PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA®

When Growth Comes Faster Than Classrooms

When people think about school infrastructure, they often think about a new school being built in a growing community. Those projects are important, and across Alberta many families are eagerly awaiting the day new schools open their doors to students.

But creating classroom space for students is about much more than building new schools.

In fact, one of the realities of Alberta's growth is when classroom space does not keep pace with student growth, the effects are often felt far beyond a single neighbourhood.

A family moving into a rapidly growing community may be waiting for a future school. Meanwhile, students from that same community are attending existing schools nearby. Parents in established neighbourhoods may start to notice their local school becoming more crowded, additional modular classrooms appearing on school grounds or attendance boundaries changing.

These experiences are often connected.

That is why public school boards spend significant time looking ahead. Through their capital plans, boards assess enrolment trends, housing development, demographic changes, facility conditions and future community needs. The goal is not simply to identify where a building should go. The goal is to understand where students will need classroom space years from now.

That planning matters because creating new classroom space is rarely a quick process. Long before students walk through the doors of a new or modernized facility, projects move through Pre-planning, Planning, Design and Construction phases. In its 2026 September Snapshot, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta (PSBAA) found that for its member public school boards almost half of active school projects are in the Planning Phase, more than a third are in the Design Phase and less than a quarter are in the Construction Phase.

The provincial government's Alberta Major Projects list provides a useful snapshot of the school project journey, showing projects at various stages of development across the province. It also serves as a reminder that announcements are a step in the right direction, but there are still many kilometres along the path to creating learning spaces for students.

For families, the most important milestone is not when a project is announced. It is when students are learning in the completed space.

The good news is that creating classroom space can take many forms.

New schools are often the most visible solution, particularly in fast-growing communities. However, they are only one part of Alberta's infrastructure story. Modernizations and expansions can create much-needed capacity in existing schools to renew aging facilities and improve learning environments for current and future students. Replacement schools can address long-term infrastructure challenges. Modular classrooms can provide flexibility and help address immediate pressures while long-term projects move forward.

Each community is different, and each solution serves a different purpose.

We need to think creatively about opportunities where they make sense. The former airport terminal turned amiskwaciy Academy in Edmonton demonstrates educational space can sometimes be created through non-traditional approaches. Such opportunities will not exist everywhere, nor should they replace investments in school infrastructure. However, they remind us that creating learning space does not always require starting from an empty field.

The common thread in all of these approaches is that they focus on the same outcome: ensuring students have access to appropriate learning environments when and where they need them.

That work depends on partnership.

Public school boards bring local knowledge and an understanding of community needs. Municipalities play an important role through land-use planning, community development and the infrastructure that supports growing neighbourhoods. The provincial government plays a critical role through capital planning, funding and project approvals. Creating classroom space for Alberta students requires all three partners—and other community stakeholders—working together with a shared focus on student success.

As Alberta continues to grow, the conversation about school infrastructure should extend beyond the number of projects announced in a given year. We should also pay attention to projects moving through the system, projects opening their doors and the many different ways classroom space is being created for students across the province.

Because ultimately, school infrastructure is not about buildings.

It is about students.

And it is about ensuring they have the classrooms, supports and opportunities they need to learn and succeed.

Dr. Lorraine Stewart, President
Public School Boards' Association of Alberta
public-schools.ab.ca

*The **Public School Boards' Association of Alberta** represents more than two-thirds of public school boards that account for more than 800 schools and more than 250,000 students across the province. We believe public schools are the first choice of our communities, where all our children learn and live the values of democracy together, reflecting our hope and shaping the future of our communities.*