capacity of 350. The current formula, based on area per student, does not allow for the older architectural style of the school and generates a capacity of 448.

Proposed Solution: A means whereby the consistent approach of area per student could be retained would be to apply the area per student factor only to areas of schools approved by Alberta Learning as actual "instructional" areas. The area per student should only be applied to areas where actual student instruction can take place, as opposed to boiler rooms, vestibules, hallways, or other spaces that support learning but which do not function well as classrooms. This approach would address the difficulty of converting wide hallways or thick walls into classrooms in older schools and measure the true capacity of a school to accommodate students.

Core Schools

Issue: The responsible approach to school construction recognizes that neighbourhoods have a life-cycle whereby enrolment peaks temporarily and levels off to a long-term settled enrolment. The core school concept addresses this by building a smaller core building with the ability to add semi-permanent pods or free-standing portables to accommodate peak enrolment. When enrolment drops off, the semi-permanent structures can be removed, as the district's current capital submission contemplates. The area per student approach is inconsistent in its treatment of these facilities because the system rates the core buildings as having more capacity than there actually is due to oversized non-instructional areas. When building the core facility, several components including the mechanical systems must be over-sized to allow for the temporary additions to be attached. When removing both free-standing and semi-permanent structures from such a school, the district does not receive the credit of reduction in non-instructional space because it is part of the core building. Under the old Alberta Learning formula, 25 student spaces were added for each attached classroom or free-standing portable. Under the current system, removing a portable classroom results in a reduction of around 9 student spaces instead of 25 because a portable is almost entirely made up of instructional space. The current formula penalizes districts which are acting responsibly when they remove semi-permanent classrooms and portables that are no longer required.

Proposed Solution: Applying the area per student factor only to spaces approved by Alberta Learning as instructional would address the issue in core schools. Rating free-standing portable classrooms and semi-permanent additions at 25 spaces per classroom would be a more realistic measure of the capacities of these structures. This approach would give the

district full credit for the planned reductions in semi-permanent space and portable classrooms.

Lease Exemptions

Issue: Alberta Infrastructure currently allows for non-profit leases to be deducted from the overall square footage of a school. Because most leases are in classrooms, the exemption is granted only for the instructional space in the lease, not for the non-instructional support spaces required by the lease holders. It would be highly unusual for the district to lease part of a hallway or a portion of the school's washrooms even though the space is also required by the lease holders. The district currently leases 39,910 square metres of classroom space, which Alberta Infrastructure removes from the district's gross area in calculating capacity. This results in the district receiving a lower reduction in capacity than the 25 spaces that are available in a typical classroom. For example, Richard Secord School leases 474 square metres to a play school and an out-of-school care. Assuming the average classroom holding 25 students is about 80 square metres, this should equate to six classrooms, or 150 student spaces. The district receives an exemption of only 60 spaces, because the lease is entirely for instructional space. The support spaces required for the lease are not considered by Alberta Infrastructure. As well, the district receives no Plant Operations and Maintenance support for leased areas even though many leases in district schools involve cross-ministry initiatives such as Early Head Start and Capital Health.

Proposed Solution: This issue could be addressed by adjusting the exemption to account for the non-instructional space used by lease holders. Alternatively, revenue-neutral leases could be written up including the proportionate required support spaces in schools. The administration has calculated that this could amount to an increase in district utilization of approximately 2%. As well, because Alberta Infrastructure is responsible for the accommodation of government activities and functions, there should be support in the form of Plant Operation and Maintenance funding for spaces that are leased for cross-ministry government initiatives.

B. Measuring the Use of Space

School utilization is calculated by dividing the Provincial Adjusted Enrolment by a school's Net Capacity. Alberta Infrastructure arrives at the Adjusted Enrolment by counting kindergarten students at .5 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) because they attend school for half the day. Regular students are counted at their FTE, and severe special needs students are weighted at 3 FTE because their additional space requirements are recognized. The district is advocating for improvements in the recognition of space that is actually required by students.

Special Needs Students

Issue: The provincial formula currently allows for recognition of the extra space requirements of severe special needs students but not the space needed for mild and moderate special needs students in district sites. The formula assumes that mild and moderate special needs students are integrated into regular classrooms. In many instances, this is not the case, as the district has established district-centre programs for mild and moderate special needs students where non-integrated instruction occurs in separate classrooms. Currently, Alberta

Infrastructure allows rural jurisdictions the ability to designate wings of schools as Special Needs, IOP, or ESL schools. In these cases, a student allowance factor of 1.5 is extended to mild and moderate special needs students. Because Edmonton Public Schools strives for balance in the distribution of special needs programs, district sites are established in existing neighbourhood schools rather than designating entire schools for special needs students. Alberta Infrastructure currently allows urban districts the mild/moderate exemption only when entire schools are approved as special needs centres.

Proposed Solution: The administration is advocating strongly the position that there should be no distinction between urban and rural districts in this regard. District-centre sites with separate classrooms for mild and moderate special needs students should be recognized for the enrolment adjustment. An exemption for district-centre mild-moderate special needs students would increase the district's overall utilization rate by approximately 2 %.

Pre-Kindergarten Programs

Issue: Edmonton Public Schools is involved with several providers of pre-kindergarten programming including Early Intervention, Early Education, and Early Head Start. Currently these programs are treated as leases with the same problems outlined above. The current formula provides these programs with an exemption on the capacity side with no recognition in terms of Plant Operation and Maintenance funding.

Proposed Solution: A more realistic approach would be to count these students on the numerator of the Area, Capacity, and Utilization formula. These students have special needs and should be weighted as such. There is no reason the use of schools should be limited to K to 12 only. This approach is also consistent with Alberta Learning's philosophy regarding life-long learning.

Kindergarten Programs

Issue: In many neighbourhood schools, enrolment is such that there is only one class of kindergarten students. Because these students only attend classes for half the day, they are counted as .5 FTE by Alberta Infrastructure. As these specially configured classrooms are used for half the day, and other grades require a home room be available for a full school day, the use of these unique spaces by other grade levels is not feasible. Therefore, the full classroom is required for kindergarten use regardless of whether the school offers one or two kindergarten classes. This penalizes smaller schools that offer a single half day kindergarten class.

Proposed Solution: Kindergarten classrooms should be considered to be fully utilized by Alberta Infrastructure regardless of whether the room is used for the whole day or for half of the day.

Community Use of Schools

Issue: Schools are an asset used by all members of the community. A large majority of taxpayers do not have school-aged children but they still value and use school facilities. The district has a long history of providing for after-hours use of schools facilities to the community. In 2001-2002, the district provided for almost 70,000 hours of after school

community use in both gymnasias and classrooms. Currently, other than paid rentals, no fees are charged to after-hours users of schools under the Joint Use Agreement even though such uses increase facility operation and maintenance costs.

Proposed Solution: The administration is advocating that Alberta Infrastructure recognize that schools are accessed by the entire community and that they are well utilized not only by K to 12 students, but by many citizens of Edmonton. Recognition by Infrastructure of community use of schools would give a more realistic picture of how schools are actually used by the community throughout the day.

C. Provincial Review of the Area, Capacity and Utilization Formula

Alberta Infrastructure recently revised the method of calculating school capacity and utilization in response to a recommendation from the Minister's Task Force on School Facilities. One of the recommendations arising from the report defining the current Area, Capacity, and Utilization formula was that "Standards and Guidelines be reviewed within one year of their acceptance and, beyond this, at least every two years or as necessitated by policy or curriculum change". In keeping with this recommendation, Alberta Infrastructure has established a committee of experts to review the current formula. The district is represented on the committee with staff from the Planning Department. District staff is advocating the above positions both through this committee and at the administrative level. It is also the intention of the administration to advocate for the above positions through a letter from the Board Chairman to the Minister of Infrastructure.

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