

BUDGET WATCH 2022

The Provincial budget is scheduled to be released on February 24. Whether you have children or not, what is announced for education funding will impact you. Every Albertan is connected to public schools. They are the hubs and hearts of our communities, and they hold our future.

Our student population is growing, but the Provincial Education budget is frozen. Frozen education funding and more students means fewer dollars per student each year.

We need your help to ensure students have what they need to be successful.

Keep reading to learn more, and then please let the Province know that adequate funding for public education is the most important investment they can make. In this budget, we will be looking for funding in four key areas: mental health, transportation, infrastructure and classroom supports.

Funding needed for child and youth mental health

Our school staff are doing tremendous work to support the increasingly complex needs of our students. There has long been a need for more accessible, affordable mental health care for children and youth. Prior to the pandemic, we knew the following information:

- By age 25, approximately 20 per cent of Canadians will have developed a mental illness, with 70 per cent reporting that symptoms started in childhood.¹ With our enrolment of 105,000 students, this equates to 21,000 students in our schools who are likely experiencing or will experience a mental illness.
- The proportion of students in need of services continues to outpace available resources. Only one fifth of young people living with a mental disorder and requiring specialty care receive it.²
- Early intervention is essential to reducing the incidence of mental health problems that interfere with learning and social development.³
- Students with undiagnosed mental disorders often struggle to succeed academically and socially.⁴

Two years of living with a pandemic have now heightened the need for mental health support in schools.

Research confirms that early intervention is essential to improving a student's ability to learn and reducing the incidence of mental health problems that interfere with learning and social development. What's the best way to make that happen?

We need to meet kids where they are at.

Mental health care should be provided to students where they are - in schools.

What Edmonton Public School Board Trustees are Watching for in the Provincial Budget

Teachers spend significant time with students on mental health concerns. However, educators need to be able to concentrate on teaching. We need to have accredited health care professionals in schools supporting students and allowing teachers to focus on education.

The government's Child and Youth Well-Being Panel looked into how the pandemic has affected children and youth. In their report, released in December 2021, they made 10 [recommendations](#). Eight of the 10 speak to the need for increasing access to supports for young people, and strengthening ways schools can respond. Targeted health funding directly to school boards is the best solution. It allows for the hiring of the right professional for the right amount of time, based on the school community. Increased services would be present in every school and would be supported with consistent sustainable funds rather than through the variable budgets of charitable organizations, pilot projects and grants.

We're watching for targeted Provincial funding so our schools can carry out the panel's recommendations and provide the best care for students, when and where they need it

¹Mental Health Commission of Canada

²Wei, Y., Kutcher, S., & Szumilas, M. (2011). Comprehensive school mental health: an integrated "school-based pathway to care" model for Canadian secondary schools. *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 46(2), 213-229. <https://www.erudit.org/en/journals/mje/2011-v46-n2-mje1824433/1006436ar.pdf>

³Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011). Supporting children's mental health in schools: Teacher perceptions of needs, roles, and barriers. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(1),

⁴Whitley, J., Smith, J. D., & Vaillancourt, T. (2013). Promoting mental health literacy among educators: Critical in school-based prevention and intervention. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, 28(1), 56-70.

Funding needed for student transportation

Our Board attempts to keep transportation fees low, while continuing to provide excellent levels of service. However, a lack of schools in new neighbourhoods combined with rising fuel and insurance costs means students must travel farther and, as a result, sustaining student transportation becomes more challenging.

Student Transportation is funded from provincial transportation grants (75%) and parent fees (25%). Transportation grants for EPSB are not keeping pace with our growth. We know that passing the buck to parents through higher fees is not the solution.

We have found efficiencies every way we can by changing school start times so more schools can share buses, sharing routes with Edmonton Catholic Schools and making sure our carrier contracts minimize fluctuating fuel prices. This has saved almost \$2 million. We also supplement ETS passes to offer students a discounted rate and have used operational reserve funds to cover funding shortfalls so fees could be kept low. But still that's not enough to keep up with rising costs.

In the spring of 2021, a [Transportation Task Force released a number of recommendations](#). While the Province has done some work on some of these recommendations, there has been limited movement in other areas such as driver recruitment and retention, or developing a new student transportation funding model for the 2022-23 or 2023-24 school year.

We hope the budget stops the wheels spinning and helps us get some traction by better funding student transportation.

What Edmonton Public School Board Trustees are Watching for in the Provincial Budget

Funding needed for infrastructure

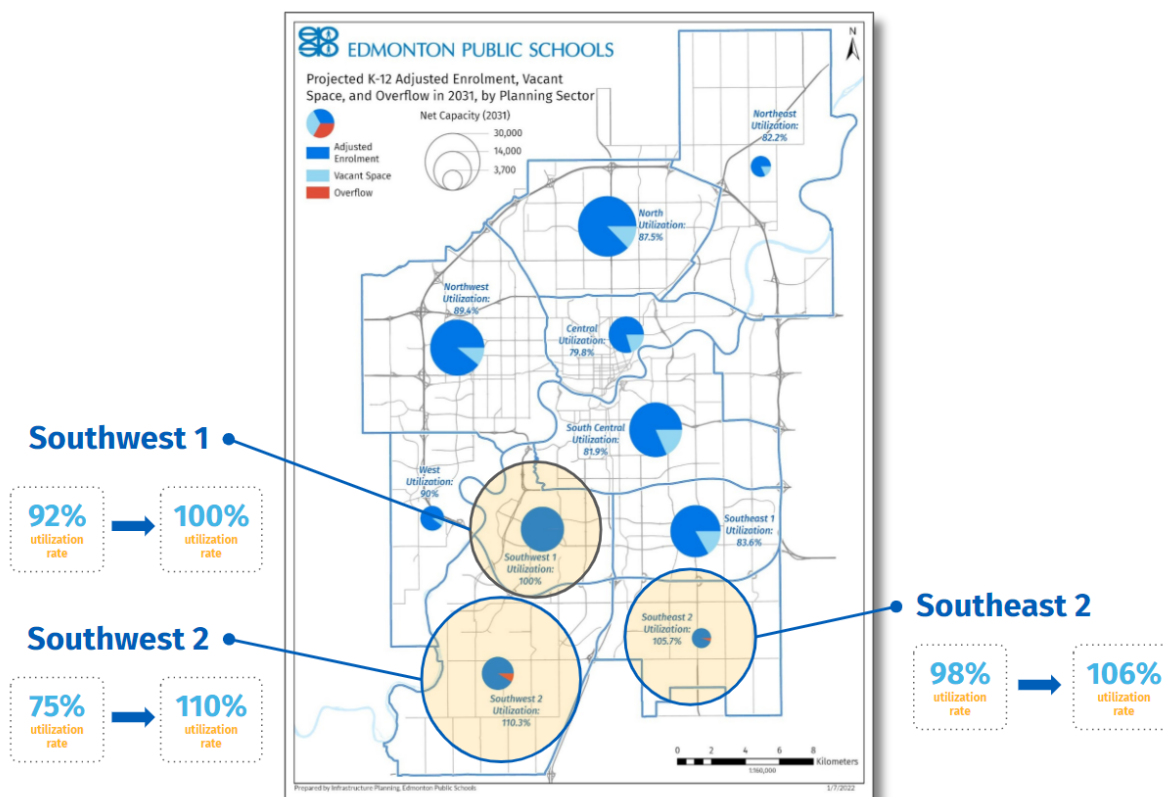
We are one of the fastest growing school divisions in Alberta, growing by about 3,000 students annually. That's enough students to fill a new high school each year.

We have 105,000 students in 215 schools. We believe every one of them deserves a great school building, no matter where they live. As shown in our [capital plan](#), we need new schools for our growing student population and funding to support our older schools.

The Province funds new school construction, decides when schools are built and controls how much money we get to repair our older buildings. In Budget 2021-22, EPSB did not receive any new funding for capital projects and we're feeling the impacts.

Division-wide, our schools are averaging 80 per cent utilization. This means that all classrooms are full except for one or two where staff can work with individual or small groups of students as needed. At 90 per cent utilization, that "extra" classroom space is generally no longer available. At 100 per cent utilization, art rooms, music rooms and learning commons are used for regular classroom space and can no longer be used for their intended purpose. In other words, with our Division at 80 per cent, we are FULL.

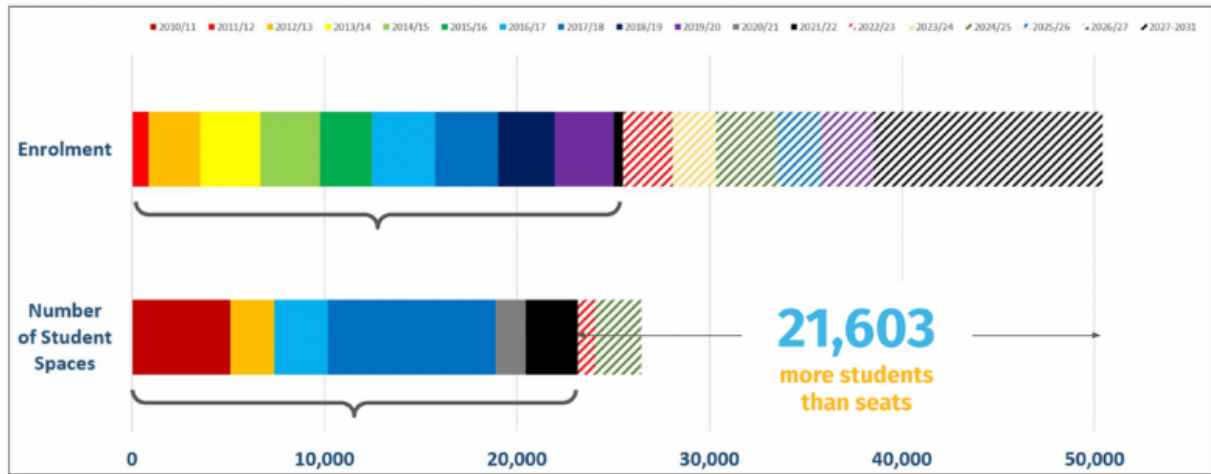
Space utilization by sector: 2031 projection



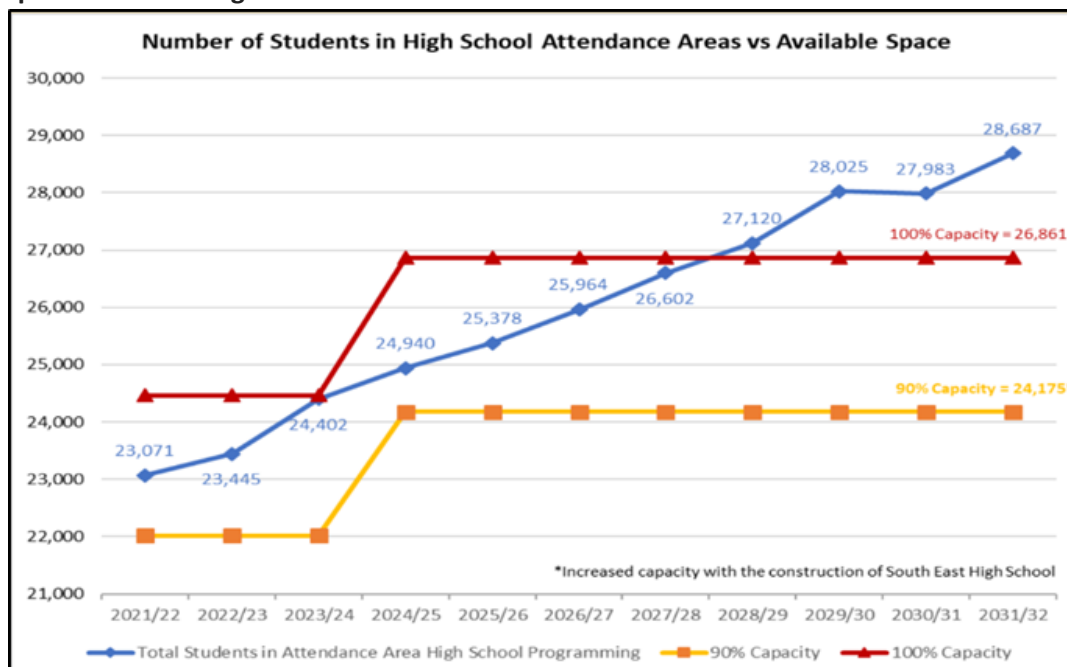
If a new high school is not announced this year, we will be out of high school space in five years. We also already have five schools that have gone to a lottery system because they aren't able to accommodate all the students in their immediate vicinity. This isn't ideal for anyone.

What Edmonton Public School Board Trustees are Watching for in the Provincial Budget

EPSB enrolment vs capacity growth - 2010 to 2031



Space demands: high school



[Capacity change in 2024/25 reflects the opening of the high school in The Meadows.]

Without new schools on the horizon, it's more important than ever to maintain our current schools. However, over half of our schools are more than 50 years old. It would cost about \$900 million to modernize all our buildings, and that would only repair them without significantly improving their layouts to match learning environments that newer schools provide. Right now, we have to take approximately \$28 million out of classrooms each year to run our buildings because we don't get enough operating funds from the province.

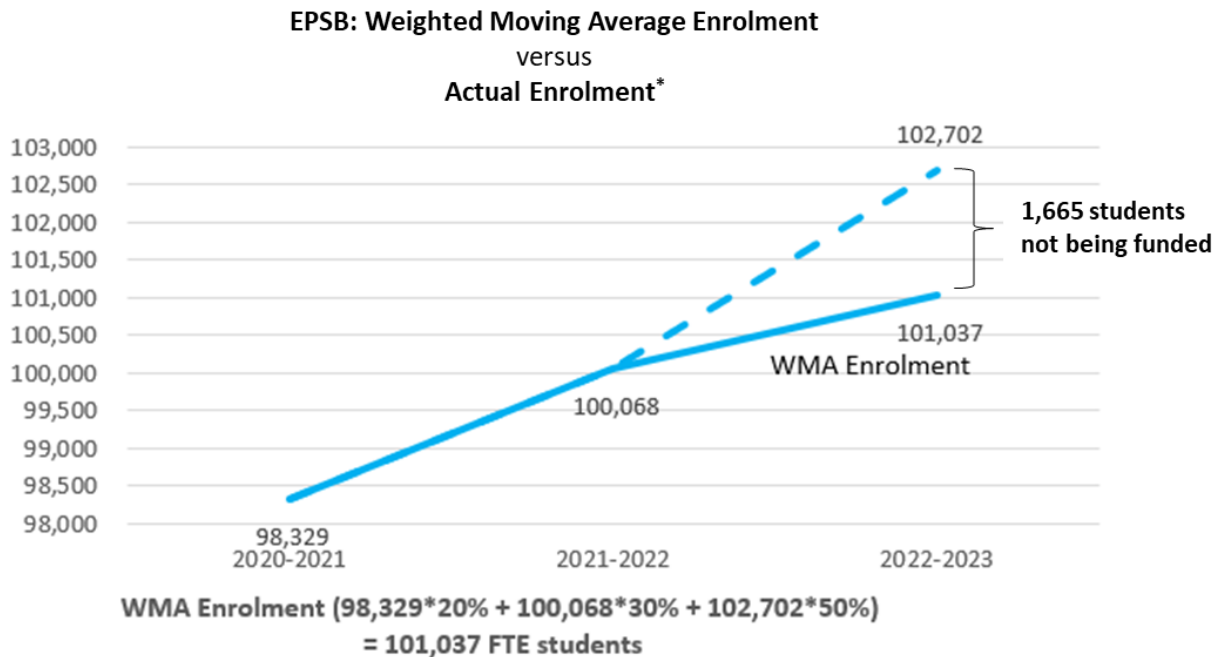
We believe schools are the hearts of our communities, and we want to keep that heartbeat healthy. We'll be watching the Provincial budget for help with that.

What Edmonton Public School Board Trustees are Watching for in the Provincial Budget

Funding needed for every student

The Province's education funding model uses the Weighted Moving Average (WMA) to calculate funded enrolment based on a percentage of the previous two years and a percentage of our projected enrolment to calculate the current year's funding. As the province's fastest growing school division, tying our funding to past enrolment is problematic.

Ultimately, it means we are never truly funded for the number of students we serve, leaving us looking in the rearview mirror. Let's use an example to illustrate.



*The chart shows full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolment, rather than individual student enrolment. For instance, a Kindergarten student is only funded for a half-day, so would count as 0.5 FTE.)

Prior to the introduction of the WMA in 2020, the Division received \$1.127 billion in Provincial funding for 96,230 FTE students. That worked out to approximately \$11,700 per FTE student.

Since then, our student numbers have continued to rise. However, with the WMA, we expect a provincial funding shortfall of \$19 million (1,665 x \$11,700), compared to the funding we would have received under the previous formula.

What does the shortfall mean? It means students get shortchanged.

It means the equivalent of trying to operate Strathcona High School or eight average-size elementary schools with no funding. It means fewer specialized learning supports, fewer educational assistants, and larger classes. It means fewer options when unexpected changes arise.

We need adequate, sustainable, predictable funding. We need to be funded for every student we serve.

It's time for the frozen Education budget to thaw.