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A new era for Catholic education in Medicine Hat



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Congratulations on your 50th annual AEFAA trade show.

For personal service or questions please call me directly 780-982-2011.

Jason Bent



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Message from the AEFAA president **Robert Krahn**

Providing a safe environment for our students is a priority for us as educational facility managers; this isn't always possible when there are potential threats within our schools. Not too many years ago, our school divisions had open doors, which gave students, parents and the community a welcoming feel. Now my school division is fully locked down, and we use video intercoms at the entrances for access. We've done a lot to protect our schools from external threats; unfortunately, often, the threat comes from inside. Which begs the question, what will school security look

like in another 10 years? Only time will tell, but we do know that the world is a different place now than it was when we grew up, and it will continue to evolve. The tragic loss of life in the Tumbler Ridge school shootings hit home, and as we all know, it's a possibility in our own schools. It's something we all have in the back of our minds, but hope to never have to deal with. On behalf of AEFAA, our thoughts and prayers go out to all affected by the tragic loss in Tumbler Ridge.

As many of us have, I started my career in the trades. The trades gave me a strong foundation in facility knowledge, and has been a key to my success in

my current role. I've always had a passion for trades, which is why I am excited to announce that this year's conference will be "Salute to the Trades". The executive and I have worked hard to include sessions that directly relate to trades. For the first time, we will have a two-day conference package option that is focused on providing value to our tradespeople. Trades and tradespeople are the backbone of facility operations; they provide the vital infrastructure that ensures education can happen safely and comfortably in our school facilities.

When I stepped into the role of AEFAA president in the spring of 2024, I made increasing

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the value of membership my top priority. The launch of our virtual round tables was met with a fantastic response. These sessions have created a way for our members to remain engaged and connected throughout the year. This spring, we are offering a dual-stream of sessions at the spring conference, with one focused on our maintenance/trades staff. We sent out a facilities questionnaire to our members this year, which was a great way for our members to see what other school divisions are doing with their resources. We focused our fall workshop professional development to facility focused sessions. We are moving our management skills session to a separate, standalone event, as we continue to recognize the importance of developing leadership skills. In addition to these changes, the executive has reviewed and updated the bylaws, executive job descriptions, including adding a new admin assistant to support the AEFAA executive. I've been fortunate to have a strong, dedicated executive who has been key to achieving these goals.

Networking can be an underrated benefit of being a part of an organization like AEFAA or EFMA, but in reality, it is one of the greatest values. I had the privilege of attending my first EFMA conference in 2018, and it's been a pleasure to work alongside their executive for the last eight years. I look forward to what the future holds

for both our organizations. My network continues to grow, and I'm very appreciative of the connections and friendships I've gained throughout the years. I look forward to the years ahead, as AEFAA and EFMA continue our collaboration to support safe and caring environments for our students.

Following the spring conference, I will be transitioning to the role of past president. I look forward to continuing to serve the AEFAA membership in that role. It's been a busy two years as president, and I am so thankful for an executive team that stood by the vision and did so much to make it happen. ■



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Message from the EFMABC president **Megan MacDonald**



As we welcome the arrival of spring, I'm reminded that this season marks one of the busiest and most important times for facility managers across the province. While many are enjoying longer days and the first signs of warmer weather, those of us in facilities are well into planning our summer project schedules. With such a short window to complete major work before September start-up, spring becomes a crucial period of coordination, problem-solving, and teamwork. It highlights the dedication and professionalism of facility teams across all districts.

This year is especially meaningful for EFMA as we prepare to celebrate our 60th Annual Conference in Penticton from June 1-5. Sixty years of building excellence is an incredible milestone; one that invites us to both honour our past and look ahead to our future. As we celebrate six decades of leadership, dedication, and collaboration, we also recognize the importance of continuing to grow as an association. The foundation built by those before us guides our path forward as we evolve to meet new challenges and opportunities in our sector.

As we move ahead, it's important to reflect on the tremendous value our association offers. EFMA provides support to new members, delivers meaningful training opportunities, and fosters strong professional networks. Our zone meetings play a significant role in this work; they give us valuable time and space to connect, collaborate, share challenges, and learn from one another. These conversations strengthen us collectively and ensure we continue advancing best practices across all districts.

Over the past year, I've had the pleasure of getting to know the AEFAA executive, and I want to acknowledge the tremendous amount of work that goes into planning and delivering conferences. These events require countless hours, strategic coordination, and the commitment of many people behind the scenes. Kudos to everyone involved, your efforts truly make a difference.

I've also had the opportunity to get to know Robert over the last several years, and I always enjoy connecting with him to share updates on the work happening within both EFMA and AEFAA. Although we operate in different provinces, many of our challenges are remarkably similar, and our conversations continue to highlight the value of inter-provincial collaboration.

I look forward to attending the AEFAA Conference in May and hope to meet many more AEFAA members while we're there. Strengthening the ties between our associations benefits all of us and supports our shared commitment to creating safe, efficient, and inspiring learning environments for students across our communities.

Wishing you all a productive and positive spring season as we prepare for the busy months ahead. I look forward to seeing many of you soon. ■

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AEFAA 2026 Annual Spring Conference & Trade Show: Salute to the trades!



Celebrating over 50 years of working in partnership with Alberta education school jurisdictions in providing teaching and learning environments which promote excellence in education.

May 11-14, 2026 | Red Deer Resort & Casino | Red Deer, Alberta

The AEFAA executive is very proud and excited to be hosting this year's annual spring conference in Red Deer at the Red Deer Resort & Casino. This year's theme is "Salute to the Trades". We have put together a program that will help you in both your work and personal life. Our keynote speaker, Allan J. Moore, is a storyteller who has travelled to over 50 countries and worked on four continents.

He holds a Master of Arts in

Leadership Degree and has been a CRSP since 2010 serving on the Board of Canadian Safety Professionals (BCRSP) Professional Conduct Committee since 2017. In addition to his travels, he has over 16 years' experience in environment, health and safety; 10 of those years working for Wood Environment & Infrastructure Solutions (formerly known as Amec). Moore began his speaking career doing stand-up comedy at Yuk Yuks, The Comic Strip, and the Laugh

Shop comedy clubs. He then moved onto a position in Taiwan working as a mandarin translator and HSE manager with Stanley Tools. In this position he was tasked with presenting Stanley's corporate programs to the various Stanley offices and key suppliers around Taiwan and China through speeches and workshops in Mandarin (which Moore learned living in Taiwan a few years prior). Ten years ago, he moved back to Calgary to begin working for Wood Environment & Infrastructure

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Solutions in their OHS department. In this position he frequently delivered safety speeches to project personnel on major projects for a variety of clients such as Enbridge, Imperial Oil, Suncor, TransCanada, Nalcor, and many others.

Following our keynote speaker, we will be hosting two sessions to be run concurrently. From Edmonton Public School Board, Terri Gosine. Gosine is the director of integrated infrastructure services and she can help you discover how integrated project delivery (IPD) can be a tool to improve school infrastructure by aligning school boards, designers, and contractors under a single collaborative network. This session examines how an IPD model can assist to optimize value in IMR and CMR budgets, reduce project friction, and help ensure high-quality project outcomes.

The final session on Wednesday afternoon is the Annual General Meeting which will be held at 2:30 p.m. in the Monaco Room.



That evening AEFAA will be hosting the banquet and entertainment. Our incoming president Paul Feledichuk, has worked very hard on this year's entertainment, and we will all be playing Family Feud! A fun evening to say the least!

Thursday morning after breakfast we will host zone meetings. At this session we will call upon our members

to bring forward ideas on how the executive can better serve the membership as well as topics and ideas you'd like to see addressed or presented. Following that two concurrent sessions will be held. Ross Newton will be back to discuss IMR and CMR with our group and opposite to that will be a

custodial round table session hosted by Darrell Campbell of Bunzl Hygiene.



Our conference will close with a few words from our new president while the closing draws are made and the ever-popular grab and go lunch will be available for all members and their partners. ■



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CONFERENCE AGENDA



MONDAY, MAY 11

7:45 am - 4 pm — Golf
Alberta Springs Golf

5 pm - 9 pm — Conference registration
Event Centre

6 pm - 10 pm — President's reception
Event Centre

TUESDAY, MAY 12

7:30 am - 9 am — Conference registration
Event Centre

9 am - 10:15 am — Opening ceremonies
and keynote speaker: Allan James Moore

10:15 am - 10:30 am — Break

10:30 am - 12 pm — Session A: IPD
Terri Gosine, Edmonton Public School Board

10:30 am - 12 pm — Session B:
Flooring commissioning — David Dwyer

12 pm - 1 pm — Lunch with partners
Monaco

2 pm - 6 pm — 50th Annual AEFAA Trade Show —
The great outdoors!
Event Centre

6 pm - 7 pm — Dinner — Event Centre

7 pm - 8 pm — Draws — Event Centre

Join us for our ever-popular fishbowl draws and
the grand prize draw, sponsored by our favourite
vendors!

8 pm - 12 am — Trade Show Social — Event Centre

WEDNESDAY, MAY 13

7 am - 8:30 am — Breakfast
Delegates and partners welcome — Monaco

8:30 am - 10 am — Session C: Funding

8:30 am - 10 am — Session D:
Roofing inspections and minor repairs

10 am - 10:15 am — Break

10:15 am - 10:30 am — Round table discussion:
Best practices

12 pm - 1 pm — Lunch — Monaco

1 pm - 2:15 pm — Session
BGIS Integrated Facility Management Services

2:15 pm - 2:30 pm — Break

2:30 pm - 4 pm — Annual General Meeting
Monaco

4 pm - 6 pm — Free time

6 pm - 10 pm — Banquet and entertainment
Monaco — Cocktails will be served from
6:00 pm - 7:00pm / Dinner at 7:00 pm

THURSDAY, MAY 14

7 am - 8:30 am — Breakfast
Delegates and partners welcome
Monaco

8:30 am - 9:45 am — Zone meetings
Monaco

9:45 am - 10 am — Break

10 am - 11:30 am — Session E:
Alberta Education — Update with Ross Newton

10 am - 11:30 am — Session F:
Custodial round table with Darrell Campbell

11:30 am - 12 pm — Break

12 pm - 1:30 pm — Grab and go lunch and closing



A new era for Catholic education in Medicine Hat

The new Holy Trinity Academy will unite three schools into a modern K–9 facility

By Shayna Wiwierski

A \$77.4-million Catholic school is rising on Medicine Hat’s northeast side, poised to replace three aging buildings and anchor a new K-12 campus.

The Holy Trinity Academy replacement school in Medicine Hat is a major capital project that will bring together three existing Catholic schools into a single, modern K-9 facility. The new school will replace St. Francis Xavier School, St. Mary’s Junior High School, and St. Michael’s School, consolidating them on a shared campus with Monsignor McCoy High School to form a unified K-12 site for the Medicine Hat Roman Catholic Separate School Division.

The replacement school will be built on land directly north of the current St. Francis Xavier School. Once Holy Trinity Academy is complete and occupied, the existing St. Francis Xavier building will be demolished, allowing the site to be fully integrated into the expanded campus rather than maintained as a separate, aging facility. Situated beside Monsignor McCoy High School, the project is designed to create a continuous Catholic education pathway from kindergarten through Grade 12 on a single, connected site.

Planned as a two-storey building, Holy Trinity Academy will encompass 9,824 square metres

of space and accommodate up to 950 students from kindergarten to Grade 9. The total project cost is \$77.4 million, funded primarily by the Province of Alberta, which is contributing \$74.9 million. The school division is adding \$2.5 million to cover an additional 460 square metres of gymnasium space, expanding athletic capacity beyond the base provincial scope.

Construction on the new school began on April 1, 2025, following design and planning work led by the division and its consultants. Completion and opening are anticipated in fall 2027, aligning with the start of a new school year and the planned transition of students from the



three existing schools into the new facility. FWBA Architects is serving as the project architect, while LEAR Construction Management is acting as the general contractor. To date, no significant construction challenges have been reported.

Inside, the school is being planned as both an academic

hub and a community venue. In addition to core classrooms, the design includes an approximately 400-seat community theatre to support drama programming and public events, as well as a dedicated band room. Two full-size gymnasiums, a fitness area, and a football change room shared with Monsignor McCoy High School are intended

to strengthen athletics and extracurricular offerings. Specialized program areas for foods, dance, art, and carpentry, along with project centres, a learning commons, a sensory room, and multiple flexible learning spaces are aimed at supporting a wide range of teaching styles and student needs.



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The division has positioned Holy Trinity Academy as a model of inclusive design. The building will feature accessible washrooms, a mobility track, sensory spaces, and adaptable learning areas, all intended to better serve students with diverse physical, sensory, and learning needs, and to remove barriers to participation.

By replacing three older schools with one fully accessible, program-rich facility on a shared K-12 campus, Holy Trinity Academy represents a significant long-term investment in Medicine Hat's Catholic school community. The consolidated campus is expected to improve continuity for students moving through the grades, enable more efficient sharing of facilities and programs with the high school, and provide a new cultural and recreational focal point for families and community groups who will use the theatre, gyms, and other shared spaces outside of the regular school day.

Previously published in the 2025/26 issue of the *Medicine Hat Construction Association* magazine. ■








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Investing in facility managers: A strategic imperative for public schools



By **Chuck Morris**, Director of Operations, B.C. School District No. 74

Originally published in *Ops Talk* magazine, the official publication of the Educational Facilities Management Association of British Columbia, Spring 2026.

When school doors open each morning, education begins. But the learning that happens inside classrooms depends more on than teachers and curriculum; it depends on the people who ensure the building itself works. Facility managers are the unsung leaders behind safe, functional, and inspiring school environments. Their work is a direct investment in student success, staff wellbeing, and community confidence.

Facility management: More than maintenance

Public school facility managers oversee every aspect of a district's physical assets, buildings, grounds, systems, and fleets. Their work is essential to student health and learning outcomes, and properly maintained HVAC systems, lighting, and indoor air quality improve concentration and reduce absenteeism. Studies show that students in well-maintained, well-ventilated schools perform better academically.

Facility managers coordinate fire safety, emergency preparedness, accessibility compliance, hazard mitigation, reducing risks to students, staff, and visitors while supporting safety and compliance. Preventive maintenance, energy management, and strategic planning save money over time and extend the life of buildings and equipment and protecting public investment with a sustainable focus.

A school that is safe, efficient, and healthy does not happen by chance, it is the result of professional, dedicated facility leadership.

Healthy and inclusive design

Modern educational spaces are designed to support learning, creativity, and inclusion. Facility managers ensure that schools use natural light, open layouts, and flexible spaces that enhance wellbeing and learning wherever possible. They incorporate universal design principles, making schools accessible to students of all abilities. They serve as community hubs, where recreation, adult education, and public programs can thrive after school hours.

By translating educational vision into practical, sustainable spaces, facility managers directly enhance student experience and community engagement.

Fleet

For many districts, especially rural communities, transportation is a lifeline. Facility managers oversee vehicle fleets, ensuring that:

- School buses meet inspection standards and operate safely in all conditions.
- Maintenance programs prevent breakdowns and delays.
- Service vehicles support snow removal, grounds maintenance, and emergency response.

Reliable transportation isn't just a convenience, it's

a critical factor in student attendance, equity, and operational continuity.

Strategic leadership and operational excellence

Facility managers are not just technical experts; they are leaders who make strategic decisions about resource allocation which means managing budgets, contracts, and staffing to maximize efficiencies.

Continuous improvement uses data to predict maintenance needs, prevent failures, and optimize workflows.

Risk management involves identifying liabilities, reducing where possible, ensuring compliance, and maintaining public trust.

Their work ensures that schools operate smoothly, safely, and sustainably, turning behind the scenes challenges into visible benefits for the entire community.

The case for investment

Investing in facility managers is investing in student success, staff wellbeing, and community trust. Evidence shows well maintained schools have

lower absenteeism among students and staff; effective lighting and HVAC systems improve academic performance and reduce energy costs. Proactive maintenance and fleet management reduces costly emergency repairs and service disruptions. Every dollar spent on skilled facility management saves multiple dollars in long term repairs, operational inefficiencies, and lost instructional time.

A career with purpose and impact

Facilities management is a career of real-world impact. It combines technical expertise, leadership, and public service. Professionals in this field solve complex operational challenges every day. They lead teams across buildings, systems, and fleets.

It is a profession where commitment, skill, and leadership make a lasting difference; a career that supports education itself!

Public school facility managers are essential, strategic, and highly skilled professionals. They ensure buildings are safe, systems operate reliably so that learning can happen without disruption. Supporting and investing in this workforce is not optional; it is critical to the future of education, public trust, and community well being. ■



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Alberta P3 School Bundle #5

By EllisDon

A coordinated school bundle project, each with its own project team, is underway across Alberta that will improve access to education for children and families in some of the province's fastest-growing communities. Anticipated to open in 2027, Alberta's P3 School Bundle #5 (P3SB5) will deliver six new schools in Edmonton, Calgary, Airdrie, Chestermere, Blackfalds, and Okotoks.

Delivered through a Public Private Partnership (P3) model, the project includes a 30-year maintenance term as part of the contract. It brings together public sector leadership and private sector expertise to support the delivery of these learning environments that will fulfil Alberta's vision for these six communities. Building

on traditional procurement approaches, the public sector retains oversight of educational outcomes, community needs, and long-term priorities, while private sector partners contribute specialized experience in design, construction, and asset management.

"This integrated approach supports predictable timelines and consistent quality," said Ben Deeley, senior vice-president, EllisDon Capital. "By integrating delivery, maintenance, and lifecycle planning from the outset, the P3 structure helps promote on-time delivery while supporting durable, adaptable, and cost-effective infrastructure for the long-term operation of the building. The result is educational facilities that support student learning today

while reducing maintenance risk and protecting public investment well into the future."

The project's success to date reflects a strong focus on proactive collaboration, consistent coordination, and adaptable delivery across each site. For example, bringing design and construction teams together early helped identify issues sooner, keep consultants engaged, and reduce rework. This approach improved construction sequencing and allowed lessons learned on one site to be applied across the project, supporting smoother progress as design and construction advance in parallel.

Since construction began in spring 2025, the EllisDon construction teams have successfully reached major



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Okotoks K-9 School.

milestones on schedule, including structural steel installation, marking the transition from groundwork to vertical construction. Masonry work, ranging from gymnasium walls to elevator cores and exterior envelopes, continues alongside mechanical and electrical rough ins, requiring strong coordination amongst our trade partner teams.

Foundations, deep services, and structural framing have also progressed steadily across all sites. Despite variations in site conditions, school configurations, and technical requirements, each project team has adapted its approach while maintaining alignment across the overall project. This flexibility has

allowed work to move forward efficiently without compromising quality or safety.

The P3SB5 project remains well aligned with upcoming milestones and is positioned to



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Blackfalds K-5 School.



Glenriding Heights 7-12 School.

advance into decking, exterior framing, and interior buildout through spring and summer 2026. This progress not only reflects construction momentum but also represents a sustained investment in Alberta's future.

"I'm proud of what our team has accomplished and of the role the P3 model has played in supporting a positive outcome," Deeley said. "Our teams have placed a real emphasis on building with purpose, and that's reflected in how these schools are coming together. These new, accessible facilities are being built by local tradespeople

and partners who live in the communities they serve and who care deeply about the end result."

Beyond the buildings themselves, the project supports broader provincial goals by creating jobs, strengthening local supply chains, and reinforcing Alberta's commitment to strong public infrastructure. With a focus on long-term value, the project is helping lay the foundation for what's to come - supporting education, economic stability, and opportunity across the province.

Schools included in the P3SB5 project:

- **Airdrie:** Grade K-8 school, The Rocky View School Division
- **Blackfalds:** Grade K-5 school, Red Deer Catholic School Division
- **Calgary - Nolan Hill:** Grade K-9 school, The Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School Division
- **Chestermere:** Grade K-9 school, The Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School Division
- **Edmonton - Glenriding Heights:** Grade 7-12 school, The Edmonton School Division
- **Okotoks:** Grade K-9 school, The Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate School Division ■



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Selecting your design team – critical to project success

By Kevin Kramers, Alberta Roofing Contractors Association



With a new roofing season soon upon us, two of the most frequently asked questions we receive are “With so many choices, how do I make sure I am using the right products?” and “Who makes sure my interests are looked after?”

All too often we receive calls from facility professionals who are either in the middle of a project, have run into problems and feel they do not have any choices, or the project has been completed and they have been left with more problems than solutions. Once contracts have been signed, it is hard to resolve some of these issues.

At the beginning of any project, it is crucial to start by selecting a professional, knowledgeable, and experienced project team who will work with you towards a common goal. Asking some simple questions while selecting your project team pays dividends towards its success.

Are they knowledgeable about several manufacturers or do they seem to be promoting one manufacturer over everyone else? Choosing a design from a specific manufacturer or having a proprietary specification may limit your choices and ultimately affect the project cost. This is not to be confused with being forced to accept lower quality products. Most manufacturers

will offer similar products that meet third-party industry standard certifications such as Canadian Standards Association (CSA) and American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM). Allowing contractors to use similar products from different manufacturers is not only a procurement best practice, but it also allows for competitive pricing.

Do they have experience designing and working in Alberta’s challenging climate? New products are introduced into the market every year, but only a few can withstand the harshness of the climate in Alberta. The strong winds in Southern Alberta, the chinooks



in Central Alberta and the extreme cold in Northern Alberta make Alberta one of the most challenging and unforgiving built environments in North America. Not only does climate play a large role choosing the right materials, it also plays a large role with application constraints that

can limit what materials can be installed. To ensure there are no surprises during construction, the materials and application techniques shall accommodate your projected installation timelines.

How do they make sure the work is done properly? Even with the best design team and solid construction documents, third-party independent inspections are crucial to ensure the contractor is following industry standards, documenting project progress and identifying any issues that may arise on site. Working directly for the building owner, with no association to any manufacturer, distributor or supplier, an independent inspector is the owners representative on site and upholds the owner's interests. Similar to the design team, this individual should have experience in Alberta

to understand that roofing application in Alberta is unique and not the same as other areas of Canada. Understanding the contractor may not be able to open up a large area with the threat of a micro-burst later in the day or ensuring all materials are properly stored and protected in the event of a thunderstorm is just as important as verifying the drain has been installed properly.

In a time where everything seems to be moving quicker, schedules are get compressed and facility budgets are being stretched, promises to get the project completed quicker with less involvement can be enticing. Taking the time to make sure the right people are involved at all phases of the project will pay dividends for a project and save time in the long run.

Kevin Kramers (C.E.T., R.R.O., C.T.R.) is the technical officer for the Alberta Roofing Contractors Association (ARCA) and has over 30 years of construction experience in Alberta.

He is responsible for maintaining the ARCA Roofing Application Standards Manual, managing the ARCA Interdisciplinary Technical Committee, researching new products and applications, and providing technical education for building professionals in Alberta. ■

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Indoor air quality after COVID: Are Alberta schools keeping up?

Five years after the pandemic reshaped how we think about ventilation, the work is far from finished — and the stakes have never been higher.

The COVID-19 pandemic put indoor air quality on the front page. For the first time, school boards, parents, and facility managers were having the same conversations that HVAC engineers had been having for decades: what are students breathing, and is it good enough? In Alberta, that question sparked real investment and real action—but also real gaps. As pandemic-era funding winds down and institutional attention shifts, facility administrators face a critical question: have the gains made since 2020 been sustained, or are Alberta schools quietly slipping back to where they were?

The standard that matters

Indoor air quality in schools is shaped by a combination of ventilation rates, filtration efficiency, and occupant density. The go-to reference for professionals in this space is ASHRAE Standard 62.1, which governs ventilation for acceptable indoor air quality in occupied buildings. Under this

framework, CO₂ concentration serves as a practical proxy for ventilation effectiveness: Health Canada recommends keeping indoor CO₂ levels at or below 1,000 parts per million (ppm), while ASHRAE guidance suggests that indoor CO₂ should not exceed outdoor concentrations—roughly 400 ppm—by more than 650 ppm, pointing to a practical ceiling of approximately 1,100 ppm.

In a well-ventilated classroom, CO₂ stays comfortably below that threshold. In an older school with undersized or poorly maintained HVAC, CO₂ levels above 2,000 ppm in occupied classrooms are not uncommon. Research consistently links elevated CO₂ with reduced concentration, increased fatigue, and higher rates of absenteeism—outcomes that undermine the very mission schools exist to carry out.

Beyond CO₂, schools also contend with particulate matter, volatile organic compounds (VOCs) from cleaning products and building materials, mould, humidity-related issues, and—

increasingly relevant in Alberta—wildfire smoke. The 2023 wildfire season was a stark reminder that outdoor air quality events can overwhelm indoor environments rapidly when ventilation systems lack adequate filtration.

What Alberta did and didn't do

During the pandemic, the Alberta government made \$250 million in accelerated capital maintenance funding available to school divisions. Ventilation upgrades were only one eligible use among many. According to Alberta Education, of that \$250 million, school divisions directed approximately \$44 million toward HVAC and ventilation improvements—roughly 18 cents of every available dollar going to air quality. That figure reflects how divisions balanced competing pressures, including staffing, cleaning, and online learning infrastructure.

Some divisions moved quickly and strategically. Edmonton Catholic Schools adopted MERV 13 filtration as a division-wide standard following 2021

guidance from the ASHRAE Northern and Southern Alberta Chapters. MERV 13 filters are capable of capturing the fine particulate matter and aerosol droplets associated with airborne viral transmission—a significant upgrade from the MERV 7 or 8 filters common in many older systems. Other divisions moved more cautiously, navigating the tension between HVAC system compatibility and the desire to improve protection.

The 2023 Alberta Building Code, which came into effect in May 2024, now requires that new construction follow ANSI/ASHRAE 62.1 ventilation standards. That is meaningful for capital projects going forward—but it does nothing for the significant stock of school buildings that predate modern ventilation standards.

The ongoing challenge: Aging buildings

Alberta's school infrastructure portfolio is diverse in age and condition. Many schools built in the 1960s and 1970s were designed with natural ventilation as a core assumption—windows were expected to do much of the work that mechanical systems now must carry. Retrofitting these buildings with modern ventilation is technically complex and expensive.

Deferred maintenance compounds this challenge. When HVAC systems are not serviced on schedule—filters

not changed, coils not cleaned, controls not calibrated—even systems that were adequate when new begin to underperform. A missing filter can lead to plugged coils over time, reducing system effectiveness and contributing to poor IAQ well before a visible failure occurs.

Practical steps for facility managers

CO₂ monitoring is one of the most cost-effective investments available. Portable monitors deployed in high-occupancy spaces—classrooms, gymnasiums, libraries—provide real-time feedback on ventilation performance and help prioritize where upgrades are most urgently needed.

Where HVAC systems can accommodate them, upgrading to MERV 13 filtration remains the most impactful single step for improving particle removal. For systems where MERV 13 is not feasible due to equipment constraints, supplemental HEPA filtration units offer a practical interim measure, though Health Canada is clear that portable units should complement, not replace, proper mechanical ventilation.

Pre-occupancy ventilation—running HVAC systems in occupied mode for at least one to two hours before students arrive—is a low-cost operational adjustment that meaningfully improves morning air quality.

Ensuring that exhaust systems in washrooms and science labs are functioning properly and not recirculating air into occupied spaces is another overlooked but important step.

Looking ahead

ASHRAE Standard 241, released in 2023, provides detailed guidance specifically focused on mitigating airborne pathogen transmission—a direct response to lessons learned during the pandemic. While adoption is not yet mandatory in most Canadian jurisdictions, it represents the direction of travel for the profession and a useful benchmark for school divisions evaluating their own systems.

Researchers and public health advocates across Canada are pressing for cleaner air in public buildings to be treated with the same seriousness as clean water—as a foundational infrastructure commitment rather than an optional upgrade. For Alberta school facility administrators, staying engaged in that conversation, and continuing to make the case for ventilation investment at the board and government level, may be the most important work of all.

The pandemic created a window of awareness. The challenge now is to ensure that awareness translates into lasting practice—not just in the newest buildings, but in every classroom where students spend their days. ■

The case for preventive maintenance plans: Saving money before something breaks

Reactive maintenance is expensive, disruptive, and avoidable. Here is how a structured preventive maintenance program pays for itself — and how to build one.

Every facility manager has a version of the story. A heating unit fails on the coldest day of January. An aging roof drain backs up over a long weekend. A gymnasium floor buckles from a moisture problem that had been developing, quietly, for months. The repair bill is significant. The disruption to students and staff is real. And with the benefit of hindsight, it is almost always possible to identify the warning signs that were present long before the failure.

This is the core argument for preventive maintenance: most equipment failures are not sudden events. They are the predictable endpoint of a process that begins with deferred inspections, missed servicing intervals, and small problems that compound over time. A structured preventive maintenance (PM) program addresses that process before it reaches crisis—and in doing so, produces substantial savings for school divisions while protecting the long-term condition of public assets.

The financial case

The financial argument for preventive maintenance is well-documented and compelling. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Indoor Air



Quality Tools for Schools program has tracked case studies in which school districts implementing formal PM programs saved \$500,000 in reactive and emergency maintenance costs within the first two years. That figure is consistent with broader industry data: facilities that implement preventive and predictive maintenance approaches can reduce overall maintenance expenditures by up to 40 per cent compared to reactive-only models.

The mechanism is straightforward. Emergency repairs carry a cost premium—parts sourced urgently, after-hours labour, and the ripple effects of unplanned downtime. A broken HVAC unit in winter does not just cost the repair bill; it may mean emergency portable heaters, displaced classes, and in some cases, school closure. Preventive maintenance eliminates most of these scenarios before they arise, and allows maintenance staff to work on a planned schedule rather than lurching from crisis to crisis.

Capital asset lifecycle is the longer-term component of the same argument. HVAC systems represent 18 to 22 per cent of a school building's total construction value. Equipment that is regularly inspected, cleaned, lubricated, and calibrated consistently outlasts equipment that is maintained reactively. For school divisions managing aging infrastructure under constrained capital budgets, extending asset life by even a few years can make a meaningful difference in how resources are allocated.

What a PM program actually looks like

A preventive maintenance program is, at its core, a systematic approach to caring for building systems and equipment on a defined schedule, before problems develop. It begins with a comprehensive asset inventory: knowing what you have, where it is, how old it is, and what its maintenance requirements are. Without a complete inventory, a PM program is built on incomplete information and will have gaps.

From the inventory, maintenance schedules are developed for each asset class. HVAC filter changes, coil cleaning, belt inspections, and control calibrations each have recommended service intervals based on manufacturer specifications and operational context. Roofing inspections, door hardware checks, fire suppression system tests, and plumbing inspections similarly follow defined cycles. The result is a forward-looking calendar of maintenance activities that can be staffed, budgeted, and tracked.

A Computerized Maintenance Management System (CMMS) is the operational backbone of any modern PM program. These platforms allow facility teams to manage work orders, track asset history, schedule recurring tasks, and generate reports that support capital planning conversations with school boards. Divisions that move from paper-based or spreadsheet-based tracking to a CMMS typically see immediate improvements in work





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Experienced custodial and trades staff often carry institutional knowledge about which systems are reliable and which have recurring issues.

order completion rates and maintenance staff accountability.

Making the case to school boards

For many facility managers, the challenge is not understanding why a PM program matters, it's securing the budget and organizational commitment to build one. School boards are accustomed to approving reactive repair expenditures because those costs are visible and immediate. Preventive maintenance spending, by contrast, funds the absence of problems, which is a harder story to tell.

The most effective approach is to frame PM investment in the language of risk and asset stewardship. Present the board with the replacement cost of the assets being protected. Identify the deferred maintenance backlog and illustrate how it grows without a structured maintenance program. Share lifecycle cost analysis that demonstrates the per-year cost of maintaining an asset versus the cost of premature replacement.

It is also worth connecting PM investment to outcomes that resonate beyond the facilities department. Equipment that operates correctly and efficiently uses less energy. Buildings that are well-maintained have better indoor air quality, which research consistently links to lower student absenteeism and higher academic performance. A school where the temperature is reliably comfortable and the air is clean is a better learning environment—outcomes that matter to trustees, administrators, and the communities they serve.

Getting started: A practical roadmap

For divisions that do not yet have a formal PM program, the path forward does not require a complete overhaul before any value is delivered.

Start with the highest-risk, highest-value assets: HVAC systems, roofing, and fire and life safety systems. Develop inspection schedules and service records for these systems first. Establish baseline documentation of their current condition.

Engage maintenance staff in the process. Experienced custodial and trades staff often carry institutional knowledge about which systems are reliable and which have recurring issues. That knowledge is invaluable in designing a PM program that reflects the actual condition and history of your buildings, not just a generic template.

Set measurable goals. A target of 80 to 90 per cent PM task completion on schedule is a reasonable first benchmark. Track emergency work orders as a percentage of total maintenance activity—most well-run facilities programs aim to keep reactive work below 20 to 25 per cent of total maintenance hours. As the program matures, these metrics can anchor your annual reporting to administration and the board.

The bottom line

A well-executed preventive maintenance program is one of the highest-return investments a school division can make in its physical infrastructure. It reduces costs, extends asset life, improves working and learning environments, and demonstrates responsible stewardship of public funds. For facility administrators navigating the dual pressures of aging buildings and constrained budgets, the question is not whether a PM program is worth the investment. The question is whether the division can afford to go without one.

The school that avoids the mid-January heating failure, the flooded gymnasium, and the emergency roof repair does not make the news. But it is managing its facilities—and its community's resources—exactly as it should. ■

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