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Introduction

What This Guide Is - and Is Not

This School Construction Planning Guide is to be used in conjunction with State Board of Education Rules for Capital Construction and is not intended to be used in isolation or to supersede any other agency rules for school construction. The specific rules of the several agencies of the state that apply to school construction are beyond the scope of this document. This document is not a comprehensive summary of such rules here; rather, its intent is to identify key state agencies, and the stage or stages in the development of a school project at which each agency should be consulted.

Described here are the procedures which school officials should follow in the development of a project. If these procedures are adhered to, the Department of Education will coordinate the preliminary review functions of all the relevant state agencies so that a project receives the necessary permits and approvals as expeditiously as possible.

In short, the task of planning and carrying out a major school construction project is complex. A school board and its superintendent must expect to rely heavily on professional services - particularly architectural and engineering - and close communications with state agencies. Knowing what should happen and when will not make the task simple, but will help ensure that the workload on school officials for a project does not become more of a burden than necessary.

Getting Started

You are running out of space, the learning environment is inadequate or unhealthy and the time has come to do something. What should it be? An addition? A new school? You don't know yet? How do you decide?

Begin with a complete facility analysis to determine the needs of your school. The Department of Education can provide guidance and materials to help with this task. (See Appendix A) Evaluate every

aspect of the school, not just the space needs. For example: How well equipped is the school to handle new technologies? Look at the most recent state inspection report you have. If the building has not been recently inspected by the state fire marshal, you may need to request the Department of Labor and Industry to arrange another inspection. There may be some health and safety issues that need to be addressed. Is the school in full compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act? Has the fire alarm system been upgraded to meet current codes?

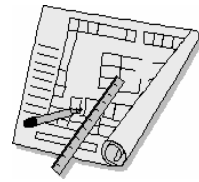
If the school has an Action Plan for improvement, look at the data and all available learning opportunities information. Is there a need for space to provide new or different programs and services? Are existing science and technology labs adequate to provide a quality education? Speak with students and every staff member to find out what improvements would help them do their jobs more effectively. Only by clearly defining the problems can you meaningfully articulate solutions. Ask the Department of Education for help with identifying learning opportunity needs of the school.

Look at your school population projections and any community needs for space for non-school functions (more about these later).

Consider professional assistance. A private consultant or architect might be useful to help identify the long-term needs and alternatives for the district. An architect or engineer can help you analyze any suspected structural problems with your building. If the school uses an on-site or private sewage disposal or water supply system, you must contact the Agency of Natural Resources or have a professional engineer advise you of its future capabilities.

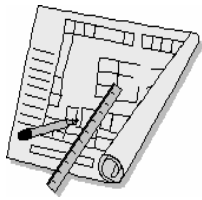
Meet with your local select board and planning officials. Gather information on the non-school use of the buildings. Familiarize yourself with the town plan. Is the school located in a designated growth center? Are there locations in the town where local planners encourage educational land uses and new growth? What are the present traffic conditions at the school site and in the community?

From these sources you should be able to prepare a statement of the current conditions of your building and site. With this information and your sense of the direction in which your programs are moving, you should be ready to describe your future school space and location needs for the 21st century. This facility analysis and needs assessment should ultimately be developed into educational specifications the board and administrators can use to evaluate the options available to the community as to the type of project that it should undertake.



Only by clearly defining the problems can you meaningfully articulate solutions. Well-defined problems result in better answers.

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Title 16 VSA §3448, the statute for construction aid, requires that school districts wanting to receive state construction aid complete and submit two applications.

Legal Assistance

You will need legal assistance at several points including the purchase of any new site, preparation of the warning for a bond vote by the district, preparation of an actual bond issue, and review of contracts for the design and construction.

School Construction Aid

Each year the General Assembly appropriates funding to the State Board of Education to help school districts with the costs of school construction projects. There are a number of steps that a school board generally must follow to receive all possible state financial assistance for a project. These are described in the section on “Procedures for School Boards.” All projects must meet eligibility requirements and are subject to design standards established by various state agencies.

For most types of construction projects, the state's share of the project costs can amount to thirty percent. Site acquisition costs and most movable furnishings are not eligible for construction aid. However, site development is an eligible expense for reimbursement. Maintenance or replacement work is not eligible nor is work attributed to deferred maintenance.

V.S.A., T.16, §3448, the statute for construction aid, requires that school districts wanting to receive state construction aid complete and submit two applications. The first is a preliminary application to the Commissioner for a determination of need. The second application is submitted if the proposed project has voter approval, has been deemed eligible and assigned funding priority.

Construction may not begin before a completed application is submitted to and approved by the State Board of Education. **Except for emergency projects under \$100,000, beginning construction prior to receiving State Board approval will jeopardize state aid.** A school district may submit a written final application to the state board at any time following approval of a preliminary application.

