



Revitalizing School Grounds and Building Exteriors

To: Finance, Budget and Enrolment Committee

Date: 9 December, 2021

Report No.: 12-21-4213

Strategic Directions

- Transform Student Learning
- Create a Culture for Student and Staff Well-Being
- Provide Equity of Access to Learning Opportunities for All Students
- Allocate Human and Financial Resources Strategically to Support Student Needs
- Build Strong Relationships and Partnerships Within School Communities to Support Student Learning and Well-Being

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

- (a) the methodology outlined in this report be implemented for future renewal investments in schools, based on available funding and system facility needs; and
- (b) staff report annually in the fall on the planned work for the upcoming year based on this methodology.

Context

Introduction

This report is the first of a set of two that charts a new course for a renewed emphasis on using equity as the primary lens through which decisions will be made about the allocation of investments into improving the appearances and condition of schools.

This report is based on the premise that schools that appear well maintained help students and staff feel valued and can inspire broader public confidence in the school system.

In this first report, the focus will be on the revitalization of school grounds and the exterior of buildings. The second report, which is tracking to Board in the

February/March 2022 cycle of meetings, will focus on improving the condition and internal components of schools.

Revitalizing school grounds and building exteriors

At its May 26, 2021 meeting, the Board of Trustees approved the *Long-Term Plan for Outdoor Learning* which included guiding principles and priorities for investments in school ground infrastructure.

The four guiding principles are that investments in school grounds should be:

- equitable,
- reflect the development needs of students,
- put students first,
- and be environmentally sustainable.

The priorities for TDSB-funded investments include:

- improving outdoor kindergarten learning environments
- addressing the needs of special-needs students,
- investing in school grounds with serious infrastructure deficiencies,
- providing quality outdoor spaces for middle school students,
- processing logs for seating in outdoor classrooms,
- investing in tree planting and maintenance,
- and supporting quality playing fields.

Appendix A provides the complete explanation of the guiding principles and priorities approved in the May 2021 *Long-Term Plan for Outdoor Learning*.

This report details the application of guiding principles and priorities for school ground infrastructure investments and includes an explanation of how school building exteriors will be revitalized through painting (e.g., doors, facia, and entrance canopies) the replacement of fencing, windows and doors, and improved lighting.

Funding the implementation of the guiding principles and priorities

A combination of School Condition Improvement (SCI) funding and the School Renewal Allocation (SRA) will be used to fund the work outlined below. Each of these funding streams has unique criteria for eligible expenditures. For a detailed explanation of both funding streams, see Appendix B.

The funding amounts indicated below are based on the pattern of Provincial funding the TDSB has received for the last few years. If the provision of funding from the Ministry of Education is reduced, then the plan outlined below will need to be reconsidered to reflect the level of funding that the TDSB receives.

Since the design and construction of facilities projects are major undertakings that take considerable time to plan and execute, particularly for site work, which is seasonal, the full implementation of this work is expected to begin in the 2022/23 school year.

Balancing equity while continuing to repair urgent and high priority site infrastructure deficiencies

Allocating human and financial resources strategically to support student needs and providing equity of access to learning opportunities for all students are explicit goals of the TDSB's Multi-year Strategic Plan. The implementation of the guiding principles and priorities outlined below aligns with these goals, representing a significant shift toward emphasizing equity when investing in school grounds and the exterior of buildings.

At the same time, resources will be allocated to ensure staff can attend to the most pressing high priority and urgent infrastructure deficiencies that arise regularly and broadly across the system, such as failing retaining walls, flooding, and deteriorating stairways. Many of these deficiencies can put the safety of students, staff and the public at risk if not addressed in a timely manner.

Planned versus responsive projects

With nearly 600 schools and an overall repair backlog of \$3.7 billion, TDSB staff receive a large volume of requests for facilities repairs daily.

It will continue to be important to triage these requests, and respond to the most urgent, using the guiding principles and priorities outlined in this report as a framework. While the goal will be to plan as much work as possible, resources will continue to be set aside to provide staff with the capacity to respond to requests as they arise.

The allocations outlined below are categorized as either planned, responsive, or a combination of both.

The four dimensions of equity

The guiding principle for equity approved in the May 2021 *Long-Term Plan for Outdoor Learning* envisioned three dimensions – that high needs-schools be prioritized, projects meet Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) standards, and that conditions be created to ensure all students, including those with special needs, can make full use of the outdoors. Enhancing Wi-Fi connectivity through the installation of additional wireless access points at schools will help to further support learning in the outdoors.

In this report, a fourth dimension has been added, which involves putting a greater emphasis on schools located within underserved areas of the city.

In the City of Toronto's Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020, 31 neighbourhoods were designated as Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs). These neighbourhoods were determined to have the most inequitable outcomes based on 15 indicators of inequity across five thematic domains: economic opportunities, social development, participation in decision making, physical surroundings and healthy lives.

Appendix C provides an explanation of the fifteen indicators of inequity. Appendix D shows the strong correlation between the 31 NIAs and the top third high needs schools at the TDSB as determined by the Learning Opportunities Index (LOI). Appendix E provides a list of all the schools located within NIAs.

Moving forward, a greater emphasis will be placed on high needs schools, with particular attention to the schools located in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas.

The City of Toronto will be developing a new Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy once 2021 Census data results become available. Should NIAs change under the new

strategy, priority schools will be reidentified.

Allocation of financial resources to implement the guiding principles and priorities

The total anticipated allocation planned to support site improvements for the 2022/23 school year is \$23,000,000 from SCI, and \$3,335,000 from SRA for a total of \$26,335,000.

Projects funded from the 2022/23 budget year will be allocated to the various priorities as outlined below.

1. Comprehensive renewal of sites in very poor condition

The most significant move to support equity in this plan is to undertake major site improvement projects at high needs schools, particularly (but not necessarily exclusively) in NIAs, starting with the schools with the worst site conditions.

While the focus will be on schools that the LOI ranks as the third neediest across the TDSB, staff will have the discretion of reviewing, and potentially selecting schools in the NIAs that are ranked in the middle third of the LOI, if their site conditions are poor.

These will be large projects and the scope of construction will be based on a detailed assessment of site conditions, with input from school teams.

Depending on the specific site conditions at each school, and input from school teams, the scope of work for projects could include a combination of areas such as the replacement of hard surface play areas, parking lots and play equipment. More shade could be introduced to the site through tree planting, and improvements could be made to playing fields, running tracks and baseball diamonds. In addition, retaining walls could be repaired, drainage improved, and erosion on slopes addressed.

The renewal of these sites will adhere to the AODA Design of Public Spaces standards, to ensure accessibility requirements are met. Particular attention will also be made to ensure that sites work well for students with special needs, who can often benefit from site features that exceed the requirements of the AODA.

Efforts will also be made to include at least one middle school on an annual basis.

Type: Planned

Prioritization: high needs schools with particular attention to those in NIAs and Facility Condition Index (urgent and high priorities)

Estimated number of annual projects: 7-12

Funding target: \$9 million

2. Parking lot replacements

One of the guiding principles approved in May 2021 is to put students first, which means prioritizing parts of sites that students use over parking lots.

The \$9 million committed to the comprehensive renewal of sites at high needs schools outlined above is possible in large part because significantly less money will be directed to parking lot replacements. Instead of \$10 million per year, the allocation for standalone parking lot projects will be \$3 million per year, which is enough for approximately 3-8 parking lot replacements depending on the size and scope of a project. Additional parking lots may still be replaced as part of the comprehensive projects outlined in #1.

Type: Planned

Prioritization: schools where the Facility Condition Index (FCI) has identified parking lot replacement as either urgent or high priority. Shortlisted schools will be ranked according to their overall condition, degree of opportunity to improve traffic safety and LOI ranking.

Estimated number of annual projects: 3-8

Funding target: \$3 million

3. Repair/replacement of urgent and high priority site infrastructure deficiencies

Staff need the financial capacity to triage and respond to site infrastructure failures as they arise on a regular basis given the age of school facilities. A particular focus will be on addressing safety issues such as retaining wall failures, drainage problems, stair replacements and fencing problems.

Type: Responsive

Prioritization: Health and safety, Facility Condition Index (urgent and high priorities), LOI, and assessment of Technical Requests submitted by Facility Team Leaders

Estimated number of annual projects: 20-30*

Funding target: \$6 million

* The number of projects is dependent on various factors noted above and may require work to be carried over to subsequent years.

4. Projects to support students with special needs

Among the most vulnerable students are those with special needs. Staff need the financial resources to make improvements to school grounds so that students with special needs can enjoy all the benefits associated with playing, learning, and socializing with their peers outdoors.

Type: 50% planned and 50% responsive

Prioritization: the planned projects will be informed from input from the Special Education department

Estimated number of annual projects: 4-6

Funding target: \$1 million

5. Play equipment replacements

Many schools have very old play equipment which receive regular repairs to keep them safe and usable for as long as possible. However, play structures eventually reach the end of their life and need to be replaced.

Type: Responsive

Prioritization: As soon as TDSB trades determine that a structure is at the end of its life and cannot continue to be sustained through repairs, it is placed on a list for replacement. Health and safety are always the primary consideration. LOI will be a factor in prioritizing work. The timing of the replacement will be at least a year, and potentially longer depending on the number of schools in the queue.

Estimated number of annual projects: 6-8

Funding target: \$2 million

6. Outdoor kindergarten learning areas

The Ministry of Education policy requires kindergarten students to spend a minimum of an hour outside every day. It is important that all schools have a good quality outdoor learning environment for kindergarten students since the time they spend outdoors is an important part of their school experience.

Type: 50% planned and 50% responsive

Prioritization: the planned projects will focus on selecting high needs schools in underserved areas of the city.

Estimated number of annual projects: 5-7

Funding target: \$850 thousand

7. Outdoor learning spaces

Schools continue to need support to create outdoor spaces for learning, particularly considering the ongoing pandemic.

Type: 50% planned and 50% responsive

Prioritization: the planned projects will focus on selecting high needs schools in underserved areas of the city.

Estimated number of annual projects: 30-50

Funding target: \$300 thousand

8. Tree planting and maintenance

The TDSB's *Annual Report 2021: Climate Action* committed to doubling the planting of large trees, and ongoing care of existing trees.

Type: 2/3 planned & 1/3 responsive

Prioritization: for planned projects, schools will be selected using the following criteria: canopy coverage, LOI, proximity to major arterial roads and highways, and heat vulnerability. Responsive projects will involve planting large trees in response to emerging needs. Instances include when a tree has died and needs to be replaced, memorial tree planting, and for small-scale succession planting at

schools with mature trees.

Estimated number of annual projects: 50-60

Funding target: \$685 thousand

9. Improving the maintenance of playing fields, running tracks and baseball diamonds

The condition of school playing fields, running tracks and baseball diamonds can have a big impact on the appearance of schools. The *Improving Playing Fields* report approved by the Board in 2016 launched a renewed effort and focus on providing better maintenance for playing fields across the city, which has since expanded to include improving running tracks and baseball diamonds.

Continuing to invest in this area is important for many reasons, including the visual impact they have, but also because of the role they play in supporting student health and well being. Additionally, these spaces on school grounds are used by communities across the system for both sports and leisure, creating social infrastructure that is adaptable to the cultural needs of neighbourhoods.

Type: 80% planned and 20% responsive

Prioritization: Schools are selected primarily based on field, track, and diamond conditions and LOI.

Estimated number of annual projects: 150-200

Funding target: \$1 million

10. Replacement of artificial turf fields at the end of their lifecycle

Forty-five schools have either artificial turf fields or courts, seven of which are more than 15 years old. As these fields reach their end of life, it will be important to replace them, starting with the fields in the worst condition.

Type: Planned

Prioritization: Schools with artificial turf in the worst condition

Estimated number of annual projects: 2-3

Funding target: \$1.5 million

11. Exterior building improvements

The exterior buildings of many schools need refreshing. Consequently, a program to revitalize building exteriors will start in the 2022/23 school year, with a focus on painting doors, facia, and entrance canopies and improving lighting.

Type: Planned

Prioritization: high needs schools with particular attention to those in NIAs and Facility Condition Index (urgent and high priorities)

Estimated number of annual projects: 8-12

Funding target: \$1 million

For a summary of the application of the guiding principles and priorities for school grounds and the exterior of buildings, refer to Appendix F.

Notes on Implementation

It is important to note that the funding allocations outlined above are targets for each area that staff will endeavor to meet, recognizing some areas could end up receiving more funding, and others less.

In some instances, staff will draw on funding from multiple areas and bundle them together into a single project. For example, if in the process of improving a kindergarten area, staff discover a failing retaining wall on the site, they may draw upon funding in both category #3 and category #6 so that the wall can be fixed while improving the kindergarten area.

Improving the Overall Appearance of Schools

In addition to school ground infrastructure and building exteriors, the condition of interior building features (e.g., paint, flooring, ceiling tiles, and lockers) can have a significant impact on the appearance of schools.

In the February/March cycle of Board meetings, staff will present a report like this one but focusing on building interiors. The report will include guiding principles and priorities, and details about how they will be implemented.

Action Plan and Associated Timeline

The implementation of the plan outlined above will start in the 2022/23 budget year.

Resource Implications

The total anticipated allocation planned to support site improvements for the 2022/23 school year is \$23,000,000 from SCI, and \$3,335,000 from SRA for a total of \$26,335,000.

The funding level is based on the pattern of Provincial funding the TDSB has received for the last few years. If the provision of funding from the Ministry of Education is reduced, then the plan outlined in this report will need to be reconsidered to reflect the level of funding that the TDSB receives.

Communications Considerations

A communication plan will be developed to ensure system leaders and Facility Team Leaders are aware of the strategic direction outlined in this report.

Board Policy and Procedure Reference(s)

Not applicable.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Guiding principles and priorities for investments in school ground infrastructure
- Appendix B: Explanation of provincial funding sources for facilities improvements
- Appendix C: Neighbourhood Improvement Areas: fifteen indicators of inequity
- Appendix D: Correlation between the Neighbourhood Improvement Areas and the top third highest needs schools
- Appendix E: All schools located within the 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas
- Appendix F: Summary of the application of guiding principles and priorities for school grounds and the exterior of buildings

From

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