PLANNING FOR DISTRICT-WIDE CHANGE:
A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL FACILITY DESIGN
When school districts study their facilities, they are often faced with a challenge: their buildings have physical space needs which require an immediate investment, which presents the leadership with a time-sensitive decision on how to proceed. A common approach is to examine the individual space needs of a given building based on current programming, and design solutions to meet those site-specific needs. However, this approach takes a limited view as building updates are done in silos (site by site) rather than with a broader goal in mind. When facilities are in need of investment, an opportunity presents itself to consider how these updates could be done with broader, district-wide goals in mind.

The **district-wide planning perspective** fosters a mission focused on equitable distribution of resources, flexibility in serving the student learning experience and preparing students across the district for their future as global citizens. This approach to educational facility design offers districts an opportunity to apply the lens of mission and vision directly to the design of learning environments. With input and guidance from a skilled educational planner and design team, the possibilities open up for any district looking to make a long-term strategic impact.

Districts may have not yet considered using a systemic, district-wide approach while addressing facility needs, or the process to impart this kind of change seems daunting. Districts of all sizes can benefit from taking a wider view of how their facilities work to amplify and empower their strategic plan - whether they have a few buildings or many. With the right approach, Districts can work with educational planners to identify priorities aligned with their larger mission and vision, develop essential systemic themes and create a facilities plan to impact change on a more meaningful level. The most important questions to ask are: **What are the big-picture goals of the District, and how can the design of your learning spaces help achieve these goals?**

Wold’s decades of experience in bettering learning environments make us a uniquely qualified partner for districts seeking to take on simultaneous design across multiple facility projects. Working with a skilled, time-tested firm with expertise in educational planning offers districts the opportunity to take this type of innovative, holistic approach. If you want to make a major change in your delivery of education to all students, looking systemically at your district is one way to find success.

Does your district have a mission statement? Do you have buildings in need of repair or replacement? What could you do if you had the right learning environments? Do you have goals for furthering the education of every student who walks through the door? Do your current classrooms limit the possibilities for your teaching staff?

If so, consider the possibility of a broader, holistic approach for your facilities needs. With the right process, any District can succeed in implementing district-wide change.

**CASE STUDY: EDINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS, ISD 273**

Edina Public Schools (Edina, Minnesota) - with nine school facilities encompassing more than 2 million square feet - found itself in a unique position to implement systemic, district-wide change as opposed to the typical model of updating facilities one-by-one.

Edina’s facilities study began with assessments of physical space needs and educational adequacy at each individual building. Throughout the course of the study, the process evolved into a broader approach, as parallel conversations regarding the district’s strong strategic plan provided an opportunity to broaden the focus of the study to address larger initiatives instead of simply individual building concerns.

Edina’s district-wide facility redesign approach was philosophy-driven as opposed to the typical solutions-driven model. The District’s facilities master plan, created with Wold, addresses the creation of next-generation learning spaces to:

- Create continuity in the learning experience from early childhood through elementary and middle school all the way to high school and beyond,
- Create equity across buildings with many ages and configurations.
WHY CONSIDER SIMULTANEOUS DESIGN?

Strategic drivers for the Edina Public Schools facilities master plan were identified through a long range planning process including building users, stakeholders and community members to ensure the plan was in alignment with the values of the community. The long range facilities planning process identified high priority needs across the District that were addressed as a part of their 2015 bond referendum. These priorities included opportunities for district-wide updates, including media centers, special education services, learning spaces furniture, flexible learning spaces, and safety & security.

These facilities improvements were proposed to take place parallel to curricular changes, technology investments, schedule changes and grade realignment. As a result, specific processes had to be designed to establish overarching criteria and goals before determining a building-level solution. Wold worked with the District to establish a design process to move all initiatives forward simultaneously.

Stakeholder groups focused on the future of the district’s facilities related to specific topics and areas. Grouping all elementary school stakeholders, all media center specialists, all special services personnel, etc. during the visioning process fostered consistency and equity within buildings and systems as well as exposure to a broader spectrum of ideas.

These groups each determined goals and needs for the particular subset of the design, including representatives from all impacted buildings and specialty areas to set a vision and common goals before exploring solutions for each unique facility.

The outcome of a simultaneous design process is a shared sense of the goals for the project and ownership from the actual users from the start of a project. By the time teachers re-entered the newly designed flexible learning spaces, they knew how their input helped shape those spaces to fit their needs.
STRATEGIC DRIVERS ACROSS ALL BUILDINGS

Strategic drivers drove the district’s planning process, with every member of the leadership, design team, user groups and broader community keenly aware of the mission and vision behind the proposed changes.

Each strategic driver, from furniture, safety & security and flexible learning spaces to media centers and special services, had champions within the district to help shape what the future of their specific area looked like within Edina Public Schools - and which subsequent architectural changes were required.

- District-wide safety and security standards balance student and staff safety while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere for families and visitors.
- Redesigned Media Centers across the district support problem-based, project-based and inquiry-based learning and shift space allocation toward more collaborative and small group learning spaces - all following the same guiding principles regarding the role of media & technology in the future.

FULL TIMELINE OF PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTION IN EDINA
- Additional flexible learning areas in each building, through both additions and renovations to support traditional instructional styles, small-group collaboration and individualized/personalized learning - allowing each type of learner to thrive in their preferred environment.

- An extensive furniture selection process for all learning spaces took place during the building planning process - not as an afterthought when the buildings were near completion. This process included developing guiding principles, showrooms/pilot classrooms to test the tools and establishing a consistent “kit of parts” to serve the relevant space type or grade level.

- To design the student special services experience, representatives from teachers, staff, paraprofessionals and parents contributed to the design process which allowed for a comprehensive reimagining of what resources and spaces were essential at every facility and grade level.

Through this process to update both facilities and programming delivery, Edina made an investment in the education of each individual student as well as the district as a whole.
OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

As a result of this extensive planning and engagement process and several years of phased construction, all of Edina’s facilities are now updated to better align with the mission and vision of the district. Students, parents and teachers are already feeling the benefits and seeing improved outcomes based on the new model of learning in Edina’s schools. The ability to change the physical learning spaces, the overall school schedules and students’ use of time during the school day all at once helped Edina achieve the goals of educational competencies focused on producing well-rounded, innovative, globally competent and responsible, engaged citizens graduating from the district.

One major takeaway from the success of the district-wide approach is that physical learning spaces can be influenced and designed around a core strategic plan on a grand scale when planned appropriately. Mission-driven design is not a wholly new concept, but this model turns the typical framework on its head by letting the philosophical goals be the driver for facility modifications to promote change for the sake of change, not only to address a particular need. District-wide holistic design can be an opportunity for any district looking to create alignment between their goals and their facilities. How can your facilities master plan amplify the learning experience for your students?

Special Services (above) and Media Centers (right) were two of the strategic drivers for the Edina district-wide approach. Determining these priorities early on facilitates equity and continuity across buildings.
For more information and to discuss opportunities for your community, call 651-227-7773 or email info@woldae.com.
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