



## Recommended Policies for Public School Facilities

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# Section 1: Public School Facilities Planning Policies

## *Introduction*

It is the responsibility of each state to ensure that every child has access to a quality education. In many states, the courts have determined that school facilities that provide educational settings suited to the state's determined curriculum are a significant part of this responsibility. However, school facility management and construction have traditionally been entirely the responsibility of the school district. Many states, particularly those who have increased their funding to local school districts are putting in place policies, procedures and technical assistance to ensure that their public school facilities are educationally adequate.

The purpose of this paper is to provide policy guidance and recommendations to elected and appointed officials and administrators at the State, local, and school district level to improve **facilities planning** in order to support and enhance the delivery of educational programs and services for students and teachers. The implementation of policies that result in high quality, high-performing, well designed and maintained school facilities has a direct and indirect impact on the teaching and learning process. Effective facilities management can contribute to the success of every student in every school in the United States.

In 2001, led by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund (21CSF), and supported by the Ford Foundation, a group of very experienced school facility and community-based groups came together in a collaboration called BEST (Building Educational Success Together). The BEST partners are: 21CSF; the Education Law Center (Newark, NJ); Neighborhood Capital Budget Group (Chicago, IL); the Knowledgeworks Foundation (Cincinnati, OH); The National Trust for Historic Preservation (Washington, DC); the National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities (Washington, DC), New Schools Better Neighborhoods (Los Angeles, CA), New Visions for Public Schools (New York, NY), and Mark Schneider (State University of New York at Stony Brook).

The BEST partners developed a four-part policy agenda: 1) Increase public participation in **facilities planning**, 2) create and support **schools as centers of community** that offer school-based supports to children to eliminate barriers to success and serve the broader community, 3) improve **facilities management**, including maintenance and capital improvement programs and 4) secure adequate and equitable **facilities funding**. We have developed recommended school facility policies in these four areas. **This paper is the first part of an effort to address our four-part policy agenda.**

State policy reform is one tool for affecting the planning, design, construction, maintenance and funding practices and processes at the state and local school district levels. However, state level standards and control must be carefully developed and applied, so that creativity, public participation, and local priorities can drive the facility planning and design outcomes.

These school facilities policies may be used to:

- assess your state and local policies—compare these recommended policies to your state and school district’s policies;
- facilitate a discussion among teachers, parents, students, principals, facility managers, community and business leaders, about any policy barriers to well-maintained, educationally adequate school facilities;
- identify policy or funding incentives that can be adopted to support high quality educational facilities for all children; and
- build consensus for state level mandates that require local school districts to engage in best practice for school facility condition, design and utilization.

We hope that others will correspond with us, critique our work, offer suggestions, substitutions or additions to any or all areas. We also hope that we will receive accounts of successes or failures in using or implementing the policies or elements at any level.

## ***Policy Rationale***

Comprehensive planning ensures the most efficient and cost effective use of taxpayer dollars. School facility planning should be a natural part of community planning, but all-too-frequently it is not undertaken. These policies do not propose to examine the full array of community planning but, instead, focus on the role of school facility planning. School facility planning is not an outgrowth of community planning. Rather, it is a unique process that recognizes the importance of education and the role of the public school in the community planning process. It should be integrated into community planning and not viewed as a supplement to the overall planning process. Like other focused planning processes, school facility planning has goals, objectives, data, and constituents that may, or may not, overlap, with other interests. Some of the specific aspects of the school facility planning process are described below.

School facility planning assures that public schools fit into the overall growth and zoning plans and projects for the neighborhood and/or community. Developing a dialogue between the various planning entities can provide for the exchange of information and data so that comprehensive plans address all of the needs and requirements of the constituents. Integrating school facility planning into municipal plans and municipal plans into educational facility plans can reduce or eliminate the many negative effects of independent and isolated planning that can lead to such problems as overcrowded schools, underutilized schools, sprawl, and increased costs for public infrastructure. Integrating school facility planning creates opportunities for establishing the school building as a focal point in the neighborhood or community and for developing a sense of pride and identity. Cooperative planning enables communities to be creative in building and land utilization, which could for example, economically combine some of the multiple needs and requirements for schools, recreation, daycare, senior citizens, health and social services, and libraries.

Broad-community involvement in school facility planning means an open, regular, public process, which can help identify educational and community needs and create solutions for school building and other neighborhood and community problems. It also can increase long-term community support for schools, which yields positive benefits for the community and for students. This type of planning also recognizes that there is generally an increasing population that does not have a direct relationship with the public schools and that these citizens have needs for services that can be provided within or adjacent to the public school building.

Very often most decisions in the school facility planning and design process are considered the domain of school administrators, professional planners, architects, and engineers, with local school constituents and community involvement included at the end of the process. Many school board members, superintendents, and school district operating officers, in addition to community stakeholders, are not trained or experienced in school facilities planning or management. In many older urban communities, school renovation and construction have been absent from the public agenda for so long that communities are unfamiliar with the processes, concepts and requirements for democratic

action regarding school planning, design and construction. This is also true for smaller school districts where capital improvements are only undertaken when the building has outlived its useful life, deferred maintenance has mounted to the point of requiring a major renovation or a replacement school project, or there are significant changes in demographics of the community (increasing or declining enrollments).

If members of a community are involved in the process, school facilities are likely to be better designed, better built, better maintained, widely used, and supported by more members of the entire community. Residents, communities, and local school personnel pay for and/or live with the long-term decisions made about school facilities. These individuals need to be educated about the facility planning, design, construction and renovation processes and options they need to be aware of as they approach and make decisions about the planning and design of school buildings. The development and adoption of long-range educational facility master plans that are integrated with municipal plans for other citizen services (and visa versa) establishes a framework for moving forward. These plans can then form the basis for decisions and implementation plans that are not dependent upon elected or appointed municipal officials, school board members, or the superintendent of schools.

### ***Policy Intent***

*To ensure that educational facility planning is a regular part of all planning activities at the state, city, town, and school district levels, with broad public participation and an integrated approach that is coordinated and reciprocal between the entities.*

## ***Recommended Policies***

### **1.1 Educational Facilities Master Plans Policy**

**The State Department of Education should require all school districts to prepare a long range Educational Facilities Master Plan (EFMP), with annual revisions and/or updates that follow an established format or outline. These plans should be reviewed, commented upon, and/or approved by the department.**

An Educational Facilities Master Plan (EFMP) is a long-range plan, often established as a plan for at least a ten-year period. It usually includes information on the following subjects:

- a) educational goals, standards, and guidelines;
- b) educational instructional programs and services;
- c) the capacity in the existing schools and their utilization;
- d) community analysis, including current and projected demographics, land usage, transportation plans, residential and commercial development, private

- schools, plans for water and sewage service expansion and/or redevelopment, and institutions of higher education;
- e) an educational facility inventory and an assessment of the building conditions;
  - f) historical and projected enrollment data;
  - g) an analysis of the facility needs and requirements of the district (based upon the data and information);
  - h) the consideration of options for addressing the needs and requirements;
  - i) identified potential sources of funding for implementation; and
  - j) a description of the process, procedure, and timeline for community participation in the development of the plan.

An EFMP, once adopted or approved, can be the basis for the development of a capital improvement program for the school district. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) could include projects for major renovations, additions, renovations combined with additions, new schools to accommodate or provide for consolidations and/or school closures, school replacements, replacement of building systems and/or components, acquisition of future school sites, and purchase or lease of relocate-able classrooms. The CIP sets priorities, establishes timelines and the sequence of the projects, cost estimates for each project, and the potential sources of funding.

School building improvements and new construction have a major impact on education of the students and the school community. Therefore, each school project should be carefully planned and coordinated in relationship to other school projects and the larger community. Educational facility master planning should be pro-active, not reactive. The development and submission of an EFMP can assure the community that the school district is well prepared for the future and the potential changes that may impact the condition and utilization of their school buildings. Coordination should be encouraged between the different local government agencies and the school district in order to facilitate effective educational facility planning.

## **1.2 Facility Planning Coordination Policy**

**The State Department of Education should require school districts to develop methods and procedures to coordinate school district facility planning with local governments and related comprehensive community plans.**

School districts rely heavily on accurate and reliable information from local governments for critical data and information to prepare an EFMP. The methods and procedures that they establish to coordinate the activities and the flow of information and mutual support can greatly improve the process and the eventual product.

It should also be noted that the goals and objectives included in municipal (town, township, city), county, and/or state community comprehensive planning should include and recognize the importance of the public school district and its contributions to the

quality of life in the community. As school districts develop an open dialogue and share information with these entities, they will be able to (a) obtain valuable information to assist them in their efforts to develop and update their EFMP, and (b) provide the planners at all levels of government with school district related information that will assist them in their community and neighborhood planning.

Community planning for such services as transportation, parks and recreation, senior citizen outreach and programming, and health care often takes place in different spheres that do not communicate well with one another. This is often complicated further by different budget cycles and/or requirements to segregate funding sources. However, it is clear that these community plans can have a major impact on the community as a whole and the well planned rehabilitation or placement of a school can contribute to a vibrant and successful community. When various factors, like bus routes and walk-ability, availability of parks and recreation spaces, proximity to libraries and shopping, are considered, the ability to develop a successful neighborhood or community that includes a public school as a point of pride is more likely.

Coordinating and sharing information pertaining to plans for residential development and/or redevelopment, for example, could result in a public school's renovation or development that is well-timed for the new residential community's student population. This type of coordination might improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the expenditure of taxpayer funds for the benefit of all citizens. Redevelopment could also be directed to utilize existing infrastructure rather than expenditures for new infrastructure (schools, other municipal service buildings, water and sewage service, and roads) and save the limited undeveloped areas in or adjacent to the community.

### **1.3 Comprehensive Maintenance Plans Policy**

**The State Department of Education should require school districts to develop a Comprehensive Maintenance Plan (CMP) with annual revisions and/or updates, and the Department should verify that these CMPs are being implemented.**

Public school districts invest taxpayer resources to develop and operate public school facilities within the district. They have a responsibility and obligation to protect and maintain that investment. They can best achieve this objective through the development and implementation of a Comprehensive Maintenance Plan (CMP). The CMP is a plan that recognizes that the proper maintenance of public school buildings can:

- a) help maintain a positive learning environment,
- b) maintain the asset value of the property,
- c) eliminate or reduce the number of fires, accidents, and other safety related hazards in or on the property,
- d) provide buildings that function efficiently,

- e) enable the continuous use of the school building without disruption to educational programs and services, and
- f) conserve energy.

The CMP generally includes information pertaining to:

- a) staffing and their respective activities and responsibilities;
- b) services provided by school district staff and those that are performed under contract;
- c) an inventory of the facilities and their condition;
- d) a schedule for preventative maintenance for various building systems and/or components as well as a schedule for potential replacement;
- e) the process and procedure for unscheduled maintenance and the handling of work orders;
- f) a description of scheduled and/or unscheduled maintenance work that has been deferred due to lack of funds or personnel and/or changes in priorities; and
- g) budget information for the overall operation of the maintenance department and the implementation of the plan.

The state department of education should establish procedures for monitoring and verifying that the CMP are being implemented. This assures taxpayers at the local school system level and those responsible for the allocation of state funds, where provided, that the investments are being properly cared for. It makes good business sense and practice to protect capital investments that have a long life expectancy so that resources are not wasted or missused.

## **1.4 Capital Improvement Plans Policy**

**The State Department of Education should require school districts to prepare an educationally, socially, and fiscally responsible Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) and budget aligned with the long-range Educational Facility Master Plan (EFMP), comprehensive municipal plans, and the district's Comprehensive Maintenance Plans (CMP).**

A Capital Improvement Program (CIP) should be based upon accurate and reliable data and information presented in an approved EFMP, comprehensive municipal plans, and the CMP. It should also be prepared with consideration given to the various competing needs and requirements of the district and the municipality. Careful implementation of the plan must distribute resources equitably within the school district to the highest priority projects with consideration being given to the condition and needs of the existing facilities and the possible socio-economic differences between and among the school attendance areas within the district.



The CIP once adopted and/or approved by the fiscal authorities, with community input and participation, should become the basis for moving forward with specific planning activities that will result in expenditures for the capital improvements. In the absence of this type of support, the plan is a just a document that has little hope or likelihood of implementation. With the support of the fiscal authorities however, educational facility plans, municipal plans, and maintenance plans can be brought to completion. Capital Improvement Plans that are based upon sound and responsible plans and realistic budgets can garner wide support that will result in improved facilities to serve the community.

Although it can be politically expeditious to plan for facilities that the community cannot afford, these plans do not address the real needs and only postpone facing budget constraints and adverse community reactions and disappointment. Planning needs to be accompanied by solid estimates of the future fiscal capacity of the community and with achievable plans to pay for the planned facilities and improvements. The CIP needs to recognize and consider the hard and soft costs of each project. This could include (but is not limited to) design fees, construction costs, inspection fees, permits, site acquisition, legal services, bond counsel and bond sale expenses, demolition costs, fees for disposing of demolished and waste materials, reasonable inflation estimates, movable furniture and equipment, and a contingency for unforeseen conditions.

## **1.5 Co-Location Policy**

**The State Department of Education should require school districts to examine the opportunities for developing co-location, proximal location, and/or cooperative arrangements for the shared use of public school facilities with other public government entities (e.g. libraries, parks, senior centers, health clinics, etc.).**

Public school districts generally do not have unlimited resources, but rather have a list of projects in their CIP that far exceed the funding capabilities. In most communities, the individual departments and/or agencies have plans for capital projects to support their specific program requirements. Through joint planning efforts the school district and the municipal entity could develop a project that maximizes the potential for a cooperative arrangement, co-location, and/or proximal locations for some shared usage of a building and/or site. There are savings to be realized for both entities when there is shared use of a facility. These possible savings include site acquisition, design fees, construction or renovation costs, operating expenses, and maintenance costs.

Very often less wealthier school districts are confronted with extensive lists of educational facility needs while the municipality also has an extensive list of projects. Joint efforts can result in savings and the provision of services for the citizens in the community. Even in wealthier districts, it is appropriate for the district to examine these cooperative options. If the district can make these arrangements, it cannot only save some resources, but also be viewed as a positive and influential force in the community.

Most current government structures have officials working and planning independently. There are instances of this occurring where neither entity within the municipality and/or the school district was aware of the other entity's project. This does not have to be the case. Many examples of the cooperative model can be replicated by school districts and their potential municipal partners. Complementary projects that benefit each entity and they can be accomplished can be planned and operated. Sometimes funding for specific projects precludes cooperation with other government agencies or functions or the sharing of scarce resources, but there are often innovative avenues that should be explored. Collaboration among government divisions should be promoted where facilities can contribute to the successful operations and delivery of programs and services to their constituents. Cooperative planning enables communities to be creative in building and land utilization while meeting multiple needs for community schools, recreation, health and human services, libraries, and social services, and the like.

There are decisions that must be made as these cooperative arrangements are explored and developed. A determination will need to be made regarding which entity will take the lead and be the contracting body for the design and construction or renovation of the facility. A written agreement for these aspects of the project, as well as the operation and maintenance should be formalized. It may be beneficial for one entity to have primary responsibility during the design and construction phase and another entity to have primary responsibility for operation and maintenance once the project is completed. Review and coordination timelines as well as budget submittals must be high on the agenda as the agreement is being developed. Very often the funding source for the various programs is the same and with joint support from both entities the potential budget problems can be resolved. It is extremely helpful if the individuals that are to have decision-making authority for the project are designated, made public, and recorded in the written agreement.

It should be noted that some states provide funding for capital projects that combine school district needs with other community needs. The same taxpayer dollars that support the school construction project can bring benefits to the community from the portion of the project that meets the community requirements, too.

## **1.6 Public Process Policy**

**The State Department of Education should require that school districts, their boards of education, and administrative staff utilize an open, public process when making site and school specific decisions concerning school facilities. This should include decisions related to school renovations, school additions, school replacements, new schools, school closings and consolidation, the disposition of surplus schools and/or property, site selection, and school design features and components.**

Proposals or plans for changes to programs, services, and/or projects that affect a neighborhood and its families can either be disruptive and upsetting or a source of community pride and cohesion. Perhaps no planning example is more demonstrative of this than school facility planning.

School facilities are a public asset to communities and neighborhoods. As well as offering educational programs and services, they are often landmarks with historical and architectural value. The local school community and neighborhood have a vested interest in decisions made about their school.

In addition, public support is easier if the public is well informed and brought along as the options are considered and the eventual decisions are made in public with a rationale and documentation of public participation in the process. Parents and neighbors alike have strong beliefs regarding the site, design, programs, and amenities for public school facilities in their community. They have a special perspective that comes from first-hand knowledge of the students, the school facility, the neighborhood, and the school's place in the larger community. They also know the needs and aspirations of the students and the community. If included in the planning process, these stakeholders can relate this important information to the planners.

An open community process is especially important when school redistricting, school consolidation and/or school closures are discussed. The possible shifting of students to another school or the removal of a school building that has served the community will bring parents and citizens together with high levels of interest and concern. This could include their concern for the impact on their students as well as the impact on their property values. The school district should examine and include in its analysis, in addition to the fiscal impact, the impact on (a) the educational programs and services, (b) the students, teachers, and parents, (c) the neighborhood and the community, including the business community, and (d) other agencies and entities.

## **1.7 Technical Assistance Policy**

**The State Department of Education should provide technical assistance to school districts in developing plans and implementation procedures and processes to effectively and efficiently plan, design, construct, operate, and maintain the public school sites and buildings within their jurisdiction and sphere of responsibility.**

Most schools districts have not engaged in the comprehensive planning processes outlined above. As a result, these districts would benefit greatly from technical assistance provided by the staff of the state department of education or outside consultants (directly under the guidance and supervision of the department) on a wide variety of subjects, specifically the implementation of the policies recommended above.

Some districts are very small and do not have staff with the expertise or experience to undertake these activities without some outside assistance. The staff of the district may also be embarking on a project that is new to them and might be able to avoid potential pitfalls with guidance and assistance from a third party. Even larger districts may not have the proper staffing to undertake some extensive or diverse projects that have not been accomplished by them in the past.

## ***Public School Facilities Planning Policies Resources & Best Practices***

### **1.1 Educational Facilities Master Plans**

#### **a. State Example: *West Virginia***

The West Virginia School Building Authority has required, since 1990, that each school district have a Comprehensive Educational Facility plan. Each county is required to have access to an architect and a Recognized Educational Facility Professional, and must work with a local planning committee. The goal is to accurately reflect the condition and need of the district and its children. Annual updates are required. State funds are not allocated in the absence of such a plan.

<http://www.wvs.state.wv.us/wvsba/MIP/mipmnpng.htm>

#### **b. State Example: *Maryland***

State of Maryland Public School Construction Program Administrative Procedures Guide. The state clearly defines the process for establishing and maintaining an education facilities master plan.

<http://www.pscp.state.md.us/>

### **1.2 Facility Planning Coordination**

#### **a. Example: *Proposed National Standard***

Growing Smart Legislative Guidebook, 2002 Edition published by the American Planning Association; Sections 6-202 and 7-201, 202

### **1.3 Comprehensive Maintenance Plans**

#### **a. State Example: *Maryland***

The state directs counties to determine the capacity of each school looking forward five years. As a result the county will know the projected student enrollment and be able to assess facility needs. This information is required to plan for new school facilities.

Maryland Senate Bill 389:

<http://mlis.state.md.us/1997rs/billfile/SB0389.htm>

### **1.4 Capital Improvement Plans**

## **1.5 Co-Location**

### **a. State Example: *Washington***

In order to receive state funding for new school construction, the school district must also survey suitable school facilities in contiguous school districts that are unused or underutilized.

WAC 180-25-070:

<http://www.leg.wa.gov/WAC/index.cfm?section=180-25-070&fuseaction=section>

## **1.6 Public Process**

## **1.7 Technical Assistance**

### **a. State Example: *Connecticut***

Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Grants Management, School Facilities Unit <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dgm/sfu/index.htm>  
Provides detailed information on the state's construction grant process, educational specifications, school construction priority list and current school projects and architect listing.