The challenge of building new schools and modernizing existing ones offers the opportunity to enhance teaching and learning, and to strengthen communities at the same time.

By initiating a thoughtful, inclusive school facilities planning process, school districts can incorporate diverse points of view, take advantage of the power and creativity of parent and business partnerships, enlist widespread community funding support, and create high performance schools that serve both students and their communities.

There is no precise formula for making this all happen, but the following 19 steps—and the action checklists that accompany them—provide the basics.

**Getting Started and Getting Organized** — Steps 1 through 5

**Involving the Community in the Planning Process** — Steps 6 through 12

**Developing and Implementing a Master Plan** — Steps 13 through 19

*In any community, if a cross section of key leaders gets together and sees an issue that needs attention, especially one with economic implications, something’s going to happen.*

—Cynthia Marshall, Executive Director, Cities in Schools of Charlotte/Mecklenburg County, Charlotte, North Carolina
Getting Organized and Getting Started

STEP 1

Initiating the Planning Process

The planning process for schools is typically initiated by the local school board or school administration, but the spark that ignites the process may come from conversations among neighbors, a small group of concerned citizens, or a single individual.

An assistant superintendent and a local developer got things started in northern California’s Western Placer Unified School District by talking to the local school board. In Gulfport, Mississippi, the school board president kicked things off, and...
within a year more than 450 Gulfport citizens were participating in the district’s master planning process. When eventually presented to voters, the plan they had developed to replace two facilities and renovate the district’s remaining schools was overwhelmingly approved in the largest school bond issue allowable under Mississippi law.

**STEP 1 ACTION CHECKLIST: INITIATING THE PLANNING PROCESS**

- **Identify a handful of key players** in your community—perhaps four to six—for an initial meeting or conversation. When considering prospective players, take into account their likely level of commitment and their potential for leadership as well as their community standing. An active parent might be the right person to help spread the word and mobilize a larger group. An influential business owner or clergy member might be most effective at initiating the planning process. Local governmental leaders may have an interest in sharing facilities and the cost benefits derived from multiple uses of the same spaces.

- **Extend personal invitations** to bring this small group together. Keep in mind that face-to-face conversations are more effective than phone calls, and phone calls are more effective than letters.

- **Select a leader** for the initial meeting. Consider someone who is skillful at facilitating conversations, but who will not dominate them.

- **At the initial meeting, present the issues at hand along with the idea of creating a community-wide process for developing a school facilities plan. Trust the group to create solutions and provide guidance.**

- **As a group, create an action plan that encompasses the next four steps of the planning process. Consider beginning the action plan with a short statement of purpose that articulates clearly what you want the planning process to accomplish. This statement will be useful as you move through the following steps.**

**STEP 2 Funding the Planning Process**

An extensive community-oriented planning process requires funding, and one of the first tasks of the initiating group will be to secure it. Since the process proposed here is both philosophically and practically a collaborative and inclusive one, a combination of public and private funds will probably provide the best funding mix.

Regardless of potential funding sources, members of the initiating group need to be able to tell prospective donors why the money is needed. While specific expenditures and expenses for the planning process undoubtedly will vary from community to community, funds likely will be required for each of the following activities:

- Training and support materials
- The services of a professional planner or facilitator or the dedicated time of a qualified district employee to oversee the process
- Paying for release time (utilizing substitute teachers) or extended time (with overtime payments) to allow school personnel to participate in planning sessions
- Paper, printing, and postage to produce and disseminate interim and final reports
- The services of a communications specialist or media consultant to help communicate goals and plans
- Clerical or technical assistance, as needed.

In a world of shrinking resources and growing demands for public accountability, obtaining funding for the planning process can be a major obstacle. When citizens want hard data and measurable results, the whole notion of planning might well be seen as an expendable frill. When teachers are underpaid or their positions are eliminated because of funding shortfalls, or when students have too few textbooks—let alone adequate access to computers—a community-based planning process might be viewed as a luxury the district can ill afford.

Addressing these issues and concerns requires proponents to imaginatively and persuasively articulate the benefits of...
One of the toughest challenges in the beginning was convincing the school board that we should spend more money on planning.... In the end, the total cost of the facilities that were suggested in the master plan cost 19 percent less than if we had used a traditional model. Our planning costs represented only 5 percent of the projected savings. We felt like we had earned our keep.

—Roger Yohe, Superintendent, Western Placer Unified School District, Lincoln, California

planning, relying on concrete research and examples that demonstrate convincingly how an investment in planning can, over the long term, positively affect student achievement, the community, citizen support, and fiscal management.

**STEP 2 ACTION CHECKLIST:**
**FUNDING THE PLANNING PROCESS**

✔ Create a list of potential donors. Consider both public and private sources.

✔ Develop a proposed budget based on the kind of planning process you envision for your district and community. Include categories for all the planning functions you foresee, along with a rationale and projected dollar amount for each.

✔ Arm yourself with research and examples illustrating the positive benefits of planning, particularly in terms of improved student achievement, community benefits, citizen support, and long-term savings.

✔ Create a presentation for potential donors. Include the overall goals of the planning process, an overview of the steps involved, expected outcomes and benefits, and an itemized list of proposed expenditures.

✔ Decide who will approach each specific potential donor to request financial support. Remember that school board support is vital to the success of a widespread planning effort, and that board members are more likely to sanction and allocate funding when they are included as players from the outset.

✔ After you have secured funding, tailor plans to reflect your actual budget.

**STEP 3**
**Identifying a Facilitator**

3 Once the school board has sanctioned a facilities planning process and secured funding to support it, the next step is to identify a facilitator to organize and oversee planning activities. Community-centered facilities planning is time-consuming and challenging; leading such a collaborative process requires great skill and commitment.

The best candidate to guide the work should possess a strong background in planning; a good working knowledge of current educational research and best practices; effective communication skills as a listener, speaker, and writer; experience in facilitating large group meetings; and a demonstrated ability to build consensus. The candidate also must be skilled in analyzing and using data.

A good facilitator may already exist within the school system. If not, the district should engage the services of a professional. Even when there are skilled facilitators on staff, an outsider may be best because of the neutral image, external knowledge, and fresh approach he or she can bring.

Although each district will need to consider its own unique situation and resources to determine who should be the facilitator, the process will succeed only if the facilitator can devote a significant amount of time and energy to the work.

It may take a year of thoughtful, concentrated work to build the community consensus necessary for a quality planning process. Time, knowledge, and expert facilitation skills are needed to share the information and perspectives necessary to help everyone understand the issues, express their views, and participate fully.

Ample time and a good grasp of planning are required to develop recommendations that match goals, address needs, and result in widespread community acceptance.

**STEP 3 ACTION CHECKLIST:**
**IDENTIFYING A FACILITATOR**

✔ Develop a facilitator job description. Include tasks, time commitments, and preferred qualifications, such as:

- Strong background in facility planning
- Solid working knowledge of current educational research and
best practices

- Effective communication skills as a listener, speaker, and writer
- Experience and skill in facilitating large meetings, including the ability to set clear directions, remove barriers, and recognize when to step back and let the group’s creativity and energy flow
- Ability to build consensus

✓ Consider the needs of your district, assess your resources (personnel, time, and money), and decide whether you will select a facilitator from inside or outside your school district.

✓ Define the selection process. Consider that widespread participation in selecting a facilitator will likely promote future support for the project. Moreover, such participation will reflect and demonstrate a key tenet of the entire facilities planning process: including all community interests.

✓ Select the facilitator and brief him or her on your goals and directions and on the work completed to date.
A core planning team of about a dozen experienced and respected leaders is needed to serve as the leadership backbone for the project through to its completion.

For the team to succeed, it should include credible community members who represent the full breadth of opinion within the school district. The team’s primary responsibilities will include:

- Naming steering committee members (see Step 5)
- Securing materials and resources
- Forming and leading the steering committee
- Scheduling meetings and establishing a reasonable timeline for completing the planning process
- Constituting subcommittees, as needed
- Managing the planning process between meetings of the steering committee
- Editing the school facilities master plan
- Communicating with the larger community throughout the process and distributing the master plan when it is completed.

A dedicated group of leaders who have diverse perspectives and a common commitment can implement a planning process that really makes a difference, mobilizing the kind of change described by Reverend Phillip Lance, member of the Los Angeles Unified Schools District’s New Schools/Better Neighborhoods Advisory Committee:

L.A.’s best schools come in all shapes and sizes, but they are led by people who aren’t deceived about wherein lies the real power to create change. These leaders build a local alliance that empowers them to battle and break free from the status quo. This covenant with the community must begin in the planning stages for a new school; otherwise, the bulldozers will wipe out many of the seeds of innovation.

—Reverend Phillip Lance, President, Pueblo Nuevo Development, Los Angeles, California

STEP 4 ACTION CHECKLIST: ASSEMBLING THE CORE PLANNING TEAM

✓ Develop job descriptions for members of the core planning team. Include tasks and time commitments.

✓ Identify a dozen or so key players in the community. Solicit suggestions for team members from them and a variety of other sources. Consider potential members’ commitment and leadership abilities as well as their standing in the community. Ensure that the planning team will represent the full breadth of community viewpoints.

✓ Issue personal invitations to serve on the core planning team. Remember, a face-to-face conversation is more effective than a phone call, and a phone call is more effective than a letter. As part of your invitation, explain the purpose of the planning process and summarize the job description for team members.

✓ Bring the members of the core planning team together with the facilitator. Provide them with background information and appropriate training in facilitation and the planning process.

STEP 5

Organizing the Steering Committee

One of the core planning team’s initial tasks will be to organize a steering committee. While this committee will vary in size according to the makeup of the community and the school district, it should be large enough—and broad enough in its thinking—to represent the interests and resources of the entire community. Many successful steering committees have been comprised of a hundred or more educators, parents, students, and representatives from local civic and business organizations.

The steering committee ultimately will be responsible to the community for developing the facilities master plan. Among its members’ most important roles will be to serve as key communicators between the community and the committee itself.

Specifically, the steering committee will participate in each of the following activities, which are discussed in the following section of this book as Steps 13 through 19 of the facilities master planning process.

Step 13. Building common understanding, shared beliefs, and collective vision about schools and schooling within the community

Step 14. Determining facilities-related educational and community needs

Step 15. Identifying assets and resources

Step 16. Developing specific recommendations

Step 17. Communicating with the larger community to solicit feedback and build consensus on recommendations
In West Virginia, where minority populations represent a very small component of the total population, divisions along racial or even ethnic lines are rare. Here, divisions occur along lines of family or geography. Geographic divisions take place between folks who live in the hills and the valleys or between folks who live on opposite sides of a river. In Putnam County, even though most of the population is on the south bank of the Kanawha River, it is always important to make sure that north bank residents get their equitable share of the action. They represent a small but politically vocal and powerful minority.

—Dr. Sam Sentelle, Superintendent, Putnam County Schools, Putnam County, West Virginia
The process of creating a school facilities plan should involve a shared community vision about the kinds of education its citizens want. By encouraging respectful and productive communication among diverse constituencies, a broad and inclusive planning process can bring about results far superior to one developed by only educators, or architects, or any other single group. Many viewpoints and multiple perspectives really are better than just a few, and an inclusive planning process can forge renewed commitment to the community’s schools. People tend to support what they help create.

The synergy of shared decision making, problem solving, and goal setting builds a strong foundation for collective responsibility and an enduring support for schools. Steps 6 through 12 of the process—intended to involve community interests in school facilities planning—should be undertaken concurrently.

**STEP 6**

**Involving Students**

Ironically, students—the people with the largest stake in education and those most directly affected by the learning environment—are the ones most frequently excluded from decisions regarding its design. Leaving students out of the planning process is a mistake. Clearly they have a vested interest in the
Students are extraordinary teachers. They speak. They constantly tell us how our expectations, objectives, curriculums, and instructional strategies affect them. We need to look to our students to tell us why learning takes place—and why it doesn't. Our students are key sources for helping us identify what needs to be done.... Often we forget to ask them, and we forget to listen to the important messages they bring.

—Anthony Gregorc, as quoted in The Hero's Journey (Brown 1999)
STEP 7

Involving Parents

As with students, parents historically have been a greatly underrepresented constituency in the school design process. In fact, parents have perhaps been the most underutilized resource in American education. Three decades of research has established unequivocally that parental engagement has a significant, positive influence on students’ academic achievement, behavior in school, and attitudes about school and work. Yet too often parents are not included as essential partners in the education of their children. Clearly, parents have a vested interest in decisions about all aspects of schooling, not the least of which are decisions about where their sons and daughters will spend their days. They deserve a place at the table from the outset of any planning activity.

Parent participation can lead to a greater shared understanding about current educational theory and practice. For some parents, there have been too few opportunities to interact with schools in meaningful roles as adults, and their perspectives on education end up based principally on their own school experiences. When parents are included in planning as active participants, teachers and administrators have a chance to talk with them about current educational strategies, answer questions, gain feedback and suggestions, and suggest ways of helping their sons and daughters learn. Perhaps more importantly, educators can become fellow researchers with parents, together discovering better ways to teach. This kind of respectful, productive communication is likely to produce new ideas about school design, empowering parents to become staunch allies as well as valuable contributors.

In addition, parents’ needs historically have not been reflected in the design of school buildings. There should be places for parents to park their cars and hang their coats, small group areas for meeting with teachers and staff, and workspaces for parents to use computers or make phone calls. Some recent school designs have gone beyond these minimal accommodations to incorporate parent centers within the building complex, thereby signaling to parents that the schoolhouse is their house. They are not only welcome, but encouraged, to take an active role in the work of educating students.

STEP 8

Involving Educators

The participation of a large contingent of educators in the facilities planning process is critical to the success of any school design. Although the need for participation may seem obvious, it has not been common. In the 1950s and 1960s, an entire generation of open-plan schools was designed and constructed with limited input from affected teachers. While there may have been significant educational benefits in these open designs, their potential never was realized because they were developed apart from their users. Changing the configuration of the learning environment without changing the practices of teachers and learners is like changing one half of an equation without the other: The result is imbalance. With open-plan schools, balance often was restored at considerable expense by modifying the facilities rather than changing instructional practices.

In recent years, many school architects have assumed that teachers would continue to teach as they have for 30 years, organizing instruction by department. The typical result has been self-contained classroom cubicles arranged on facing sides of a corridor. Meanwhile, educators have been discovering the benefits of team teaching, interdisciplinary learning, and block scheduling, methods which might benefit from a different kind of classroom arrangement.

As educators see how new and evolving technologies can enhance learning, they are abandoning the traditional lecture as the instructional method of choice. More active and effective learning strategies are finding favor; these involve students in cooperative group work, collaborative

We can no longer ignore the leadership capability of teachers—the largest group of school employees and those closest to the students. Empowered teachers bring an enormous resource for continually improving schools.

problem solving, and projects requiring knowledge application (Lippman 2002; George Lucas Educational Foundation 2003). These approaches significantly affect the kinds of spaces, furniture, and equipment required in a school and cannot easily be accommodated by a traditional departmentalized, self-contained series of classrooms.

Mismatches between design and use can be avoided when educators play a key role in every stage of the facilities planning process. Now, when educational practice involves a wider range of teaching and learning strategies than ever before, providing a place at the table for teachers in particular is critical. As practitioner experts and primary users, teachers—not just school administrators—must take a leading role in the process of developing facilities plans that support their best knowledge about learning.

**STEP 9**

**Involving Business**

The involvement of corporations, businesses, and organizations representing businesses can enhance and legitimize the school facilities planning process. As primary “customers” for the “products” schools produce, businesses have particular needs and unique perspectives. Having businesses participate in your school’s design process tells the community that supporting schools is good business.

During the past decade, many businesses have spent substantial sums restructuring their work environments to reflect the new ways that people work in an information society. This experience can inform the process of rethinking school designs. A good example of the exodus from old-school business ways was the departure of Alcoa Aluminum, Inc., from a gleaming tower it owned on Pittsburgh’s Golden Triangle. The company now is
settled in a facilities complex that has a radically different workplace design.

At Alcoa, private offices and anonymous cubicles are a thing of the past. The emphasis now is on equality and ease of communication. Alcoa’s design philosophy is emblematic of a new awareness that the physical nature of the workplace does affect the way we do business. The idea is that we’re reducing the amount of space individuals receive, and we’re reallocating that space to a much wider variety of places where people can interact—break areas, meeting areas, team areas, and so on. The individual workstation, then, becomes little more than a place to hang your hat. As your tasks change during the course of the day, you move from place to place, gravitating naturally to the area where you can most comfortably perform the task at hand (Fandray 1999).

Such changes in the design of corporate America are widespread. Companies as diverse as Citibank, Hewlett-Packard, and Boeing are embracing an expanded view of space as it relates to the work people do. Business leaders can help effect similar changes in learning environments for students by helping communities to perceive and understand the work world. It is a world far different from the factory model of the 1950s and 1960s.

Involvement by businesses in the planning process is not a one-way street, benefiting only students and schools. Businesses gain from the partnership because educational programs and environments that create better-prepared students can save them thousands of dollars in training costs. Businesses obtain more immediate benefits from their involvement in schools as well. The quality of local schools is an important consideration for potential employees as they consider whether to relocate in order to accept a job offer. For this reason, employers want high
quality schools in order to attract a high quality workforce (Bond 1998).

With such a vested interest in the quality of education, business leaders are uniquely positioned to catalyze educational improvements by taking their place at the table in the school facility planning process.

**STEP 10**

**Involving Senior Citizens**

The design and planning of new schools should reflect two new realities: the need for life-long learning to keep citizens employed, productive, and engaged, and the coming demographic change, as the baby boom generation begins to retire. Beginning in 2011, the first wave of the 80 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 will retire. The number of citizens over age 65 will more than double from 30 million to 70 million over the next 25 years (Sullivan 2002).

Because of their sheer numbers, retirees will have great influence on public expenditures. Concerns about the rising costs of health care could lead to competition for scarce public dollars. Senior citizens whose children are grown may see little reason to support bond issues for school construction when they are more concerned about health care expenses.

An alternative to this scenario of competition would be for community leaders to think long-term and recognize that planning and designing new schools as community learning centers provides an opportunity to forge an intergenerational coalition of support.

The efforts of school officials to build a new school in Gaylord, Michigan, is a case in point (see Case Study 1). After senior citizens there had helped to defeat two bond referendums for a new school, school and community leaders began a community planning process that for the first time included them. Seniors were particularly eager for Gaylord to have a performing arts center. The decision by school officials to incorporate a performing arts center into the new school was a key factor in winning the public support to pass the bond the third time it was presented.

There are many reasons why senior citizens should be involved in the planning process and why new schools should be built with senior citizens in mind. Ending the unhealthy age segregation that pervades American society and giving students more adult connections is one reason to involve seniors. Keeping seniors healthy and active is another. “It makes little sense for public officials to spend millions of taxpayer dollars to build state-of-the-art schools with computer labs, gyms, swimming pools, and other recreational facilities for students, then deny their use to community residents, including seniors, because they are not school age” (Sullivan 2002).

**STEP 11**

**Involving Community Organizations and Government Agencies**

Cultural and civic institutions can be important partners in planning school facilities. When organizations such as museums, libraries, zoos, parks, and hospitals join forces with schools, a community can leverage these resources to enhance student learning. The partnerships foster connections that increase institutional support at many levels.

The Henry Ford Academy in Dearborn, Michigan (see Case Study 11), exemplifies such a partnership. It has enjoyed wide-ranging benefits, including significant savings in capital costs through the mutual use of existing facilities. Minnesota’s School of Environmental Studies (see Case Study 13) illustrates another creative use of community resources. It was built on zoo grounds through a partnership among Independent School District 196, the city of Apple Valley, and the Minnesota Zoo. Each of the 400 students at this alternative high school has his or her own computer work station, is a member of a ten-person team, and conducts projects using the zoo as a living laboratory.

In other communities across the country, school-to-work programs have created opportunities for students to apply their
learning in government, recreation, healthcare, and other community settings. By shifting appropriate programs off-site, the school districts in these communities have been able to increase their capacity significantly.

Such joint ventures can lead to more intelligent and efficient use of dollars, space, personnel, and expertise. By harnessing a community’s resources to a common vision for the future—one in which schools play a central role, everyone stands to benefit, especially young people.

In Los Angeles, citizens who have formed the organization New Schools/Better Neighborhoods recognize the power of such an approach:

All levels of government should work together to build the best schools in the best locations that we can—coordinating our efforts and leveraging our resources to make our school sites not only centers for education, but for reading and research as libraries, for health care as clinics, and as epicenters of civic life in their communities.

—Zev Yaroslavsky, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Los Angeles, California

Law enforcement and fire departments are two additional government entities that need to be included in the school facilities design process from the outset. Too often in the past, local police and fire officials have been brought in for oversight and building permitting only after the design process was well under way. Lessons from incidents of campus violence underscore the importance of the relationship among school officials, law enforcement, and community safety personnel as well as the correlation between school design and effective security. The eyes and ears of professionals specifically trained to notice safety features can be invaluable to the process of designing schools.

Even when planning and architecture firms employ their own safety and security experts, engaging police and fire officials makes sense, since they will be charged with helping maintain school and student safety long after the planners and architects have completed their work.

STEP 12

Involving the School Board and District Administration

The sanction of the school board is vital to the success of any school facilities planning process. Board members can use their power and influence to bring the right players to the table, create the best possible conditions for action, and leverage the necessary resources to support the planning process.

The school board’s involvement will vary from one community to the next. In some cases, a board member may become active on the core planning team and participate in all steering committee sessions. In others, the board may appoint a liaison to the steering committee or choose to hear only periodic progress reports and wait to act upon recommendations from the committee.

Whatever involvement it chooses, the school board’s attention is critical and requires each member to be fully informed throughout the planning process. To this end, school board workshops should be held at regular intervals to review the steering committee’s work and consider policy and budget issues related to the committee’s goals and recommendations.

As with the school board, the superintendent and other school district officials have critical leadership functions to fulfill. Unlike board members, district officials cannot choose whether to be actively engaged in the facilities planning process; their involvement is vital. They must be skilled listeners and articulate communicators. They must be facilitators of understanding and disseminators of information. They must be effective consensus builders and good decision makers. They must be able to empower others and use their own power wisely. Most importantly, they must be willing and able to serve as stewards of a collective vision and to be visionaries themselves.
Once the organizational preliminaries and community liaison considerations have been completed, the real work of developing a school facilities master plan begins.

Throughout this process, the steering committee will typically meet once a month in a comfortable space large enough for the whole group, followed by break-out sessions.

As meetings progress, participants will complete several work products. They will amass a common understanding of the district’s educational needs and resources, and then articulate their agreements as a set of statements known as shared beliefs. Taken together, the common understandings and shared beliefs comprise a collective vision that addresses the question, “What will our educational system look like in the future?”

The steering committee will also develop a list of facilities needs, make specific recommendations, and seek community consensus. Finally, it will write a facilities master plan and include suggestions for implementation. These activities are discussed in the following pages as Steps 13 through 19.

It is tempting to portray the facilities planning process as simple and straightforward, but that would be misleading. The process may prove at times to be challenging and time-consuming because it involves many people and diverse opinions. The end result, however, will be a purposeful plan for the future of the school district.
STEP 13
Building Common Understanding, Shared Beliefs, and a Collective Vision

The steering committee’s first task is to develop a common knowledge base. Participants can begin by studying community demographic studies, summaries of student achievement data, and district-wide strategic plans. They can review base documents that govern the education of their young people, including learning goals, graduation requirements and state and national standards. This is also a good opportunity to survey the attitudes and perspectives of the community. Using such data, the committee will be able to create a school and community profile that includes general characteristics, strengths, limitations, and emerging issues.

While developing the knowledge base, the steering committee should consider not only present conditions, but future possibilities. This will require examination of current research and best practices in three areas: effective schools and instructional...
practices; the implication of future trends for students; and changing expectations in the workplace. The committee may also profit from visiting other facilities in school districts where educators and citizens have reinvented their institutions to meet changing societal needs.

The time spent developing a future focus is essential. Otherwise, analysis of existing conditions may bog down in entrenched ideas. When the operable assumption is that new or renovated spaces will be used in the same ways that spaces have been used in the past, facilities planning tends to focus more on structural requirements, code compliance, and mechanical systems than on planning for a future that includes emerging technologies, curricular changes, and new strategies for educational delivery.

As the knowledge base is being developed, two effective information-sharing techniques for the committee are large-group presentations and small-group discussions. Large-group presentations offer an efficient means for exploring current research and best practices, while the small-group break-outs provide an opportunity for each person's opinions and creative ideas to be heard and considered. The facilitator plays an important organizational role. He or she assembles important information for the larger group to review, arranging for presentations by such professional advisors as architects, school planners, curriculum designers, and other specialists; he or she also fosters conditions that encourage meaningful small-group information exchange.

Once satisfied that the knowledge base has been established, steering committee members may be tempted to begin brainstorming and making lists of facilities needs. Their purposes will be better served in the long run, however, if they take time to agree upon some conclusions regarding the knowledge base. Such conclusions should result in written statements of shared beliefs, which can be reviewed by the larger community. These statements form the foundation for the committee's collective vision of the kind of educational system they want for their community.

The importance of putting into writing such a collective vision cannot be overemphasized. The existence of this document will help to ensure that the final school facilities plan is customized to address specific identified goals, rather than being a one-size-fits-all blueprint. Most importantly, by establishing common ground at this point in the process, the steering committee members pave the way for the kind of respectful discussion and collaborative problem solving that will be required to successfully complete the facilities master planning process.

**STEP 13 ACTION CHECKLIST: BUILDING COMMON UNDERSTANDING, SHARED BELIEFS, AND A COLLECTIVE VISION**

✓ Develop a common understanding and clear picture about current conditions by reviewing:
  - Community demographic studies
  - District-wide strategic or facilities plans
  - Learning goals, student achievement data, and graduation requirements
  - State and national standards
  - Community attitudes and perspectives

✓ Consider “what could be” and develop a “future focus” by reviewing:
  - Current research and best practices on effective schools
  - Future trends and potential implications for students, schools, and communities
  - Changing workplace needs and expectations
  - Innovative models from other districts and communities

✓ Develop statements of shared belief about education and the role of schools in the community. Begin with the six design principles presented in this book and consider preparing examples of more concise belief statements, such as:
  - Students need opportunities to apply their learning in meaningful ways.
  - Positive relationships are key to good learning and strong communities.
  - All members of the community need access to technological tools for learning.
  - The community is a critical educational partner.
  - To be successful in the workplace, students must be both self-directed workers and good team members.
  - Lifelong learning is a desired and necessary strategy for survival in today’s world.

✓ Craft a collective vision that reflects shared beliefs, and put this collective vision into writing. As a group, answer this question: What will our educational system look like when we “get there”?
STEP 14

Determining Educational Needs

Once the collective vision has been successfully written, steering committee members will be ready—and probably eager—to draft a wish list. For such a list to advance the planning process, it must be framed in terms of facilities needs. The list should be thoughtful, strategic, and focused on the future.

Facilities needs, of course, can be wide-ranging. They can encompass issues as simple as air conditioning in every classroom, or as ambitious as elementary schools with no more than 300 students.

An imperative goal at this point is making sure that the facilities needs listed by the steering committee are consistent with the written statements of shared belief that the committee drafted in Step 13 of this process.

For instance, if the steering committee has written as one of its shared beliefs that students “need opportunities to engage in project-based learning and to work in teams,” then spaces other than the typical 900-square-foot lecture classrooms will be required. If a shared belief has stated that “the most effective schools embody a strong culture of personalization,” then more configurations that serve small groups will have to be designed. If a shared belief has stated that “parent involvement on school campuses is important,” then schools will need spaces for parents to park their cars, hang their coats, meet with teachers, or help with school activities. If a shared belief has stated that “schools should be centers of learning for the whole community”—as it did in one Mississippi community—then other needs will become apparent.

We assumed at the beginning of our steering committee meetings that high schools were for high school students and teachers. But as we began to educate ourselves, we learned that our facility could be designed for the whole community, not just the students, to use. Before long, we were talking with a local group that was trying to raise money for a performing arts center but was far from reaching their goal. They loved the idea of joining forces with the high school to become a community center. Other members of the community were interested in trying to find a place to hold community meetings. With the community and the high school collaborating in this new way, we were able to win state funds for a performing arts council. Eventually we built our school and our new “town square.” It includes a performing arts center and a community meeting hall for weddings and meetings and—you name it. The kids say they like having more grown-ups around.

—Rilla Wiley, Steering Committee Member, Tishomingo County, Mississippi

When schools are envisioned as centers for the entire community, a whole range of possibilities emerges, along with new sets of needs. If, for instance, the steering committee’s collective vision calls for schools that are “a resource for lifelong learning”—for retraining dislocated workers, teaching computer skills to seniors, teaching families to use the internet, or any number of other community learning endeavors—then school facilities will need to be open beyond conventional school hours.

When listing facilities needs, the steering committee should think globally about conditions within the community, and specifically about conditions in classrooms and schools.

STEP 14 ACTION CHECKLIST: DETERMINING EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

✓ Starting with shared beliefs and a collective vision, develop a list of facilities needs. To guide this process, consider the following questions: What will we need to do to enact our beliefs about schooling and our vision of schools? What kinds of facilities will we need to accomplish these activities? What kinds of learning environments will we need to:

• Help students see links between school and the rest of their lives
• Increase parent and community participation in schools
• Improve coordination among schools and other social service agencies
• Provide stimulating, lifelong educational opportunities

✓ When developing the list of needs, think both specifically and collectively. Consider the needs of specific groups, such as students or parents or the business sector. At the same time, consider the collective needs of the whole community.

✓ Frame the list of needs in language that directly links them to your shared beliefs and collective vision.
STEP 15

Identifying Resources

At the same time the steering committee is analyzing facility needs, it should also be considering resources available to meet those needs. Many such resources will already be on hand at existing schools. Others may be located within the larger community. It is important that the steering committee consider both internal and external resources as potential solutions.

To identify resources at existing school sites, the steering committee should review the district’s facilities evaluation report, if such a document is available. If not, the committee should consider conducting such an evaluation itself (a time-consuming endeavor) or commissioning experts to do so.

To identify resources within the larger community, the steering committee can consult everything from the Yellow Pages to real estate listings, calendars of cultural activities, and directories of local businesses. When teachers, students, parents, and business representatives work together to discover and identify community assets, they not only increase their personal understanding but help develop a valuable public knowledge base about the community.

Steering committee members need to think outside the box as they identify potential resources. Examples abound of instances where unconventional thinking has yielded creative solutions. Some school districts have financed projects through private-sector investment—or public-private partnership—when traditional methods of funding like local property taxes have proved ineffective or insufficient. Others have learned how to take advantage of library bonds, recreation and park bonds, and health dollars to serve both communities and students in more efficient and productive ways. Still others have explored creative leasing, shared- and multiple-use agreements, interagency contracts, or revenue-generating projects.

In his exploration of the hidden assets of Los Angeles, UCLA Professor Richard Weinstein illustrates such outside-the-box thinking about opportunities for joint use:

Some of the biggest holes in the fabric of the city are supermarket and shopping mall parking lots, which rank high on the mess list. The air rights over parking lots could be acquired for schools, community centers, and additional parking. The commercial enterprises would be advantaged, day-care and other services provided, and the urban design of the area improved. Joint development of this sort should be encouraged from the start where thoughtful design can solve the additional density resulting from mixed commercial and educational uses.
STEP 15 ACTION CHECKLIST: IDENTIFYING RESOURCES

✓ Review the school district’s facilities evaluation report, if one exists, or consider commissioning one, to identify resources available at existing school sites.

✓ Identify other significant private or public resources. To guide the discovery process, consider the following questions: What kinds of support for learning do students receive beyond the classroom and school? What community resources are available that might be employed to support the school district and its students?

✓ Identify and create a list of the community’s available resources.

✓ Consider and explore innovative partnerships, creative financing, and interagency relationships.

STEP 16
Developing Recommendations

16 After the steering committee has identified facilities needs and identified available resources, its next task is to prepare written facilities recommendations that match available resources to identified needs. Guiding questions for this phase of the work include: How can the school district and community work together most effectively to realize their collective vision for schools? In what ways can the school district and community combine forces to build on their strengths?

To revisit an example cited in Step 14, if the steering committee’s stated belief said “students need opportunities to engage in project-based learning and work in teams,” and the collective vision called for “spaces different from existing traditional classrooms,” the resulting recommendation might specify “remodeling existing classrooms to include additional square footage, more storage, and appropriate utilities.” As another example, if the committee has listed the need for a community performing arts center and identified a school space that could be modified to meet this need, the specific recommendation might be to “remodel the school’s performing arts facility to provide direct street access, appropriate security, and adequate parking.”

The best recommendations will be specific and creative, they will refer to one or more of the steering committee’s shared beliefs, and they will be consistent with the collective vision. Recommendations may also be prioritized at this point and should take the form of a report.

STEP 16 ACTION CHECKLIST: DEVELOPING STEERING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

✓ Develop a list of recommendations that is consistent with the knowledge base, shared beliefs, facilities needs, and identified resources.

✓ In developing recommendations, consider these questions: How can the school district and community work together most effectively to address limitations and areas of need to realize their collective vision for schools? In what ways can the school district and community combine forces to build upon their strengths?

✓ Check steering committee recommendations to ensure that they are specific and consistent with the collective vision. Assess whether they harness resources in the best way to meet community needs.

✓ Compile facilities recommendations into a report that can be easily understood and readily shared.

STEP 17
Communicating with the Larger Community

17 The steering committee should have maintained open communications about the facilities planning process throughout its duration.

Once the recommendations report has been issued, however, the steering committee will need to embark upon a deliberate and strategic effort to publicize the report’s contents and rationale. The goal of this publicity is to foster community understanding of the recommendations, solicit feedback about them, and build community consensus.

Steering committee recommendations should be communicated in ways that are easy to understand and readily accessible. News releases, newspaper articles, radio spots and television features can be used for getting the word out. Creative publicity ideas are in order. In Puyallup, Washington, for example, the school facilities steering committee decided to publish Building Traditions, a quarterly newsletter explicitly for this purpose.

A plan for working with the local media is a good idea and should acknowledge that media interest depends on newsworthiness and understandability. Research
and recommendations can be brought to life with examples and anecdotes. A trained communications consultant can help to package steering committee information into engaging media messages.

The steering committee should remain mindful that communication with the public at this point is intended as a two-way street: Part of the purpose is solicitation of community feedback. To facilitate two-way communication, committee members must report to their constituencies at critical decision points and bring back to steering committee meetings community input. In addition, the steering committee can hold workshops with the school board or individual school site councils, host coffee hours or town meetings, conduct surveys at shopping malls, implement phone trees, create speakers bureaus, and develop its own website and listserv.

Whatever outreach methods it employs, the steering committee should strive for a communications process that deals with community opinion and feedback respectfully, openly, and honestly. *Putting the Pieces Together* recommends four proactive efforts for ensuring such productive communication and for helping to build productive partnerships (U.S. Department of Education and the Regional Educational Laboratory Network 1996):

- Reach out to your critics by inviting them to see a new program, listening to their concerns, and providing opportunities for them to contribute.
- Develop good written communications, such as a low-cost newsletter widely distributed throughout the community.
- Keep participants and local leaders informed by hosting an open house or site visit.
- Share the bottom line to show that collaborative programs are cost effective and get results.

Once the recommendations report has been issued, the steering committee will need to embark upon a deliberate and strategic effort to publicize the report’s contents and rationale. The goal of this publicity is to foster community understanding of the recommendations, solicit feedback about them, and build community consensus. Photo: Brand X Pictures.
STEP 17 ACTION CHECKLIST: COMMUNICATING WITH THE LARGER COMMUNITY

✓ Establish a comprehensive communications plan for disseminating and collecting information.

✓ Consider creating a special steering committee newsletter or publishing regular updates in existing district and community newsletters.

✓ Decide how to involve the local media (newspaper, radio, community websites, and television).

✓ Make sure outreach efforts are inclusive enough to encompass a broad spectrum of stakeholders. Use such strategies as conducting workshops, hosting coffee hours, convening town meetings, conducting surveys in public places, implementing phone trees, creating speakers’ bureaus, and hosting a special website or listserv.

✓ Develop a system for listening, recording, and responding to people’s feedback.

✓ Consider engaging the services of a media consultant to manage the communications aspect of the planning process.

✓ Keep in mind that the three primary purposes of any communications plan should be to create common understanding, gather feedback to help identify further improvement opportunities, and build community consensus.

STEP 18

Creating a Master Plan

The facilities master plan is the culmination of all the steps that have come before.

Before compiling the work products generated by Steps 13 through 17, however, the steering committee must carefully assess community feedback received during Step 17 and make any adjustments to the plan that it deems appropriate.

That done, the committee should define action steps, determine timelines, and assign responsibilities for achieving its recommendations. It should then prioritize the recommendations, if this was not done during Step 16.

Finally, the committee should compile this information—along with work products from Steps 13 through 17—into one document, the final facilities master plan. Preparation of the final document may require the aid of school district officials or school planning consultants, along with good editorial, graphic design, and printing support. Various feasibility, cost, and other studies may be needed to supplement the master plan. These are normally prepared by school district officials, appropriate governmental agencies, or school planning consultants.

Ultimately, the completed facilities master plan should be submitted to the school board for approval.

Then the steering committee should take time to celebrate its accomplishments!
STEP 18 ACTION CHECKLIST: CREATING A MASTER PLAN

✓ Based upon the feedback received during the communications phase, make necessary modifications to steering committee recommendations.
✓ Priority rank the recommendations.
✓ Identify action steps and determine timelines, resources, and the assignment of responsibilities for achieving recommendations.
✓ Draft a master plan.
✓ Submit the master plan to the school district or other appropriate agencies for supplementary feasibility, cost, or other studies.
✓ Edit the master plan and prepare it for publication.
✓ Present the finalized master plan to the school board for approval.
✓ Celebrate the completion of a major milestone in the planning process.

STEP 19
Implementing the Master Plan

Completing a master plan is a cause for celebration because the steering committee has accomplished its primary mission. But implementing the plan—moving from vision to action—will be its true test. Exciting plans are not enough. The hard work of the master plan will not be beneficial unless the plan is implemented. Everyone involved in the planning process must understand that implementation requires time, commitment, and oversight.

Recognizing that it will take months or years before construction work is completed, many steering committees choose to stay in place throughout the process. When they do, their focus will naturally shift to the new and equally critical tasks of tracking progress and assisting the school board in its implementation tasks. This is what happened in Lincoln, California:

We knew it would take years to implement every recommendation on the master plan.... We decided to incorporate as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. Before long, a local developer gave us a parcel of 179 acres of land worth about $1.8 million dollars. Next week we will hold a groundbreaking ceremony for an Outdoor Learning Environment (OLE) on that land, which includes a Native American archaeological site. We also have plans to expand arts in the schools and childcare before and after school. We have set up a subcommittee to focus on grant writing to support these new ideas. Our job is to serve as community support group for the school board. Through our “Project Build” master planning process, we have developed a deeper level of trust and empowered each other to make things happen. We haven’t abandoned our existing schools just yet, but our plan is to keep the planning process alive and continue to search for opportunities to integrate our learning with the world around us.

—Joanne Neft, President, Western Placer Education Foundation, Western Placer School District, Lincoln, California

Provided that funding is in place to implement the community’s vision, the completion and approval of a master plan will normally lead to the preparation of educational specifications, a final architectural design, and construction plans and specifications. The process of community engagement should continue at each step, helping to devise creative solutions and moving the construction project to completion.

When occupancy of the completed project has been achieved at last, the steering committee should undertake one more task: a retrospective examination of the planning process. It should assess to what extent the planning process has strengthened the community, wisely allocated resources, and positively affected teaching and learning. Those engaged in planning have too often failed to address this question: What specific benefits resulted from the actions that were taken and the dollars that were spent?

By documenting results, the steering committee can evaluate its efforts, demonstrate accountability, and add to a growing body of knowledge that connects the facilities planning process to favorable academic outcomes and community growth.

STEP 19 ACTION CHECKLIST: IMPLEMENTING THE MASTER PLAN

✓ Determine how to maintain the community’s interest in bringing about faithful implementation of the master plan.
✓ Discuss with steering committee members what they might do during the implementation phase, such as support a bond campaign, develop school-community partnerships, or participate in an ongoing oversight effort.
✓ Develop ways to assess the effect of the planning on academic outcomes, resource allocation, and community growth.
✓ Give the plan time. Remember that implementation will not happen overnight.