
Chapter 1

School District Project Management

INTRODUCTION

This book is about how, when, and why public school districts build new schools. All organizations, at one time or another, undertake major projects. For school districts, the most complex, comprehensive, visible, and enduring project they undertake is the planning and designing of school facilities. This activity occurs periodically, sometimes as infrequently as every two decades. This periodic aspect to the process means that school districts are seldom prepared to assume the responsibility in terms of in-house experience or resources. Thus, when school districts engage in constructing new schools, a project other than regular school district business has to be accommodated. The process of building school facilities requires project management from the school districts' organization.

At the present time, the national and international needs for educational facilities are grave. New growth, aging facilities, and population displacement are occurring on a worldwide scale, requiring school facilities of one kind or another. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA), representing 18,500 of the nation's school superintendents and other top administrators, reports that replacement of 74 percent of the nation's school buildings built prior to World War II or during the 50s-60s era of cheap construction to meet "Baby Boom" needs is overdue. Twelve percent of the buildings are considered inadequate; they are too old, too small, have deteriorating mechanical systems, or seriously need window replacement. Eleven percent of the nation's schools have been built since 1980 (American Association of School Administrators, 1991).

Teens across the nation place building maintenance and construction as their number one priority, whereas adults place it in fourteenth place. A 1988 study by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching reports that students' attitudes about education are a direct reflection of their learning environment. An independent study of the Washington, D.C. schools released in the summer of 1991 concluded that city kids could do 5-11 percent better on standardized tests if the physical conditions of their schools improved (USA Weekend, 1991; American Association of School Administrators, 1991). The AASA (1991) concluded that there is a serious leadership void at the federal level and in most states in regard to the provision of facilities or facility guidance.

Even though this report is based on California school districts, school construction is an activity taking place in other areas of the world and the nation. Across the nation, the organizing unit that assumes responsibility for the project is the school district. The activities include initiating, acquiring funds for construction, and terminating the project.

The issues that demand attention are:

1. The reorganization of the school district structure in order to embark on a project
2. The search for expert and special knowledge and skills outside the organization in order to complete the project
3. The solicitation of community support for the facility
4. The solicitation of funds in order to complete the project
5. The development of working relationships with a variety of regulatory agencies
6. The coordination of all parties throughout the process
7. The management of the project from inception to completion
8. The solicitation of continuing support and ownership of the facility after completion

School facility construction provides an opportunity to examine how organizations reorganize themselves to manage projects. Examining California school construction provides an opportunity to see how multiple projects are handled, inasmuch as many of the districts under study were constructing more than one school. The *how* specifies the school's reorganization and the steps necessary to the process.

Special projects require support and specialized technical help from outside the school district. How do organizations integrate outside spe-

cialists and experts in the conduct of a project? What are the components of the relationship and who is responsible for initiating, maintaining, and terminating the relationship? Public school construction also requires state agency approval. These agencies regulate and provide funds and other types of technical support. The relationship with these agencies is ongoing throughout the construction process, making it necessary that the character of the relationship be understood. The *who* constructs new schools includes the school district's personnel, specialists from outside the organization, and regulators from state and local agencies.

Two factors that trigger school districts' educational facilities construction are replacement of buildings and enrollment increases due to new development and population shifts. For example, in the state of California enrollment increases have resulted from both new development and new groups of immigrants. School planners relying on the California State Department of Finance's Demographic Research Unit were dismayed at the prediction of 556,000 babies in 1990 when the National Center for Health Statistics reported that 310,000 children arrived in the first six months. The assistant state superintendent for school facilities planning in California said, "In terms of our planning, we are \$6 billion in the hole already. There are people that, halfway serious, halfway facetiously, are talking about tents" (Lewis, 1990, p. A-3). The two fastest growing counties in the state of California project dramatic increases. The county of Riverside is expected to increase enrollment from 201,600 in 1989 K-12 to 417,100 in 1999 K-12, a growth of 106.95 percent; and San Bernardino County is expected to increase from 268,300 in 1989 K-12 to 513,700 in 1999 K-12, a growth of 91.46 percent (Heydt, 1991).

Associated with increased enrollments and the need for school-housing is the need for funds to support the building. In California, the typical cost of new construction, which includes site preparation, architects' fees, furniture and equipment, and construction, is about \$125 a square foot. The typical school construction cost, excluding land, is \$4.5 million for elementary, \$10 million for junior or middle high, and \$23 million for high school. The land costs vary greatly, but they tend to average about 25 percent of the total project cost. The state limits are 10 percent. The sobering conclusion is, thus, that even using the lower state projections, districts need more than \$12.5 billion over the next five years.

School construction becomes necessary *when* students can no longer be accommodated in the existing facilities, *when* the use of relo-

catables has been exhausted, and *when* a source of funds for the construction has been identified.

Schoolhousing construction differs from other types of projects in that the purpose of the facility is loaded with symbolic and moral overtones. The facility is meant to house children, to be a place where learning takes place, and to symbolize the community's deeply held values. The *why* to construct new facilities is that children need to be housed in order to be educated. But beyond that, the facility must be a school that reflects the value placed on children, learning, safety, and aesthetics in order to fulfill its function. School buildings are, thus, the safest buildings in a community, and the most available during disasters. In brief, the construction of schools differs from other projects because it embodies community values and accessibility to children for education, evaluation, and shelter.

This report is organized into two major sections. Chapter I includes the introduction and the methodology used in the study. Chapter II covers the review of the literature and the formulation of the theoretical framework. The second section is the analysis of the data. Chapter III analyzes the steps prior to the construction of the building. Chapter IV deals with the construction process. Chapter V presents the postconstruction process, and Chapter VI examines the relationship of the school district to the state agencies. Chapter VII presents the conclusions and policy implications.

METHODOLOGY

This study dealing with schoolhousing was requested by twenty school district California Educational Research Cooperative (CERC) member superintendents. School enrollment in the Inland Empire has continuously increased, requiring additional school facilities. The issues of concern for the CERC superintendents were: How can school facilities be best provided for school children? What resources are available for school construction? What financial plans are most appropriate and how can we judge whether school facilities are being built in the best possible way? The research question, How are school districts providing schoolhousing for children in California? became the focus. Other questions emerged as the project got under way: What are the phases a project goes through before completion? Who are the key participants involved in the process? and, How do they enact their roles?

The investigation into these questions began by trying to determine how many school buildings were being constructed in the area. The Office of Local Assistance (OLA) provided general information,

and it was determined that in the area covered by the CERC member districts over one hundred schools were at different phases of the construction process.

These school districts were contacted to determine which official was responsible for building schoolhouses. Most school districts were found to have appointed facilities planners. Some school districts assigned the responsibility of facilities to their associate superintendent of finance and budgeting. Small school districts had their superintendents in charge of school facility planning.

All school facilities planners and/or district personnel responsible for facility planning were interviewed. From the data gathered, a small sample of six school districts was selected for extensive study. Four districts were examined in detail and the remaining two were used for comparison as necessary. The districts differed in size, methods of building new schools, degree of community involvement, and community characteristics.

Data were collected through interviews, observation, and document analysis. From the selected districts, a sample of individuals representing the districts and area of involvement was selected to be interviewed. The individuals chosen were likely to be principals, teachers, school board members, superintendents, parents, custodians, architects, contractors, and others who were involved in one way or another with the construction of school facilities. State agency officials were also interviewed.

Data collected through observation included school activities and functions related to school construction. Photographs were taken to record the progress of some school sites. Notes were compiled from films from the Lloyds Laboratories Incorporated and D. G. King Associates, *Demographics for California School Construction Funding, Simplified* and a lecture film, *Financing New School Construction*, presented by an instructor.

Document analysis included reviewing newspaper accounts and other media reports of school building issues. Technical reports, such as school district manuals on financing and school site selection, as well as long-range programs, architects designs, state legal documents, and agency rules and regulations, were collected and analyzed.

Meetings held by agencies such as the State Allocation Board (SAB) and the county facilities planners were attended for the collection of observation, interview, and document data. The Coalition for Adequate School Housing (CASH) conference, the School Legal Defense Association (SLDA) conference, and other local organizational meetings were also attended for the same purpose.

The theoretical framework applied to the analysis was derived from the literature review and the data. After extensive categorization and classification of data entries, concepts and constructs were generated to explain relationships uncovered in the data. Four major parts to a theoretical framework emerged: (1) the identification of the fundamental steps in the process of constructing school facilities, (2) the classification of organizational functions, (3) the basis for the school district's relationship to the state agencies, and (4) the interorganizational and interpersonal relationships between the school district and state agency officials.

The chapter that follows is the review of the literature and the formulation of the theoretical framework presented on pages 14-25.