

Prismatic Perspectives

Facilities Planning

by Tom Martineau, Prismatic Consultant

Facilities planning is a continuous process that many school districts do not utilize to the fullest extent, if any extent at all. Over the years as demographics change and as new subjects, technology, curricula, and teaching methods are introduced, school districts have done their level best to adapt to their change-resistant buildings with the traditionally sparse funding available. The results are often not ideal, such as:

- Programs no longer popular are maintained, using resources that could be allocated to other programs in demand.
- New programs are uncomfortably housed in nothing more than former broom closets.
- Former storage units are converted into classrooms or other facilities utilized by students and staff.
- Wildly arranged portable classrooms house a mixed assortment of other programs not in proximity to anything to which they are functionally related.
- Lunch is held in several shifts that are not at appropriate times.

Traditional planning often makes little or no difference in a school district's proper utilization and adequacy of its buildings and grounds. When we point out discrepancies between the facilities and the programs they seek to accommodate, we receive responses such as these:

"We make a facilities master plan every ten years, but change happens faster than our plan's ten-year goals. Our plans are often obsolete within five years."

"We stopped making plans 20 years ago because we never got them funded adequately and couldn't implement them. We just do what we can, when we can."

"Our state education department mandates us to do facilities plans on prescribed forms, and we send them in every five years."

The disconnect between facilities plans and the usefulness of facilities lies perhaps in a quote attributed to former General and U. S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower:

Plans are nothing: planning is everything.

The key point of this quote is that planning is a constant activity, not a task to be completed in five, ten, or other yearly intervals. A characteristic of communist regimes was the Five-Year Plan. There was the making of the plan followed by its attempted execution. When the plan's goals were not reached, which was frequently the case, it was then time to make another Five-Year Plan in the same style. The main accomplishment of this activity was document creation. Not much was ever accomplished in plan implementation and plan goal fulfillment.

In his quote, Eisenhower referred to the basic meaninglessness of this style of plan preparation, and we agree with his views. Planning is not the making of a rigid plan – in the case of public

education, it is the constant scanning of the environment for changes, trends, and new developments, and then responding to the new information in as timely and appropriate a manner as possible. That is the essence of facilities planning: a process that seeks to respond to changes, trends, and other factors influencing the nature of school facilities.

Consequently, facility planning as recommended by Prismatic is a ***continuous planning process***. In most applications, it consists of a five-year planning horizon, where each year contains specific programs, projects, actions, and the required funding for each section. As the current year is ready for implementation and full funding, a new year is added to the back to maintain the five year horizon. For larger districts of 20,000+ students, we often recommend an additional five years to have a time horizon of ten. The years six through ten are less specifically framed, and estimated in order of magnitude terms. The programs, projects, and actions for any given year usually come from these categories:

- data and other information collection, analysis, and inputs to planning;
- facilities planning, programming, design, and construction actions;
- renovations, additions, rehabilitation, major repairs, and other capital improvements;
- preventive and reactive facilities maintenance; and
- custodial services, security and safety, and facilities operations.

The planning process derives its continuousness from the fact that it is never-ending: the five-year (or ten-year) time horizon is always maintained and the information within each plan year is subject to ongoing updating and revision as new data and information are examined and applied. Thus, the continuous planning process is a dynamic activity that allows a school district to be highly responsive to changes in demography, educational technology, trends in teaching methods, and subject matter emphasis.

We hope you found this resource useful!
Don't forget to check out the rest of the *Perspectives* series.

If you have any questions, or if you are interested in learning more about how Prismatic can help you, please contact us at info@prismaticservices.com.

