

Executive Summary

Introduction

First Nations Engineering Services Ltd. (FNESL) was retained by the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to complete a national assessment of the capital and operations and maintenance (O&M) requirements for on-reserve First Nations education infrastructure. This study is an update to two previous assessments which studied the capital needs and operation and maintenance needs separately.

Building on the 2021 and 2022 national assessments, this update incorporates the 2023 Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) School Space Accommodation Standards (SSAS), updated demographic information, updated construction costs, and revised O&M estimates in 2025 dollars. It evaluates current infrastructure needs and projects capital and O&M requirements over a 20-year planning horizon. Details of the assessment methodology, assumptions, and cost estimation approach are provided in Sections 3 and 4.

Existing Education Infrastructure

Based on a review of asset and nominal roll data supplied by ISC (December 2024), there are 409 First Nations schools on reserves throughout Canada. It is also important to note that 11 of the 409 schools are assumed to be closed based on having a nominal roll of zero. An additional 2 schools are provincially funded and have been excluded. In total, 395 schools have been included in this study.

The assessment evaluated 395 on-reserve schools and 1,222 teacherages across Canada using current enrolment, existing facility floor areas, and the revised 2023 School Space Accommodation Standards. Infrastructure requirements were assessed for immediate needs and over five-, ten-, fifteen-, and twenty-year planning horizons.

The assessment found that significant infrastructure deficiencies remain across the national portfolio. Many schools require additions, replacement, or new construction to meet current and projected enrolment and updated accommodation standards. Additional teacherages will also be required to support educator recruitment and retention. These challenges are greatest in northern and remote communities, where transportation, construction logistics, labour availability, and operating costs substantially increase both capital and long-term maintenance requirements.

Schools Infrastructure Needs

The assessment identified significant capital investment requirements to address existing infrastructure deficiencies and future education needs across the 395 schools included in this study. Using the updated 2023 School Space Accommodation Standards, current enrolment, projected population growth, and current construction costs, immediate and long-term infrastructure requirements were assessed over a 20-year planning period.

Immediate infrastructure needs are substantial, with 227 schools requiring additional space to meet current requirements and 77 schools requiring replacement through new construction. As facilities continue to age, additional replacement projects become necessary, increasing capital requirements in later planning phases.

The total estimated capital requirement for schools is \$16.83 billion, including additions, new construction, and planning and design costs. Immediate investment is driven primarily by additions, while later phases are dominated by new construction as existing facilities reach the end of their service lives.

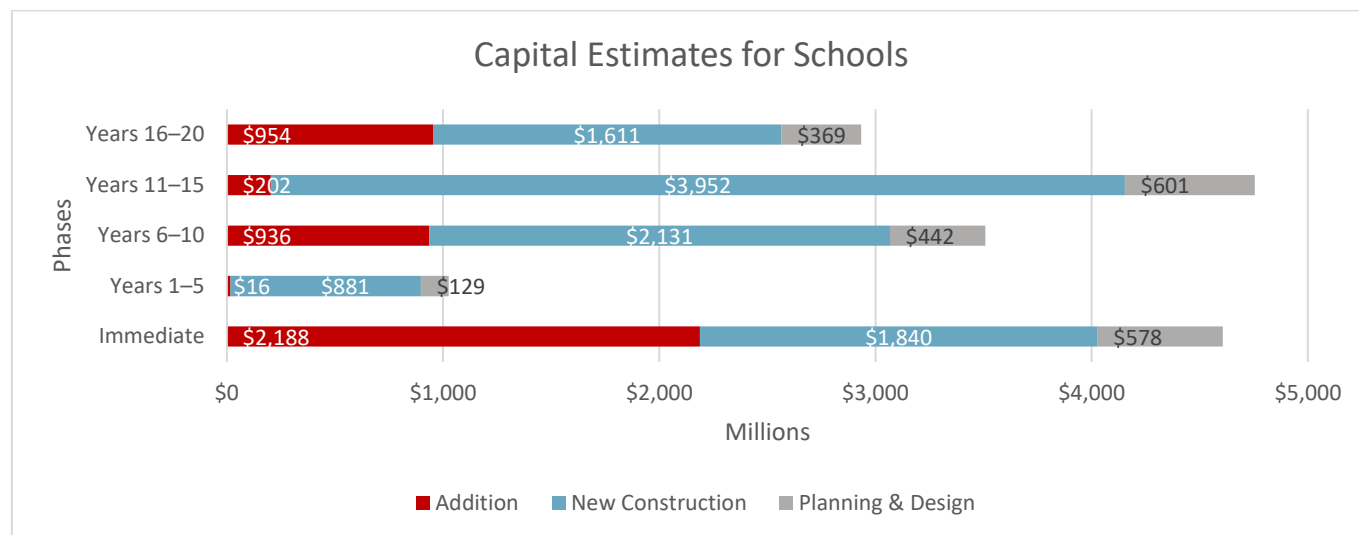


Figure 1: Total Capital Cost Requirement for Schools

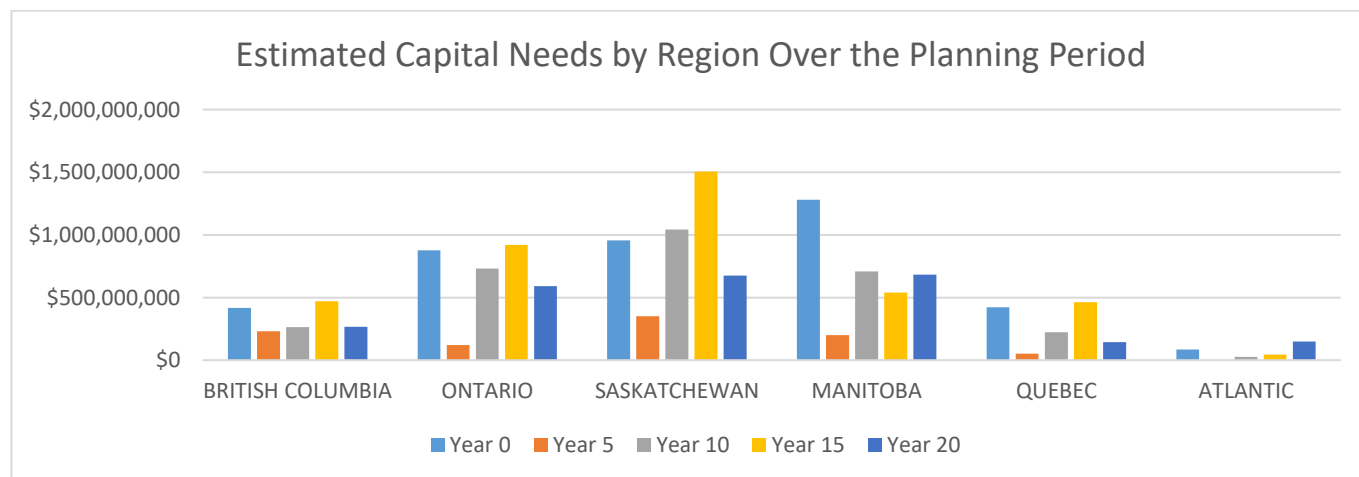


Figure 2: Regional School Capital Requirements

Figure 2 illustrates the estimated school capital requirements by region over the 20-year planning period. The largest capital requirements are in Saskatchewan (\$4.53 billion), Manitoba (\$3.41 billion), Ontario (\$3.24 billion), and Alberta (\$2.39 billion). British Columbia, Quebec, and the Atlantic region require an estimated \$1.65 billion, \$1.31 billion, and \$306 million, respectively.

Annual O&M requirements are currently estimated at \$418.6 million (Year 0) and increase to approximately \$518.4 million by Years 16–20 as additional school space is constructed and maintained under the updated accommodation standards.

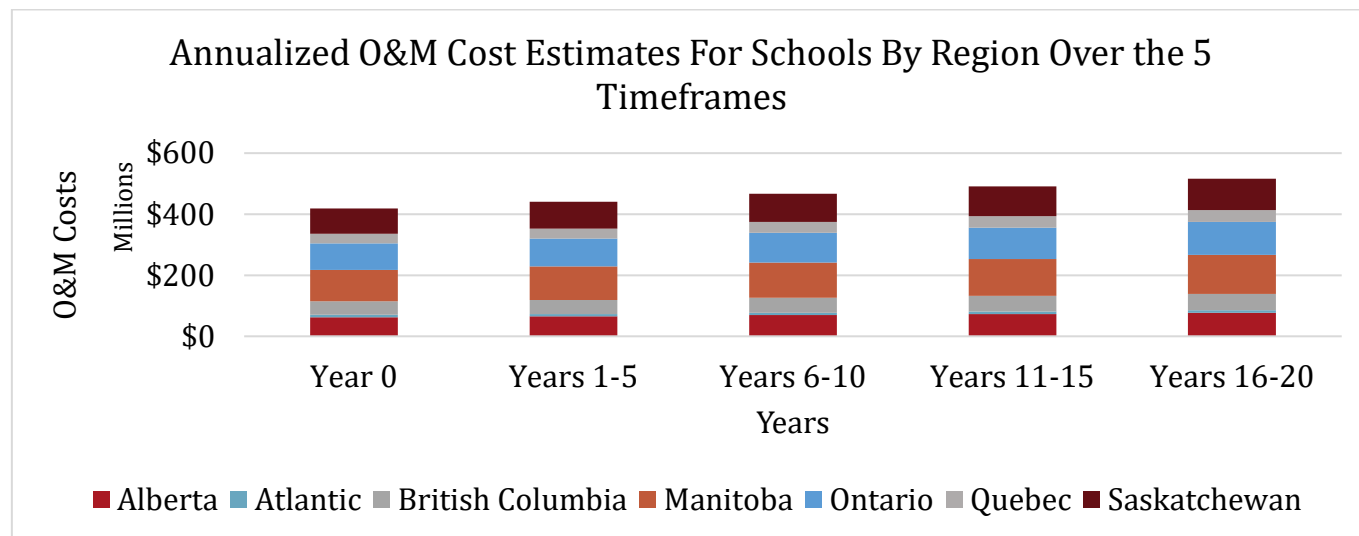


Figure 3: Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Costs for Schools vs Year by Region

Teacherages Infrastructure Needs

Adequate teacher housing is essential for recruiting and retaining qualified educators, particularly in northern and remote communities. The assessment evaluated current teacherage capacity and projected future accommodation needs over the same 20-year planning period.

Significant investment is required for additional teacherages and replacement of aging accommodations. Immediate priorities focus on expanding existing capacity, while future investments include additions, replacement through new construction, and associated planning and design activities.

The total estimated capital requirement for teacherages is \$2.20 billion over the 20-year planning period. Annual O&M requirements are currently estimated at \$131.7 million (Year 0), increasing to approximately \$183.2 million by Years 16–20 as additional teacherages are constructed and maintained. Compared with the previous assessment, these estimates reflect updated 2025 cost conditions and the inclusion of additional teacherage spaces identified through the updated capital needs assessment.

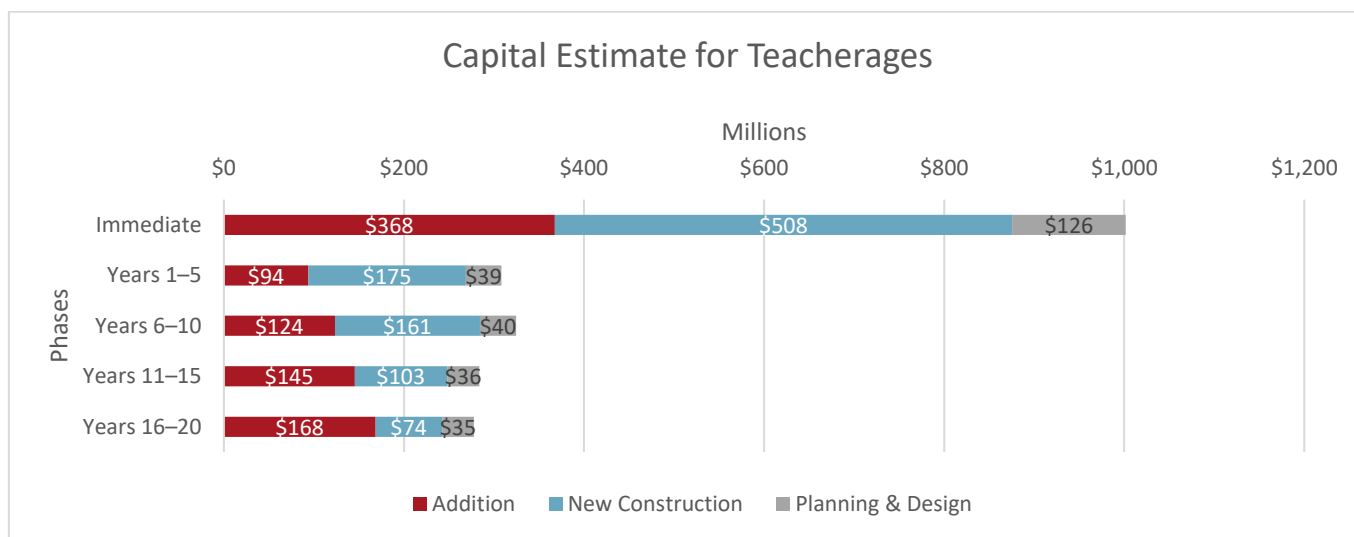


Figure 4: Total Capital Cost Requirement for Teacherages

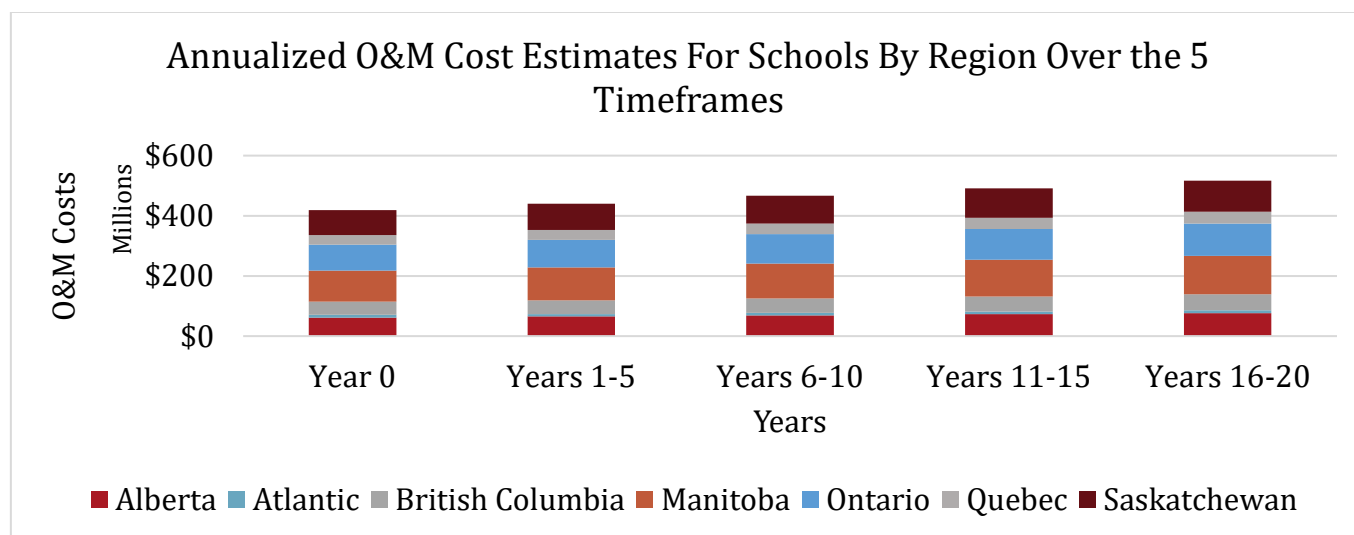


Figure 5: Operations and Maintenance (O&M) Costs for Teacherages vs Year by Region

Conclusion

This assessment demonstrates that substantial long-term investment will be required to provide safe, functional, and culturally appropriate education infrastructure for First Nations communities. The study identifies an estimated \$16.83 billion in school capital requirements and \$2.20 billion in teacherage capital requirements over the next 20 years, together with increasing annual O&M requirements as facilities are expanded and renewed. The O&M requirements in Years 16-20 are estimated to reach \$518 million annually for the school space needed by 2045.