

news release

CBE prioritizes school construction to catch up to city's growth

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CALGARY— The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) has prioritized a list of new schools and major modernization projects required to meet student educational needs and catch up to the population growth of Calgary.

This list of priorities is part of the Three-Year School Capital Plan, submitted annually to Alberta Education by every school board in the province. Funding for school capital projects is approved by the Government of Alberta, informed by each school board's capital plan.

The report includes priority lists of new schools, major modernizations and a combined list. The total cost of the combined new school construction and major modernization priority list included in the 2014-17 School Capital Plan is \$860 million, compared to \$667 million in the 2013-16 School Capital Plan.

The six new schools announced by the Government of Alberta in early May are not included in this plan and all of the projects have been prioritized based on an updated ranking methodology. This methodology considers the way that new communities in Calgary are designed and their growth patterns; busing and travel time; existing schools in the community; previously approved capital projects and other factors.

“Between incredible population growth and Calgarians’ expectations for public education in their city, this is one of the most important requests we make of the government every year,” says Naomi Johnson, Chief Superintendent of Schools. “Some of our schools are very old, and many are very crowded. Without significant and ongoing investment in school capacity, we’ll see the situation for our students worsen.”

Many CBE schools are already at capacity, with a significant projected increase in enrolment in the coming years. By 2017, the CBE projects enrolment to rise to 117,000 students.

In order to maintain today's system utilization rate of 80 per cent, 25 new schools are required by 2018. At 80 per cent system utilization, many students have access to schools close to their homes and have continuity of learning with their peers. If additional capacity is not made available, increased student transportation, crowded classrooms and lack of space will have a direct impact on student learning. By the time the six newly announced schools open in 2016, the CBE will reach a system utilization rate of 86.4 per cent.

In addition to new school requirements, many CBE schools require significant upgrades, repair and modernization work.

“Sixty per cent of our schools are more than 40 years old and a number are nearing the end of their life cycle,” says Frank Coppinger, Superintendent, Facilities and Environmental Services. “Our schools must be safe for our students, without question. These projects are urgently needed, and represent a significant financial requirement.”

The 2014-17 Three-Year School Capital Plan and the new ranking methodology will be debated by the Board of Trustees at a Public Board Meeting on May 28, at 3 pm at the Education Centre, 1221 – 8 St S.W.

Johnson adds, “As much as we are grateful for the new school funding that was announced earlier this month, this report highlights that without significant capital investment in the coming years, it will be very hard for the CBE to catch up to the demands of Calgary’s growing population.”

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