



COMPREHENSIVE FACILITY ASSESSMENT

Get your school buildings in order
with a facility assessment

Roger Price

A comprehensive facility assessment is an important step in the planning process that helps school districts and their communities better understand the current state of their facilities, and understand how well these components support educational goals.

The process includes several key steps, including:

- Assessing the physical condition of the facilities and systems;
- Evaluating the operational efficiency of the school facilities;
- Evaluating the conditions that are potential health or safety hazards;
- Assessing how well facilities are functioning for current and future programs;

- Identifying the external considerations that could affect the district's ability to provide appropriate facilities;
- Conducting a financial assessment; and finally,
- Developing and implementing an action plan.

■ Facilities and Systems Assessment

Assessing the physical condition of a district's facilities and systems is critical in the planning process.

Most districts possess a great deal of information and analysis, often in the hands of highly capable facilities/maintenance managers. Organizing, documenting and establishing a shared understanding of the condi-

tion of the district's facilities and its systems avoids questions and gross misperceptions during the remainder of the process.

■ Operational Efficiency Evaluation

Evaluating the operational efficiency of a district's facilities should include: utility costs, site planning, sustainable systems, sustainable methods and materials, and scheduling efficiency.

For many school districts, there have been processes in the past to evaluate some, if not all, of their facilities for operational efficiencies. During a comprehensive facility assessment process, steps should be taken to ensure that there is a thorough review of existing documentation and past

projects to investigate and document any areas of concern or opportunity that may not have been included or considered as part of the earlier processes. Steps should be taken to ensure that the comprehensive process is complete and documentation is shared with internal and external stakeholders.

■ Assessing Health and Safety Considerations

The many areas considered under the health and safety umbrella include: asbestos, vulnerabilities, environmental conditions, hazard communications, egress, sanitation, fire safety, building systems, building materials, and vehicular and pedestrian traffic.

The assessment process should include an in-depth analysis of the existing efforts to monitor and maintain an environmental standard as well as investigate and document any areas of concern that may not have been included or considered as part of an earlier process. Again, efforts should be made to ensure that documentation is shared with internal and external stakeholders.

■ Functional Assessment (Fit for Purpose)

The functionality assessment has a different focus than the physical condition assessment, and it considers factors of programmatic uses and requirements. The approach is not

building-system based, rather, it is directed toward the perspective of the building user.

A functionality assessment expands the traditional physical condition assessment to evaluate how well facilities are functioning for an assigned program. It answers the question: How well does the existing space meet functionality needs for the program it is supposed to serve?

The assessment process is a means of providing satisfactory environments for the people who own, manage, and occupy them. It should include an **environmental scan** that considers the context of the school building's setting.

Does the building suit the site it sits upon, suit the scale of the surrounding buildings, suit the pattern of the surrounding streets? Does the land use adjacent to the building seem to fit harmoniously with the building type and uses of adjacent buildings surrounding it? Does the exterior of the building indicate its interior function(s)? Does the inside of the building connect with the outside of the building?

A complete environmental scan documents how the users experience the facilities and sites, and observes the ability of the school environment to accommodate diverse human needs. It identifies what works well, issues that impact the effective delivery of the educational programs,

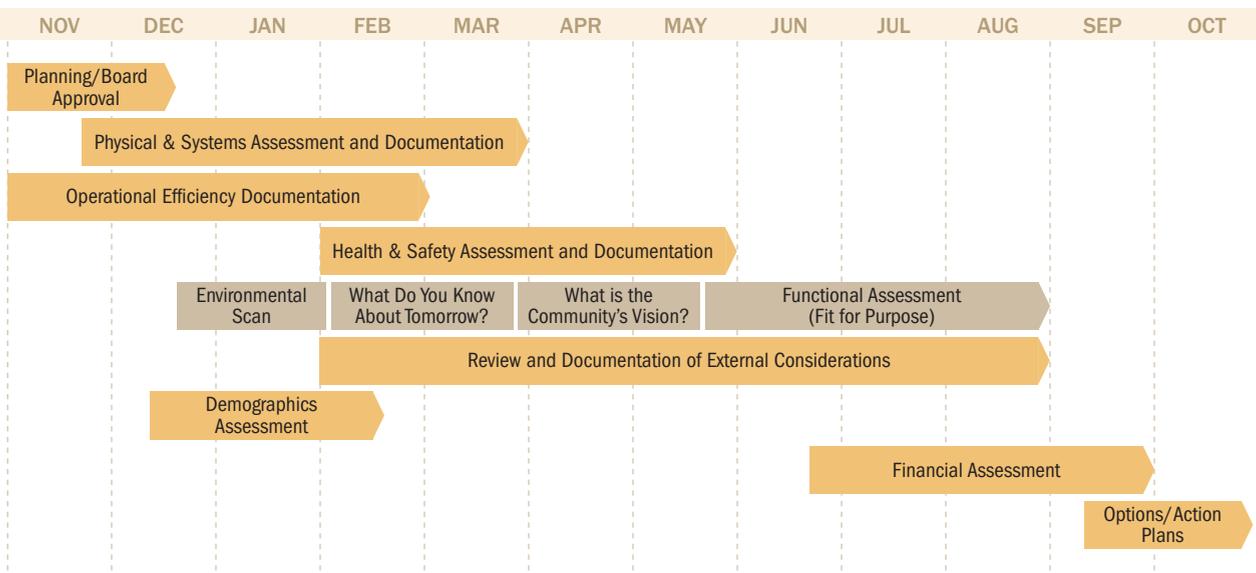
and the perceptions that exist. The process is best served by including a neutral outsider's observations of physical and operational issues to be discussed and/or addressed.

A functional assessment process also needs to include a determination of whether there is a **sufficient number of learning spaces** to accommodate the current student enrollment as well as the projected student enrollment using nationally recognized educational planning models. Understanding the future demographics of the district is critical in assessing the need for facility updates, remodeling and/or expansion.

To determine a **projected student enrollment**, the assessment will need to include historical enrollment data from the school district, birth data from the State of Wisconsin Department of Health Services, and population and housing estimates from the U.S. Census and the State of Wisconsin Department of Administration. Services are available to generate progression ratio models projecting enrollment by grade. Different models make different assumptions regarding future trends in births, in and out migration, and school transfers to provide a range of likely projection scenarios.

The next step in a functional assessment is the **development of an academic plan**. After an inclusive process that reviews current literature

COMPREHENSIVE FACILITY ASSESSMENT TIMELINE



and ideas related to the future of education, the planning process should include the development of a shared vision of the future that would impact decisions in the use, expansion, adaptation, addition to, etc. of the district's facilities and sites.

A shared vision should be accomplished with district staff working with the board, internal stakeholders and external stakeholders to provide an intentional path forward to assure academic programs and services continue to prepare graduates.

An inclusive **community visioning** process should document what the community values related to the future of education and assure that the district's strategic plan is in alignment with the community.

The assessment should document the evolution of the **use of the spaces** to demonstrate the continuing change in how a facility is used to meet the educational goals. This will help ensure an internal and external understanding of current building utilization, including issues, challenges and concerns.

■ External Considerations

During the facility assessment process, an effort should be made to

identify the external considerations that could affect the district's ability to provide appropriate facilities. Formal and informal community and civic relationships will need to be documented. District officials will also want to catalogue relevant data and information that could have an impact on future school district facility and site development and use.

■ Financial Assessment

An in-depth financial assessment offers the kind of evaluation that rarely is possible during time-sensitive budget deliberations.

Evaluating a school district's financial condition is a complex process. Not only are there large numbers of factors to evaluate, but many of them are also difficult to isolate and quantify. Relationships between the factors add to the complexity.

The assessment should include the selection of a group of indicators critical to local circumstances and the collection of information relevant to those indicators. The analysis should track results for the selected indicators over a multi-year period and strive for comprehensiveness and sophistication, seeking to take the temperature of a district's finances by

The WASB Can Help!

Completing a facility assessment

is an involved process with many moving parts. Consultants from the WASB's Organizational Consulting Services can help districts plan and/or complete in-depth facility assessments along with a host of other services.

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examining underlying fiscal forces. The completed process will help a school board, the internal community and external community better understand the nature of its revenues and expenditures, its long-term and current budget solvency, the district's cash position, and how revenues and expenditures influence service levels.

■ Data Collection

Throughout the assessment process, a wide range of data will need to be collected on background information, such as building documentation, and schools' organizational structures: building size, construction and seismic data, site amenities, room types, and building offerings and amenities (curriculum/program). The methodology for collecting data should be chosen deliberately. There are three basic types.

Direct Observation: In this method, data are collected by direct contact with real-life situations and by behaviors that occur naturally. The observer, unobtrusively, records ongoing events and records all activities in a setting.

Surveys: There are numerous models that would seek to gather input from both internal and external stakeholders.

Interview: This method is the most commonly used tool for assessing people's reactions to physical settings. Interviews can be structured, where the type and order of questions are decided in advance; or they can be unstructured where the interviewer asks questions of interest while visiting a site.

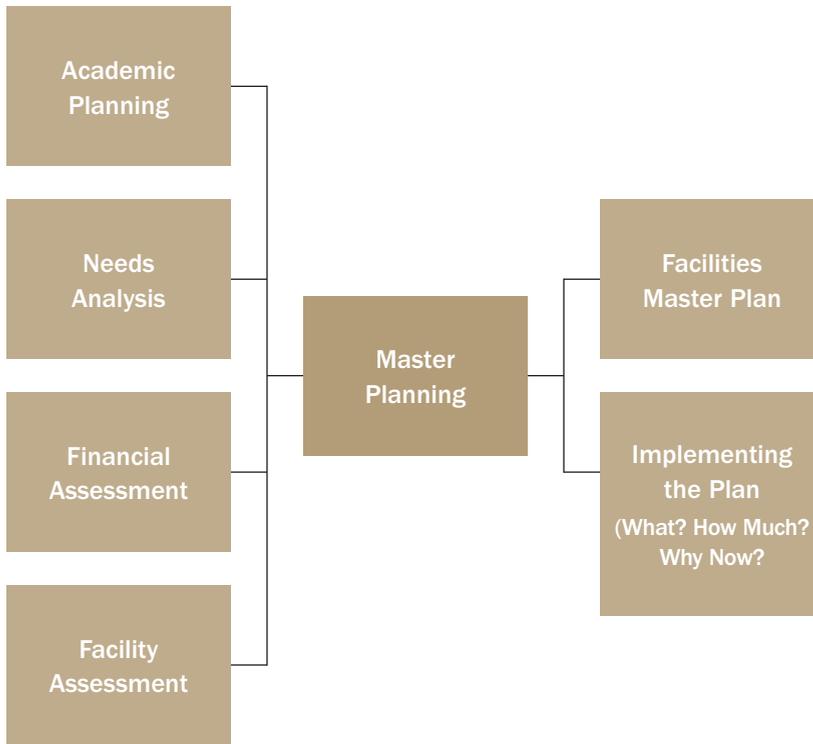


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CONDUCTING A FACILITIES AND SYSTEMS ASSESSMENT



■ Action Plan

A forward-thinking, interactive, and inclusive planning process will assist school district leadership to define the district's academic and physical future. The process of assessment facilitates the dialogue that leads to a list of goals and solutions. Once those goals and solutions are fully vetted and prioritized, a detailed action plan is developed — a facilities master plan.

As a flexible framework for development, a facilities master plan should direct development and reinvestment for more than a decade. The plan should clarify what resources are required to reach the goal or solution, formulate a timeline for when specific tasks need to be completed, and determine what resources are required. ■

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