

The Process

Programming is the process that elicits and systematically translates the mission and objective of an organization, group, or individual into activity settings and building functions. Facility programming, through the process of educational specification development, precedes the traditional architectural design phase in the building delivery process. The primary resources for this programming task are the building occupants or users. It is their objectives and needs that the planning team must utilize to shape the educational specifications. The ultimate success of a school capital project rests on the effective communication between those who design and those who will use the built environment. The educational specifications are the communication tool that must bridge the gap between the building's users and designers.

Design for the Life of a Facility

A district can expect a facility to be in service for 30 or more years before a major renovation or remodel of spaces. Ensure the educational specification process has plenty of time to evaluate facility needs and goals.

An essential requirement of the process is to allow adequate time for the development of educational specifications prior to the initiation of architectural design. Time is needed for people to envision, review, revise, and re-think programmatic desires that will be translated into conceptual design. A “hurry-up” process does not allow for reflection by parents, students, faculty, and community members. Without sufficient lead-time, project elements and parameters may be set too quickly that may later prove undesirable.

After the need for a project is identified, the first step in the educational specification process is to establish a school building planning team or committee. The planning team should be kept small enough so that it can function as a group and not become unwieldy, yet the planning team should be large enough to include a cross section of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community members. A team of eight to twelve members is probably sufficient for the task, however this may vary within each community. Membership on the planning team should be voluntary. Team members should have the interest and desire to be involved in the planning of the school project and should have a stake in the outcome.

The planning team will be required to formulate, organize and prioritize all ideas and input regarding what the school should be. They will serve as the impetus in the collection of information, as a review body of what is proposed, and as a communicator regarding the educational specification effort with the school staff, the student body, and the community. It is essential that people who are going to work in the facility (building principal if known, teachers, maintenance and custodial support staff, and students), if not serving on the committee, be invited to provide input in the process that shapes the facility. These are the people who will spend the bulk of their time in the facility after it is constructed. Desirable or undesirable building features will impact their daily lives. Although all community members may eventually

be affected by the project, it is the responsibility of the school building planning team to ensure the successful programming of the facility.

The task and responsibility presented to the planning team may appear daunting, and in truth a good deal of thought, time, and hard work is to be expected. It is for this reason that the team may wish to employ an experienced school planning professional to assist in the development of the educational specifications. Many times the school planning professional can provide an established structure for the educational specifications and can serve as a facilitator to convert the team's ideas and concerns into a presentable final product. Experienced school planning professionals may also bring specific expertise and knowledge in areas related to the broader function of a facility over its entire life-cycle. If budget constraints limit the ability to hire a consultant or when a qualified individual is available from the school district staff, a local or in-house person may fill the position of facilitator. Under this strategy, focused effort may still be needed to fill specific gaps in knowledge or experience with outside expertise.

There are advantages and disadvantages to either approach. The local person has intimate familiarity with the community, understands the school district and its educational programs, and may be well known to the members of the planning team. However, the local individual may hold provincial views and biases that could reduce their effectiveness in resolving issues where planning team members hold conflicting views. The planning professional, "the expert from out of town," can point out provincial thinking without fear. The out of town expert can also bring new ideas for the group's consideration from planning experiences in other locations. One example of this might be establishing goals for sustainability and for high performance buildings. However, the expert may not be intimately familiar with the community's social and political makeup, thus they may not be able to fully understand the community's perspective.

Essential Factors

Regardless of the planning team's approach to the development of the educational specifications, the planning team and school planning professional, if used, must consider the following essential factors influencing educational specifications that are discussed in detail on the following pages:

- Project Rationale
- The Community
- Student Population Projections
- Educational Philosophy & Instructional Plans
- The School Site
- Environment for Learning
- General Design Considerations
- Activity Setting Descriptions
- Spatial Relationships
- Space Requirements Summary
- Furnishings & Equipment Summary

- Project Budget & Financing
- Scheduling & Assignment of Responsibility

These essential factors mirror the required elements of an educational specification as defined in 4 AAC 31.010; however, the last factor noted is excluded from the regulatory requirements. This omission is not due to lack of importance, for this factor is imperative in getting all the involved parties on the same page as to their role in the project. Early definition in the planning process of all participants and their responsibilities not only facilitates the smooth execution of the project, but can oftentimes save money and enhance the project by capitalizing on partnering opportunities within the community. It is for these reasons that the department believes this is an essential step in the process.

