



November 30, 2018

Ref: 206091

Janet Fraser, Chair
Board of Education
School District No. 39 (Vancouver)
Email: janet.fraser@vsb.bc.ca

Dear Ms. Fraser:

Thank you for your letter of November 5, 2018, in which you express concerns about the current Ministry “area standards”. Your correspondence provides the opportunity to clarify some existing misconceptions about how these standards apply to capital projects.

I am pleased to advise you that the Ministry of Education is undertaking several reviews with respect to the costing models and processes used to generate appropriate capital budgets for new schools and replacement schools, as well as additions and partial replacements of existing schools.

First, the Ministry is currently working with school districts to update the rated capacities of schools across the province. The nominal capacity of a school and its neighbouring schools is a critical component that the Ministry uses when it evaluates a school district’s plan to accommodate current and future student enrolments. Given the variety of grade configurations and functional layouts for schools, it is essential that the Ministry has a consistent assignment of student capacities. Please note that the nominal capacity of a school differs from its operating capacity, which instead is a function of contracted maximum class sizes for teachers.

Secondly, the Ministry is also in the process of finishing an update of its base budget rates and location factors. These are key components used to calculate project budgets for new schools, full replacement schools, additions to existing schools, or partial replacements of existing schools.

Finally, next year the Ministry will be undertaking a review of its current space allocations, which are based on the Ministry area standards that you reference in your letter. However, the primary purpose of space allocations is to establish the capital project budget, not to dictate specific required allocations of space within a designed school.

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At the time of the last review of area standards in 2004, school districts were expected to construct only the types of space as specified, and only within the allowable areas published; however, this prescriptive regimen has not been employed by the Ministry for many years. While space allocations may still serve as a general guide to school districts and their design teams, it is more critical that any proposed school design remains achievable within the overall budget that is generated and approved for the project.

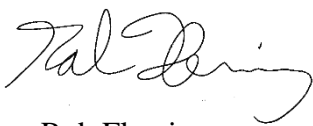
Ultimately, boards of education have the primary responsibility to decide on the actual educational programming and non-instructional activities to be delivered - or not delivered - in any new or replacement facility space. The school district must work closely with its design team to determine how a board's preferences may be accommodated within a proposed school design, within the approved capital budget. While this may seem more challenging when compared to following schedules of prescribed areas, its inherent flexibility allows for a more holistic and innovative approach to the design and construction of schools.

For its upcoming review of area allocations, the Ministry will be interested in gathering lessons learned from recently completed schools to consider whether current space allocations remain reasonable for generating appropriate capital project budgets. This review will certainly address the impact of personalized learning on school design and the community use of Neighbourhood Learning Centre space provided in schools. The various space concerns mentioned in your letter will be covered as part of this review.

I am hopeful this letter provides you with a better understanding of how the Ministry manages the allocation of capital funding for K-12 capital projects.

Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rob Fleming". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Rob Fleming
Minister

pc: Reg Bawa, Assistant Deputy Minister, Resource Management Division
Joel Palmer, Executive Director, Capital Management Branch
David Green, Secretary-Treasurer