

# Development of Facilities Master Plans

### **District Leadership Forum**

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### 1) Executive Overview

### Key Observations

Identify the district's facilities needs prior to launching the facilities master planning process. Administrators at all profiled districts conduct a facilities needs assessment before creating facilities master plans. These needs assessments outline both the mission critical (i.e., addressing capacity issues and safety concerns) and less-urgent (e.g., replacing outdated-but-functional systems) facilities needs. The needs assessments also suggest proposed projects and budgets to address the identified needs. Administrators at **District C** and **District A** closely monitor the conditions of district facilities internally, while administrators at **District B** and **District D** hire architectural consulting firms to conduct thorough facilities needs assessments. After identifying facilities needs, administrators engage with the community to further prioritize the recommended projects for the facilities master plan.

Top facilities priorities at profiled districts include increasing enrollment capacity and addressing safety concerns. For example, administrators label expanding building capacity to meet enrollment projections or replacing leaking roofs as highest-priority projects. After these most urgent priorities, administrators consider upgrading outdated-but-functional systems (e.g., out-of-date but up-to-code fire alarms), followed by renovating campus amenities such as installing new turf athletic fields.

Include the community in the prioritization process to demonstrate commitment to community input. Administrators at profiled districts use a variety of community engagement strategies to solicit feedback and input for the facilities master planning process. Administrators at **District C** and **District D** discuss facilities needs with community members during regularly-scheduled meetings, like monthly parent-teacher association meetings. Administrators at **District B** facilitate a public workshop for community members to envision ideal facilities characteristics at schools across the district. Incorporating the feedback of community members helps secure community support for the facilities master plan.

**Update the facilities master plan often to account for changing needs of the district.** Administrators at profiled districts emphasize the importance of updating facilities master plans to reflect the evolving needs of the district. While facilities master plans cover between five and ten years in scope, administrators at profiled districts update their master plans regularly. State law mandates that administrators at **District C** and **District A** update the facilities master plan annually. At **District D**, contacts note that district administrators update the facilities master plan about every two years.

Administrators at *District D* and *District B* fund facilities projects with community bonds. The facilities master plan informs the amount of bond funding district administrators seek from the community. The projects included in the facilities master plan are categorized into phases aligned with the bond distribution schedule. Administrators at both districts partner with a bond campaign advisory company to poll the community to gauge the public's perception of bond measures. This exercise helps administrators predict if a bond measure will pass or if they need to make the bond proposal more attractive to voters.

### 2) Administration of Facilities Master Plans

### Development

# **Determine the District's Facilities Needs Prior to Launching the Facilities Master Planning Process**

Administrators at all profiled districts conduct a facilities needs assessment before creating facilities master plans. These needs assessments outline both critical (e.g., addressing capacity issues) and less-urgent (e.g., replacing outdated-but-functional systems) facilities needs.

Administrators at **District C** and **District A** closely monitor the conditions of their district facilities. Facilities staff at District C use a facilities maintenance software to track the condition of their facilities and to estimate when replacements or renovations will be necessary. Because facilities staff can consistently monitor the needs of their buildings, systems, and grounds, the software eliminates the need to hire an external consulting firm to conduct a needs assessment.

Administrators at **District B** and **District D** hire architectural consulting firms to conduct facilities needs assessments prior to creating their facilities master plans.

## **Consider Hiring External Consultants to Create Facilities Master Plans**

Administrators at **District D** and **District B** partnered with architectural consulting firms to create their facilities master plan. Both districts used different firms for their needs assessments and facilities master plans. At both districts, the consulting firm collaborated with the superintendent, the chief business officer, and several other district administrators to develop and write the plan. The superintendent at both profiled districts attended most meetings and worked closely with consultants to create a plan that the school board and the community would support.

The consulting firms brought expertise in engineering, space planning, and construction essential to creating a comprehensive facilities master plan. Contacts at profiled districts note that the facilities master planning process generally takes about one year, from conclusion of the facilities needs assessment to the final, boardapproved master plan.

At **District A** and **District C**, the districts' facilities and operations teams have the capacity and expertise to create and update the facilities master plan.

#### Structure

## Comprehensive Facilities Master Plans Span Between Five and Ten Years at Profiled Districts

Contacts at **District D** note that facilities master plans generally cover between five and ten years. After about ten years, facilities systems should be thoroughly reviewed, and the facilities master plan should be re-created to reflect the changing priorities of the district. Administrators typically group projects in the plan into phases to align with anticipated revenues from funding streams during the prioritization process. Projects requiring significant investment, such as renovating an entire school to comply with fire codes and accessibility requirements, may be addressed in several phases according to financial needs. Administrators will occasionally shift the timelines of projects included in the master plan to account for changes in funding revenue or prioritization.

## Administrators Design Facilities Master Plans to Best Meet the Districts' Needs

Administrators at profiled districts use facilities master plans in different ways depending on the needs of their district communities. Contacts at **District A**, **District C** and **District D** view facilities master plans as strategic guiding documents that serve as a roadmap to address facilities needs. At these districts, facilities master plans describe specific projects to address each identified facilities needs at each school across the district.

### **P**

## **Create a Detailed Facilities Master Plan to Comprehensively Address Facilities Needs**

Administrators at **District D** recommend creating a master plan with specific projects in mind instead of creating a general plan. While a comprehensive facilities needs assessment may illuminate an overwhelming number of projects, administrators should prioritize needs and create a focused master plan to address urgent needs. Plans that include specific projects, goals, and budgets help keep the district on-track to complete necessary facilities upgrades and renovations.

A specific, focused facilities master plan can also help secure community buyin for funding and support purposes. In a detailed plan, community members can clearly see how their support will impact the projects included in the master plan. Facilities master plans should include specific projects outlined with detailed steps to complete each project and comprehensive cost estimates for each step.

Contacts at **District B** view their facilities master plan as an aspirational guiding document and purposefully design the document to provide school communities with flexibility to address the specific needs of each school. Thus, the district divided the facilities master plan into three tiers. The first two tiers focus on the results of the facilities needs assessment, including critical recommendations around infrastructure and core facilities needs (e.g., improving the air conditioning system).

Administrators use tier three to provide flexibility and to allow each school community to develop an ideal vision for the educational learning environments within schools.

#### Tiers of District B's Facilities Master Plan

Facilities Needs Addressed
Infrastructure upgrades to ensure safety and code compliance of each school campus.
<b>Modernizing buildings</b> to preserve existing facilities and ensure equity in physical learning environments across the district.
Community-identified ideal upgrades and initiatives to redesign the student experience and classroom learning environments.

In the facilities master plan, administrators only prescribe necessary facilities upgrades and renovations to address core facilities needs. Instead of administrators prescribing specific projects to improve educational environments to be completed at each school, school communities create proposals for projects that would benefit and support their schools. Administrators allocate equitable funding to each school to address issues with learning environments, and each school community decides how to utilize this funding in their school. This model provides agency to each school community and allows the district to focus on updating the district's core infrastructure.

# Include Community Engagement Strategies in Facilities Master Plan to Show District's Commitment to Feedback

Administrators at **District B**, **District C**, and **District D** include sections detailing the community engagement strategies employed during the facilities master planning process. These sections outline the various committees, meetings, and activities district administrators use to increase community involvement with the facilities master plan. District administrators should include a similar section in any new facilities master plans to illustrate the district's commitment to community involvement and input.

In addition, administrators at profiled districts include between four and nine sections in their facilities master plans to illustrate the entire facilities master planning process. The length of facilities master plans varies according to the needs and specific process of each district. In general, administrators include sections such as an executive summary, district-wide facilities needs analyses, community engagement strategies, and recommended facilities projects. Administrators also often include an appendix or reference document section, which provides constituents with additional materials like budgeting documents, city or town initiatives, feeder-school patterns, old facilities master plans, needs assessments, and board policies.

#### Overview of Sections in Profiled Districts' Facilities Master Plans

### FY2020 Educational Facilities Master Plan Update



**District B** 

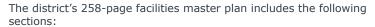
The district's 151-page facilities master plan includes the following sections:

- Overview of Educational Facilities Master Plan (including vision and strategic plan, community analysis, school site analyses, and enrollment projections)
- Facilities Inventory
- Facilities Needs
- Appendix

#### 2017 Facilities Master Plan

- Letter from the Superintendent
- Project Directory
- Executive Summary
- District Campus Analysis
- Stakeholder Engagement
- · Design Guidelines
- Recommendations
- Summer Prioritization and Costs
- Reference Documents





- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Community Analysis
- · Inventory and Evaluation of School Facilities
- Enrollment Projections and Facility Needs Analysis
- Recommended Facilities Plans
- Appendices





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**District C** 

The district's 162-page facilities master plan includes the following sections:

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- Introduction and Process
- Facilities Assessments
- Program Costs

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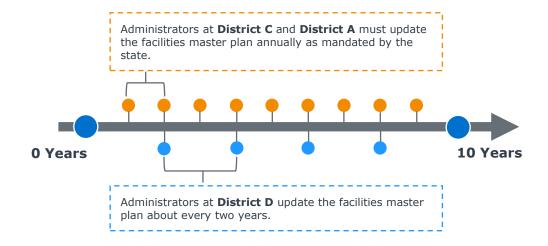
- Community Input and Outreach
- Site Analysis and Master Plans

### Plan Maintenance

# **Update the Facilities Master Plan Often to Account for Changing Needs of the District**

Administrators at **District C**, **District A**, and **District D** emphasize that facilities master plans should be updated to reflect the changing needs of the district. While facilities master plans cover about ten years at profiled districts, administrators update the plans regularly. At profiled districts, facilities and operations staff work with district administrators to update the plans themselves rather than hiring architectural consulting firms.

#### **Facilities Master Plan Timelines at Profiled Districts**



#### Reasons for Updating Facilities Master Plans at Profiled Districts



**Increase in Costs** 

At **District D**, administrators update their facilities master plan to account for changes in construction and material prices for projects included in the facilities master plan. Current economic factors often force construction prices to increase, shifting the budgets for upcoming projects. Administrators update the master plan to extend the timelines for projects to align with anticipated funding.



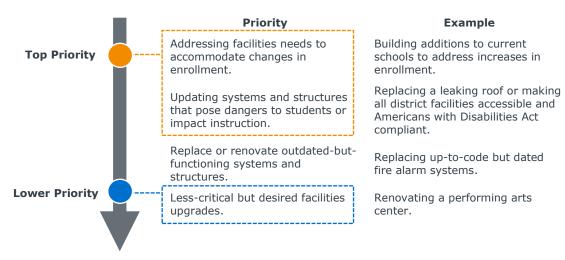
Expediting Project Timelines During their state-mandated annual update, administrators at **District C** restructure some proposed projects' timelines in the facilities master plan due to changes in funding. One year, the district received more tax revenue than anticipated and therefore had enough funds to begin a project ahead of schedule. Instead of waiting for the proposed start date, administrators moved forward with the project sooner than anticipated to maximize available funding.

#### Prioritization

## Capacity and Safety Concerns Are the Highest Facilities Priorities at Profiled Districts

Administrators at profiled districts prioritize identified facilities needs by first addressing enrollment capacity issues and safety concerns. After receiving the facilities needs assessment, administrators typically review the proposed projects and conduct an initial prioritization of projects. Changes in enrollment and failing or malfunctioning systems are the first two priority areas for projects to include in the facilities master plan. After accounting for those projects, administrators then look to replace or renovate outdated-but-functioning systems. Finally, administrators will consider including high-profile, less-critical facilities upgrades into the facilities master plan.

#### **Project Prioritization Process at Profiled Districts**



District leaders may experience challenges balancing the needs of the district with the desires of the school community when navigating the prioritization process. Administrators at profiled districts note that district leaders should be clear and transparent when communicating the prioritization process to the school community. Remaining transparent will mitigate any negative reactions to the specific order and prioritization of projects included in the facilities master plan.

Administrators at **District C** and **District A** highlight the importance of creating a facts-based prioritization process from enrollment data and facilities conditions based on the needs assessment. Creating a standard prioritization ranking system ensures that administrators consider all projects holistically and without the biases of special interest groups, like the sports booster club or parent-teacher association.

### Funding Projects

# **Two Profiled Districts Use Bonds to Fund Facilities Projects**

Administrators at **District D** and **District B** fund facilities projects with community bonds. The bonds, generated from increasing property taxes in the area the district serves, provide the resources necessary to fund the districts' facilities projects. The facilities master plan informs the amount of bond funding district administrators seek from the community.



#### **Survey Community Members to Gauge Support of Bond Measure**

Administrators at both **District B** and **District D** poll the school community to gauge the public's perception of the facilities master plan and proposed facilities projects. The districts partner with a local bond campaign advisory company that use phone polls to reach hundreds of members of the school community. The poll asks if participants agree with the terms of the bond, if they would vote in favor of the bond, and for any additional feedback on the bond or the facilities master planning process. At District D, over 500 school community members completed the survey and most responded they would support the bond measure.

If a poll shows poor support for a bond measure, administrators should work diligently to update the bond to address community concerns and to further communicate the value of school improvement projects before introducing the bond in upcoming elections. This strategy ensures that the community supports facilities projects included in the bond and each bond measure receives favorable votes.

### Solicit Funding for the Full Costs of Necessary Facilities Improvements

Contacts at **District D** strongly suggest soliciting the full amount of funds necessary to address the critical facilities needs as identified in the facilities needs assessment. Even if district administrators can justify not replacing or renovating certain facilities to cut costs from the proposed facilities master plan, those facilities' conditions will continue to deteriorate until they become critical, emergency needs.

In 2016, district administrators received a needs assessment that identified facilities needs costing over \$500 million. Due to board pressure and fear of public backlash, district administrators cut necessary projects and artificially lowered construction estimates to present a facilities improvement plan of \$220 million, a sum that administrators knew they could secure with a successful bond measure. At less than half of the original proposed cost, district administrators made significant cuts and adjustments to the facilities master plan.

District administrators and facilities staff now struggle with the consequences of these decisions, as construction costs routinely total millions of dollars more than the estimates accounted for in the facilities master plan budget. This forces facilities leaders to frequently petition the school board for additional funding and to delay starting new projects to make up the true cost of the projects included in the plan. Contacts suggest district leaders ask for the appropriate amount of money initially to prevent long-term issues with project budgets.

# **Seek Additional Funding from County and State Governments**

The law prohibits administrators at **District C** and **District A** from seeking bond funding from communities. Instead, administrators receive funding from county and state government budgets to complete facilities projects as outlined in their facilities master plan. Approximately 50 percent of funding for facilities improvement projects comes from county funds and the state provides the additional 50 percent of funding.

### 3) Community Feedback and Support

### Feedback Collection

# **Include the Community in the Prioritization Process to Demonstrate Commitment to Community Input**

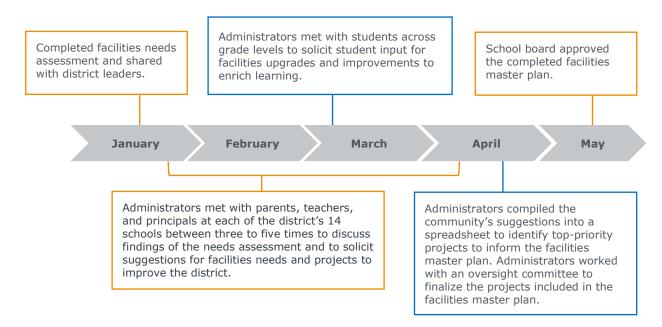
After the initial prioritization, district administrators at most profiled districts discuss the findings of the needs assessment with the school community. Administrators at profiled districts use a variety of community engagement strategies to solicit feedback and input for the facilities master planning process.

Contacts at **District B** emphasize including community feedback in the prioritization process for the facilities master plan. By allowing community members to voice their concerns and participate in the planning process, district administrators foster a sense of shared responsibility and ownership for the plan. This shared ownership helps district administrators garner wide-spread community support for projects in the facilities master plan and ultimately the bond measures used to fund the projects.

Administrators at **District C** note that parents and community members often prefer to be engaged with school-level rather than district-wide initiatives, as school-level initiatives often directly impact parents' children in ways that district-wide initiatives do not. Therefore, administrators offer community meetings at each school as often as necessary to keep the community informed of facilities improvements and plans.

After conducting the facilities needs assessment at **District D**, administrators solicited community input to prioritize recommended improvements and renovations. District administrators worked with parents, teachers, and community members across the district to identify facilities projects of top priority to the larger district community. These exercises helped administrators best prioritize their facilities master plan and garner buy-in for the bond measure necessary to fund the included projects.

#### Community Input Process at District D



# **Create Committees with Community Members to Prioritize Facilities Needs and Garner Buy-In**

District administrators at **District D** formed an oversight committee to finalize prioritization of projects. Over 50 individuals, including parents, staff, administrators, teachers, and other community members served as members on the committee. The oversight committee met four times to choose top-priority projects and finalize the long-term plan for addressing the identified facilities needs. District administrators asked the committee to narrow down the initial list of 35 projects identified through the needs assessment to choose three critical projects (e.g., replacing a leaking roof) and three ideal projects (e.g., building a new turf stadium) to improve the district. The committee used community suggestions and input from the consulting firm that conducted the needs assessment to create their finalized list of projects to include in the facilities master plan.

#### Topics of Four District Oversight Committee Meetings at District D



#### **Overview of Facilities Needs and Committees Purpose**

The first session provided an overview of the needs assessment, identified priorities from school site meetings, described the purpose of the committee, and defined the timeline of the prioritization process.



#### **Reviewing Priorities from Site Meetings**

At the second meeting, administrators reviewed the priorities identified from the school site meetings and asked committee members to identify their top five projects of priority.



#### **Identifying Critical and Ideal Projects**

The third session asked committee members to identify their top three critical projects and three ideal projects. Administrators then compiled results and highlighted top priorities for the entire committee.



#### **Compiling Finalized List of Priority Projects**

At the final meeting, committee members categorized projects into phases to be aligned with bond timelines and finalized the list of prioritized facilities needs and projects.

# **Host Facilities Visioning Workshops to Identify Community Priorities for Learning Environments**

At **District B**, administrators incorporated community input for the facilities master plan by hosting a workshop to envision the ideal school campus and facilities to include in tier three of their facilities master plan. This full-day retreat, held from 9:00am to 4:00pm at a local public space, was free and open to the public to solicit feedback on the facilities master plan. The workshop, facilitated by the master planning team, was attended by approximately 50 school community members including teachers, parents, students, and administrators. Participants worked in small groups to identify facilities projects they were interested in seeing addressed in the facilities master plan and presented their group's selected projects to the whole group after each activity.

#### Details of District B's Visioning Workshop



1) Divide into Diverse, Small Groups

Administrators separated participants into small groups of approximately eight individuals, and each group included a variety of stakeholders to diversify conversations and maximize productivity.



2) Identify Important Ideals

The first activity asked participants to write down everything important to their ideal high school environment and categorize the group's identified ideals (e.g., security and safety).



3) Envision Ideal Physical Features

The second activity asked groups to create a poster to illustrate the ideal physical attributes of the district. After identifying their groups' priorities for physical structures and features, the group categorized these attributes and chose photographs from magazines to create a poster.



4) Identify Ideal Natural Values

For the third activity, groups identified the ideal values of nature they deemed important to the district that they would like to see on school campuses (e.g., open air, green spaces, trees). Teams then identified natural habitats (e.g., tide pool, valley, delta) that incorporated their ideal natural values. Facilitators then asked all participants to vote on their top five natural features they would like to include on school campuses.



5) Create a Facilities Vision Statement

The final activity asked participants to create a facilities vision statement that incorporated the natural values and ideals identified in prior activities. Groups completed a template with the following sentence: "The ideal [District B] high school is like a [blank], that includes [blank], ensuring [blank]." Groups drafted their version of the vision statement and presented to the larger group.

Participants then voted for the vision statement that most resonated with them, and the winning vision statement served as the guiding framework for the facilities master plan.

After the workshop, district administrators codified the data collected from each participant (e.g., identified ideals in activity one) and analyzed the data for trends across participants. Administrators then translated the data into categories and created ten statements to describe the core values of facilities across the district.

#### Ten Core Values Statements at District B



Our school campus is welcoming with a clear identity.



Our school campus is inspiring and rejuvenating.



Our school campus is beautiful.



Our school campus is flexible and adaptable to change.



Our school campus feels safe and supportive to everyone.



Our school campus supports positive social interaction.



Our school campus is connected to nature.



Our school campus has a diverse array of open/protected/collaborative areas.



Our school campus supports overall health and well-being.



Our school campus is eco-friendly.

The facilities master planning team presented the ten statements to each school's site council for review. Administrators asked council members to discuss the ten statements and score their school's achievement of the statements. After scoring the statements, administrators asked participants to complete a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis for the three lowest-scoring statements.

This exercise helped administrators identify the areas for improvement in learning environments that could be addressed in the master plan alongside the critical infrastructure and building modernization needs, identified in the needs assessment. Administrators ultimately included the ten statements in the facilities master plan as guiding principles for the section on redesigning the high school experience. District administrators use these guiding principles when discussing school-level projects with school administrators, which helps to focus project requests and link all projects back to the facilities master plan.

# Strategies to Gain Support

# Remain Transparent About Facilities Needs to Garner Community Support

After the initial prioritization of projects in the facilities needs assessment, district administrators should discuss the findings of the needs assessment with the district community. Administrators should be careful not to alarm community members by focusing on the potential high costs of the projects recommended in the needs assessment. Instead, district administrators should highlight the necessity of addressing facilities needs to improve the quality of education across the district and ensure the safety and well-being of students.

After conducting any exercise to gather community input during the prioritization process, administrators should discuss with the community the amount of funding necessary to complete the critical and community-identified priority projects included in the facilities master plan. Transparency throughout the creation of a facilities master plan will help the community better understand the facilities needs and mitigate frustrations with the prioritization process.

## Consider Including Less-Critical Projects in Funding Proposals to Gain Support for Facilities Improvements

Administrators at **District D** include high-profile, less critical projects alongside critical facilities needs in their bond proposals to gain community support for facilities improvements. Administrators note that community members more readily support projects with visible, clear improvements to district facilities. For example, administrators included building a new performing arts center and installing new turf athletic fields in their facilities master plan. Though not critical facilities needs, these projects showed that administrators were responsive to community input and helped gain enough community support to generate wide-spread backing for a bond measure.

# **Engage the School Community with a Variety of Outreach Strategies to Mitigate Concerns about Representation**

Administrators at profiled districts use a variety of outreach strategies to remain transparent and communicate facilities needs, the planning process, and decisions to the school community. Contacts at **District C** and **District D** note that district leaders should try to engage the community with multiple strategies to identify the most

effective ways to communicate with various stakeholders. District leaders can then use the most effective strategies to communicate facilities needs and the master planning process to school communities.

Administrators at **District C** and **District D** discuss facilities needs with community members during regularly-scheduled, special interest group meetings (e.g., monthly parent-teacher association meetings). Contacts note that this allows more parents and community members to participate in decision-making processes related to facilities needs because individuals do not need to find additional time to be involved. Making participation more convenient for community members mitigates complaints about lack of opportunities to participate in facilities decision-making.

Administrators at District C also use electronic surveys, conduct school site visits, use alerts and notification systems, and send paper flyers home with students to keep parents and other community members informed of facilities planning processes and updates.

Administrators at District D use multiple social media platforms to keep the community engaged and informed with facilities needs and projects. Administrators monitor the districts' Facebook and Twitter accounts for community feedback and respond when appropriate. Administrators also post all facilities communications on the district website and include an option for submitting feedback on the website. District administrators often hold district-wide meetings to solicit community feedback.

At **District A**, administrators post all communications about their facilities master plan and its subsequent updates on their website for 30 days prior to presenting the plan to the board of trustees. During this time, community members may submit their comments on the website for consideration during the board meeting.

## Demonstrate Value of Facilities Improvements to Gain Community Support

Administrators at **District D**, **District C**, and **District A** frequently link improvements to district facilities to potential increases in local economic and residential growth by making the district more attractive to potential homeowners and businesses interested in purchasing property in the district. For example, administrators may discuss how renovating a high school and upgrading learning environments will attract new homebuyers and businesses to settle within the district's limits.

### 5) Research Methodology

### Project Challenge

Leadership at the member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- How did administrators at contact districts prioritize the facilities needs of their districts?
- 2. Which administrators and staff at contact districts were involved in the prioritization process?
- 3. Did administrators at contact districts include community input during the prioritization process?
- 4. How did administrators at contact districts develop the facilities plan?
- 5. How many years does the facilities plan at contact districts include?
- 6. What does the facilities plan at contacts districts contain?
- 7. Which administrators and staff did contact districts involve in creating the facilities plan?
- 8. How long did the process to create and implement a facilities plan take at contact districts, from identifying facilities needs to securing funding for major projects?
- 9. What unexpected challenges did contact districts face while developing the facilities plan?
- 10. How do administrators at contact districts fund the renovations, upgrades, and construction required to address their facilities needs?
- 11. What strategies did administrators at contact districts use to communicate facilities needs to gain support from the community and other district constituents?

### Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

- EAB's internal and online research libraries (eab.com)
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (<a href="http://nces.ed.gov/">http://nces.ed.gov/</a>)

### Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed district-level administrators with knowledge of facilities master planning processes at public school districts.

#### A Guide to Institutions Profiled in this Brief

District	Region	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Mid-Atlantic	15,500
District B	Pacific West	27,000
District C	Mid-Atlantic	41,000
District D	Pacific West	7,600