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February 11, 2026

Honourable Demetrios Nicolaidis
Minister of Education and Childcare
228 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Nicolaidis:

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the current Education Area Guidelines prescribed in Appendix A of the School Capital Manual. We want to raise these concerns now given the CBE has 10 new schools and one replacement school in design, with a high number of additional approvals anticipated over the next two approval cycles.

Currently all schools are being designed by Alberta Infrastructure based on the areas allotted in the Education Area Guidelines space tables. The Guidelines prescribe in detail the amount of area that can be allocated to the various spaces within new schools, including instructional and non-instructional spaces. However, several space types within the non-instructional area allocations in these tables are quite restrictive making it difficult to meet requirements outlined in the National Building Code (Alberta Edition) and build fully functional schools that allow for flexible use of space and enhance the student experience. For metro school boards, adequate second floor egress is a particular area of concern, along with washroom areas (described further below).

For projects currently in the design process, critical space shortfalls are being addressed by diverting area from other already constrained non-instructional spaces such as reducing hallway width, storage and administrative space, resulting in overcrowded hallways and insufficient space for the staff and resources essential for the proper functioning of a school.

Urgent Need for the Guidelines to be Reviewed

CBE is aware that Alberta Education & Childcare (AE&C) is in the preliminary stages of reviewing these tables, however, given the scale of ongoing development and the long service life of these public assets, it is critical this review be prioritized to meet the needs of school jurisdictions well into the future.

We acknowledge that reviewing and updating these guidelines is a substantial undertaking. However, the large number of newly approved or soon to be approved new school projects underscores the urgency of this review. We are seeking your support to advance this work expeditiously so that it can inform the design work of all Schools Now projects.

Request for Area Allocation Increases for Projects Currently Underway

In the interim, noting that design work is already underway on 10 CBE projects, we wish to request consideration of an advanced increase to the non-instructional area allocated to the following areas:

1. **Washrooms:** to align with the recent changes to the National Building Code (Alberta Edition), and
2. **Circulation:** to allow for adequately sized stairwells in schools with more than one level.

Washrooms

As a part of the release of the National Building Code – 2023 Alberta Edition, which came into effect in 2024, there was an adjustment to the washroom requirements that impacts schools. Specifically, for every pair of group washrooms there must be a separate single occupancy (gender neutral) washroom provided. A typical school has multiple sets of group washrooms scattered throughout the floorplan. This means the current space allotment for washrooms within the Area Guidelines is inadequate to meet this updated standard.

Circulation

Presently, there is no space allocation dedicated to stairwells. Single-storey schools receive the same circulation area allotment as schools with multiple levels. However, within a metro context of requiring larger capacity schools on school sites that are under constant pressure to be reduced in size, multi-level schools are increasingly becoming the norm. To stay within the prescribed allocation, stairwells in multi-level schools are sized based on the exiting capacity for 25 students plus one teacher per educational space. This challenge is even more pronounced as the number of storeys increase, as each additional floor needs stairwell access driving up the need for a higher allocation of circulation area to stairwells, making compliance under the current allocation even more difficult and further limiting operational flexibility. Moreover, when a school approaches or exceeds 100% utilization, it becomes increasingly difficult to ensure upper levels remain within the occupancy limit, a limit that is significantly and directly influenced by the size of the stairwells, creating significant operational challenges. Particularly in times of higher enrolment and schools opening at capacity, this negatively affects building function, accessibility, and the student experience.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. The Education Area Guidelines are foundational to the effective design of new school facilities that support student learning and meet long-term operational requirements. We appreciate your Ministry's ongoing commitment to ensuring educational facilities remain safe, functional, and responsive to the needs of Alberta students for many decades to come. Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have questions or wish to discuss further.

Sincerely,



Laura Hack, Chair
Board of Trustees

Cc: Honourable Martin Long, Minister of Infrastructure
Joanne Pitman, Chief Superintendent of Schools
Dany Breton, Superintendent, Facilities & Environmental Services





ALBERTA

Education
and Childcare

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Calgary-Bow*

AR 137914

March 19, 2026

Ms. Laura Hack
Chair
Calgary Board of Education
1221 - 8 Street SW
Calgary AB T2R 0L4

Dear Ms. Hack:

Thank you for your letter regarding the Education Area Guidelines included in the School Capital Manual. I appreciate you sharing the Calgary Board of Education's experience and welcome the opportunity to respond.

The Education Area Guidelines set out school design and the technical requirements for instructional and non-instructional areas of a school building, from mechanical rooms and staff administration areas to classroom and gymnasium sizes. I recognize that this technical detail is not abstract and translates to tangible, day-to-day impacts on student and staff experiences, as well as on health and safety within school facilities.

As Minister of Education and Childcare, I understand the importance of applying guidelines that keep pace with industry best practices and the realities school jurisdictions must manage when working within established standards on approved projects. In this context, Education and Childcare is working through a Request for Proposal process to engage a consultant team to review the Education Area Guidelines. This work will support alignment with updated safety standards and accessibility requirements and reflect inclusive education and childcare services. Input from school jurisdictions will be incorporated to better understand how the current guidelines are experienced in practice.

The timing for implementation of any updated guidelines has not yet been established. I recognize that, in the meantime, jurisdictions must continue to advance approved projects within the existing framework. As such, projects that are already approved will continue to proceed under the existing guidelines and will not be eligible for redesign once new guidelines are released.

Thank you for your commitment to providing safe and functional school buildings. I look forward to sharing more information in the coming months as this work progresses.

Best,

Demetrios Nicolaides ECA PhD
Minister of Education and Childcare