
Backgrounder

Date: June 2, 2023

The Assembly of First Nations and the Government of Canada announce updates to school design standards for schools on-reserve

In 2019, the Government of Canada made a commitment to work with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners to close infrastructure gaps by 2030. As part of this commitment, ISC worked in partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, along with input from regional First Nations, to update the School Space Accommodation Standards (SSAS) in a two-phased approach.

The SSAS outlines the service standards for the construction and major renovation of First Nations schools that are funded by ISC through its Capital Facilities and Maintenance Program. This policy guides the development of First Nations learning environments that will support communities, culture, language, and ways of knowing. While it is aligned to provincial planning standards and best practices, it also recognizes programming that is specific to First Nations communities.

This two-phased collaborative approach – with the Assembly of First Nations and regional First Nations – to updating the SSAS policy ensures that First Nations leaders and communities are partners in the design and delivery of services that reflect their priorities. This approach also reflects the importance of Canada’s relationship with First Nations peoples and our commitment to reconciliation.

Updates resulting from the first review phase went into effect April 1, 2021, and supported increased on-reserve school sizes as well as space to support full-day kindergarden, language and culture rooms, knowledge keeper offices, counselling rooms, and outdoor learning spaces.

The second phase of updates took effect April 1, 2023.

The updated SSAS policy supports First Nations having greater flexibility to design new and renovated schools that can better accommodate students' needs. Improvements that came into effect in April 2023 include:

- more accurate enrolment projections to determine school size



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- extending school design horizon from 5 years to 10 or 12 years;
- flexibility for additional space to accommodate the most vulnerable students who require inclusive or special education services or unique education programming, such as home economics and culinary arts, technology education (e.g. woodwork or automotive), language education, or other programs offered within the province;
- improved accommodations for wellness and unique learning services in each community;
- flexibility for indoor and outdoor storage rooms, and for space in the school gym for community gatherings or emergency response purposes;
- updated formulas that reflect building code standards;
- forms that are easier to navigate and more accessible; and
- considerations for sustainable building and alignment with climate plans in the planning of a school project.



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