

School Capital Planning

Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Key Messages

- The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development created a multi-year school capital planning process in 2019, however enrolment trends have changed so improvements are needed.
- The multi-year capital planning process does not incorporate new growth schools.
- Submissions from Regional Centres for Education (RCEs) to the Department for replacement schools and major renovations were supported by evidence of need, but the scoring process needs improvement.
- While most schools have a Facility Condition Assessment on record, with 254 conducted in 2023, 21% have not had an updated assessment within the last five years.

Why We Did This Audit

- Nova Scotia has 372 schools with over 133,000 students.
- \$1 billion in new growth and replacement schools have been announced since June 2024, which is a significant investment of Nova Scotia taxpayer dollars.
- Provincial enrolment increased by over 15,000 students or 13% in the past 10 years and by 24% in Halifax Regional Centre for Education (HRCE) alone.
- \$162 million spent on HRCE portables and modulars in the last four years to accommodate 6,000+ students.
- 30% of schools are in poor condition and 3% are in critical condition, based on the Facility Condition Index which measures overall facility condition, not school safety.

Department Does Not Have an Evidence-Based Process for New Growth School Decisions

- We were unable to follow how the Department arrived at the decision to announce four new growth schools in June 2023
- Department does not have a process for decisions on new growth schools at a time of significant population growth
- Six new HRCE growth schools approved in order that differed from HRCE's preference
- Submissions from RCEs/Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) and scoring not required for new growth school decisions
- Enrolment projections used for decision making appear to be reasonable, based on appropriate information and are up to date
- \$162 million spent on portables and modulars in the past five years to mitigate short and medium-term enrolment pressures in HRCE

Scoring Process for Replacement Schools and Major Renovations Lacks Evidence for Prioritization of Projects

- Submissions to the Department from RCEs for replacement schools and major renovations supported by evidence of need
- Categorization of replacement schools and major renovations as low, medium or high appeared to be supported by evidence and based on appropriate criteria, however scoring matrices lacked detail
- While projects were categorized as low, medium or high, they were not ranked by priority, and it was not clear why certain projects were recommended for consideration and others were not
- In 2022-23, 11 projects were categorized as medium, but only two were recommended for consideration, with no evidence for their prioritization

School Condition Information Outdated

- 21% (77) of school facilities did not have a facility condition assessment completed within the past five years as required
- 30% of HRCE school facilities lacked annual updates on school building conditions