

Public Education Facilities

[2003, revised 2013]

Background and Rationale

Reasonable access to publicly owned and operated education facilities is an essential feature of a democratic society. Since the public school is a significant aspect of a community's identity, the closest possible cooperation between school authorities and the community is necessary when planning, constructing, modernizing, maintaining or closing a school. All planning, constructing, maintaining and modernizing of public education facilities must be undertaken in compliance with prevailing Occupational Health and Safety legislation and regulations.

Schools—Teaching and Learning Facilities

It is vital that there be minimal disruption to instruction and student learning during any phase of school construction, modernization or closure. Therefore, consideration of the impact on teaching and learning is of primary importance in the associated decision-making processes and implementation practices.

The teacher's role during construction, modernization or school closure should be restricted to professional roles and responsibilities. If teachers are required to perform additional duties related to any of these three processes, they should be appropriately compensated.

Planning and Design

Enrolment projections should be the primary criterion in planning and constructing school facilities. In designing and equipping school buildings, optimum physical conditions for active learning need to be in place to provide for the range of activities required for effective program delivery. In addition, the design must allow for the necessary flexibility to meet changing needs in curriculum delivery and technology. Planners should incorporate optimal standards for heating/cooling, lighting, visual aesthetics, ventilation, acoustics, ergonomic designs and other building systems in a more energy efficient manner and develop school sites that best preserve the natural environment.

Maintenance and Modernization

Regularly scheduled ongoing maintenance programs must be implemented to ensure that all school facilities meet Occupational Health and Safety standards and to provide an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Existing schools should undergo the modernization required to bring them up to the same standards.

Portable and relocatable classrooms should be used on a temporary basis only. Temporary classrooms must be constructed, equipped and regularly inspected to be safe and healthy places for teaching and learning. Portable and relocatable classrooms must undergo comprehensive, independent, third-party Occupational Health and Safety testing, with results released to the public.

School Closure

Schools with excess capacity should be considered for alternative use before being closed, with the first priority being student-related programs and subsequent priority given to community-based public-sector programs. If it becomes necessary to close a school, the process should include

- (a) public notice of the projected closing given as early as possible;
- (b) the opportunity for teachers, parents and community members to provide formal input; and
- (c) notice given to affected staff, students, parents and the community as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Albertans must have reasonable access to healthy and safe publicly funded education facilities. The integral role public education facilities play in communities dictates that collaborative decision-making processes and compliance with legislated Occupational Health and Safety practices be paramount when planning, constructing, modernizing, maintaining or closing public education facilities. The overriding guiding principle for utilization of public education facilities must be to provide healthy and safe environments that are optimized for teaching and learning.