



\$8.6 Billion a Crucial Step to Address the Growing Needs of Public Schools

On behalf of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA), I would like to express our gratitude to the Alberta government for the \$8.6 billion investment for building new schools and modular classrooms recently announced. This is a crucial step toward addressing the growing needs of our public school system, demonstrating the government's commitment to providing every student with access to learning environments designed to help them thrive. As Alberta Infrastructure Minister Peter Guthrie emphasized, the province must “ensure Alberta's students have access to the state-of-the-art facilities they need to learn and succeed, and that we deliver these schools in a timely and cost-effective manner.”

Public Schools = Equitable Education

Since the 1970s, school choice has been part of Alberta's public school system, allowing parents to choose schools based on their child's unique learning needs rather than their catchment area. While the Alberta government's emphasis on school choice provides families with additional options, the heart of Alberta's education system remains its public schools, which serve over 500,000 students across the province.

Public schools are deeply embedded in their communities and are designed to meet the needs of Alberta's student population. Importantly, they ensure every student, regardless of background or ability, has the opportunity to benefit from varied educational pathways. They are the most inclusive and democratic form of education, ensuring equitable access to learning for all children.

That is the reason we believe, in every community, public schools should be the first built to offer a comprehensive range of programs, specialized support, and enrichment opportunities for all students—from those with special needs to high achievers and everyone in between. Only when public schools are fully funded, with manageable class sizes, adequate teaching resources, and the infrastructure to support diverse learners, should the government consider diverting funds to charter or private schools.

Beyond Bricks and Mortar

A well-resourced public school system is essential to ensuring that no student is left behind, that exceptional students can achieve their full potential, and that all students thrive in environments that promote inclusivity, equity, and academic excellence. Investment in public

schools—through optimal class sizes, enhanced support for teachers, and expanded access to specialized programs and resources—will provide the learning gateways needed to meet the unique needs of Alberta's growing and diverse student population.

As enrollment continues to rise, the challenges of maintaining manageable class sizes, and ensuring that every child receives the attention and resources they need to succeed are becoming more pronounced. Premier Danielle Smith's comments on Alberta's rapid enrollment growth highlight not only the need for more schools but also the strain it places on operations, sharing that the province's treasury board is "working on an alternative model" for school funding that will be in the February 2025 budget.

This is welcome news. School boards can now start to plan and prepare to transform classroom spaces into enriched learning environments: hiring additional teachers, professional and support staff, as well as equipping classrooms and resourcing programs that address every student's unique set of needs. Providing both infrastructure and essential resources will ensure that every student benefits from such investment and that public schools are positioned to meet the challenges of today and tomorrow.

The Future of Alberta Depends on Strong Public Schools

Investing in public school education must be a priority because it is the foundation of Alberta's future economic strength, social cohesion, and overall prosperity. A strong public education system equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to drive innovation, compete in the global economy, and solve the challenges of tomorrow. By prioritizing public education, the government not only ensures equal opportunities for all children but also addresses the long-term needs of industries reliant on a well-educated workforce. Furthermore, strong public schools reduce future social costs associated with unemployment, homelessness, and crime, creating a more equitable and thriving society.

Public School education is a fundamental pillar of our society, ensuring that every child has the chance to succeed, regardless of their circumstances. It is essential that public schools receive the funding and support they need before exploring alternative or selective education options that benefit a narrower subset of students. This approach will ensure that public education remains strong, equitable, and capable of meeting the evolving needs of all Alberta families.

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