



Facilities Master Planning

Every governing board, regardless of circumstance, size or location will need to conduct a facilities master plan to set the direction for the district's facilities, land-use planning, maintenance and other features. A facilities master plan is the result of a process in which the board of education and district staff collect and analyze data regarding the current and future needs of district facilities. The data collected is used to inform future district facilities planning. An FMP should be conducted or updated by district staff approximately every five to 10 years, or prior to any significant building project. All districts benefit from the process and findings of an FMP – not only growing districts with new construction projects but also those districts with older facilities requiring modernization.

Most FMPs include needs assessments of individual school sites. In certain circumstances, a needs assessment is required by law; first, when a district wants to levy a developer fee (see Government Code 65995.6) and also as part of the Williams Emergency Repair Account. The steps that follow the completion of an FMP may include, but are not limited to: Site acquisition, project planning, project design, the bidding process and ultimately construction.

Understanding the status of facilities can inform future planning and direction setting for the district. As with every step of the school construction process, the gathering and analyzing of data is a key component. In order to ensure collaboration at the local and state level, school board members should be in constant communication with appropriate government agencies. The board may also wish to assemble an advisory committee to discuss the data and make recommendations to the board for the FMP.

Why conduct a facilities master plan?

Districts should conduct an FMP to ensure the final construction plans will be formulated to meet the long-term needs of students, teachers, administrators, parents and the community.

Who should be involved in the process?

District staff will need to solicit input and expectations from stakeholders and gather statistical information in order to provide the board with the most relevant data to make decisions regarding school facilities.

Potential stakeholders:

- Students
- Parents
- Community members
- Local government
- Parks and recreation
- School district staff
- Business community
- Community-based organizations

Where should the process begin?

Once a board has decided to conduct or update their district's FMP, it must do three things: Set goals and expectations for the plan; allocate resources and set direction for district staff and; assemble an advisory committee. A governing board must prioritize its objectives for the plan and provide oversight to the staff. Flexibility, adequate funds and appropriate timelines will all require direction from the board to district staff. In order to receive community input and engage stakeholders, a board may benefit from assembling an advisory committee of potential stakeholders. The responsibilities of the committee should be outlined by the board. Responsibilities may include the analysis of data and providing recommendations to the board. Regularly scheduled reports to the board on the progress of both the advisory committee and staff work should be added to school board meetings.



What should be addressed in the facilities master plan?

The district will need to collect data in order to assess the condition and adequacy of existing facilities, project future enrollments and align facilities with the district's vision for the instructional program. In projecting student enrollments, the facilities master plan should address economic considerations in the projected attendance area, such as changes in housing costs and availability as well as projections about employment and planned residential or commercial development. Data on the projected school population should also factor in the density of the local neighborhoods, as well as the characteristics of the population, such as age, transience and birth rate. Public records and census data will inform the discussions by providing a common understanding of the historical development of the community and challenges that may be presented by geography or transportation infrastructure. Other factors, such as traffic patterns, transportation and safety should be incorporated into district planning.

Gathering student information will help address the planning needs of future facilities and, the data may also guide board discussions as they evaluate existing structures as a part of the FMP process. For current and planned facilities, a district will need to consider how space is used for teaching and learning. The age of students, class size requirements, level of safety, what is needed to support technology and the availability of flexible space all must be considered when creating a facilities master plan. Any potential code violations will need to be identified and the facilities will need to be examined for compliance of new and existing regulations. This evaluation is most often completed with a facility needs assessment. As noted above, in some cases a needs assessment is required by law. Whether or not they are required, site needs assessments are a vital tool in determining current and future needs of district facilities.

Effective planning also requires general background knowledge of the school facilities system in California, including but not limited to:

- legal requirements, standards and court decisions affecting facilities;
- funding options currently available to districts for new construction, modernization and deferred maintenance;
- local planning processes as they relate cities or counties general plan;
- allowable uses of facilities; and
- a sense of current politics and legislative proposals.

Once all the data is collected, the needs assessment should be used to define the goals and desired outcomes of future construction projects, as well as any potential problems. After considering all data, boards can move to the planning stage of construction, confident that the plans will take into account the future needs of the district, staff and students.

What is the board's role in the facilities master plan?

Completing a thorough FMP is an important part of developing a facilities master plan for the district and ensuring that construction projects comply with complex state requirements. Obtaining and compiling the data are the responsibilities of district staff, but it is the responsibility of the board to ensure that the FMP is conducted and that the results are used in the planning and decision-making process.

A well-informed board can play an important role in setting clear expectations for the oversight and monitoring of construction projects. Board members provide community leadership and serve as advocates for children by working collectively to make decisions that will best serve all the students in the community. Engaging community stakeholders in the process of facilities master planning is one way board members can ensure accountability. Building positive relationships with other civic and community leaders in your district can also be beneficial when other projects arise, such as the passage of a local school bond.

One of the most significant responsibilities of the board will be to strive to meet the expectations of the school community while working within limited funding constraints.

The school board can help ensure that the district has all the information it needs to effectively plan and provide high-quality, safe and appropriate school facilities through the following actions:

Steps for a comprehensive facilities master plan

- Communicate the board's priority on developing and implementing a thoughtful planning process that obtains perspectives from key stakeholders.
- Allocate funding, other resources and sufficient time for a thorough needs assessment.
- Work collaboratively with all other local and state agencies.



- Request that data be provided by the superintendent and district staff to the board regarding the projected enrollment data for school sites. This data should include, information from the city, county, census bureau, public records and other agencies to determine potential changes in:
 - housing costs and availability
 - employment projections
 - planned residential and commercial development
 - city master plans
 - demographics
- Understand the historical development of the community, as well as its future direction.
- Determine how new construction/modernization projects will correlate with district and community goals.
- Establish parity across sites – set district standards for technology, aesthetics, equipment, fixtures, etc.
- Prioritize funding and resources for individual construction projects. Communicate with staff and the public why some facilities/projects receive differentiated funding.
- Provide clear policy direction regarding facilities planning and set expectations for regular reviews of facilities needs.
- Convene a group of stakeholders to review enrollment data. In the case of the renovation of an existing site, facility data should also be reviewed.
- Establish clear guidelines and expectations for the group of stakeholders.
- Conduct forums, focus groups and surveys to gauge the wishes of students and parents for the new or renovated school facility.
- Provide opportunities at board meetings for reports on the status and results of the needs assessment.
- Use FMP data to identify concerns as well as to define goals and desired outcomes of the construction project(s).
- Create a plan for communication and refer to your existing district communication plan. Be transparent with decisions, convey realistic project timelines and goals.



Resources

Community Needs Assessment. The Arizona State Library's Department of Archives and Public Records offers specific information about the strategies and challenges faced when conducting a needs assessment in a local community. More information can be found by visiting <http://www.dlapr.lib.az.us/cdt/commneeds.htm>.

Construction Management Association of America. This site provides an overview into the professional service of construction management, including the planning, design, and construction of projects from inception to completion for the purpose of controlling time, cost and quality. Its Web site can be found at <http://www.cmaanet.org>.

Fixing it Right. An article explaining the importance of careful planning of construction projects, including the identification of needs up front, securing funding and setting a schedule. This article was written by Richard A. Henry through the American School & University. The document can be found by visiting http://www.asumag.com/mag/university_fixing_right/.

Maximizing School Board Governance: School Facilities Management. A publication by the California School Boards Association, details the role and responsibilities of the governing board in ensuring that a comprehensive facilities is in place, identifying and allocating resources for facilities projects, providing direction and making major decisions that support implementation of the facilities plan, monitoring progress, and engaging in community leadership and advocacy on behalf of the district's facilities needs.

Needs Assessment: Mapping a Course for the Future. A Web site that offers general information regarding the execution of a needs assessment with a focus on school facilities. This resource is provided by the San Diego State University National Center for the 21st Century Schoolhouse and may be found at http://www.edweb.sdsu.edu/schoolhouse/21C_PIMdl_CI.htm.

Planning 101. A comprehensive look at the need for detailed planning before beginning a school construction project. Planning 101 is presented by Lettie Boggs and Colbi Technologies and produced by the California Coalition for Adequate School Housing Resource Center. The document can be found by visiting <http://www.cashnet.org/resource-center/resourcefiles/594.pdf>.

Planning for the Long Haul. An article written by John D. Blackwell and the American School & University which details the reasons that a facilities needs assessment and master plan are invaluable tools for districts facing future construction. To find the article visit http://asumag.com/mag/university_planning_long_haul/.

The California School Boards Association's Construction Management Task Force provides districts with policy briefs and fact sheets on construction related issues. District staff and Governing Boards should use this information as a resource when making local decisions. These documents are provided for informational purposes only and are not a substitute for legal advice from school districts legal counsel. Districts should obtain independent legal advice and review when necessary.

If you have any questions, please contact CSBA Policy Services at (800) 266-3382 or via e-mail policy@csba.org

Construction Management Task Force

Kerry Clegg, Chair

NSBA Director, Sulphur Springs Union ESD

Mark Cooper, Vice Chair

CSBA Director, Region 1, Lake COE

Jeanette Amavisca

CSBA Delegate, Region 6, Elk Grove USD

Andy Berg

Director, Local Government Affairs, NECA

Paul Cohen

*Director, Public & Governmental Relations,
Northern California Carpenters Regional Council*

John Collins

Deputy Superintendent, Poway USD

Juan Garza

Superintendent, Kings Canyon Joint USD

Keith Giles

CSBA Director, Region 22, Lancaster ESD

Roy Grimes

CSBA Delegate, Region 6, Sacramento City USD

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Field Representative, Carpenters Local #180

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Anne Renshaw

CSBA Delegate, Region 17, Fallbrook Union ESD

Susan Silver

Superintendent, Scotts Valley USD

Steve Sturgeon

CSBA Delegate, Region 22, William S. Hart Union HSD

Shelly Yarbrough

CSBA Director-at-Large, American Indian, Val Verde USD