

EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS

Educational specifications serve as the link between the educational program and school facilities, whether contemplating a new building or remodeling an existing one. The purpose of educational specifications is to clearly describe the various learning activities to be housed in the school, their spatial requirements, appropriate locations within the building or the site and any special requirements that a designer or a facility planner would need to consider.

Strategic Resources West (SRW) assists in developing the educational specifications policy, regulations and guidelines with input from teachers, administrators and on-site personnel to align with the curriculum from one grade level to the next. This provides the basis for a cohesive and fully functional facilities plan that enables students and staff to focus on learning. Consider this case study as an example of how SRW can help:

Problem: A school district in Northern Colorado needed to gain a clearer understanding of how to best utilize facilities based on enrollment, programs offered, and special needs within those programs over the course of the next five, ten and twenty years.

Background: The district assembled and charged a committee of community and staff members to develop a plan to guide building and site decisions taking into account four critical issues:

1. Growth potential: The district needed a plan that could accommodate growth initially at the elementary level, with time to plan for secondary space.
2. Current facilities: A primary goal was to keep existing buildings in service and maximize their use in meeting future enrollment needs; the community had made significant investment in existing buildings.
3. Future programming: Another primary goal was to modify existing and develop future schools with 21st century facility capabilities and program opportunities.
4. Growth uncertainties: The district had to be prepared to meet the demand for additional space or make best use of facilities to meet growing enrollment demands in some areas and declining enrollment in others.

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STRATEGIC RESOURCES WEST

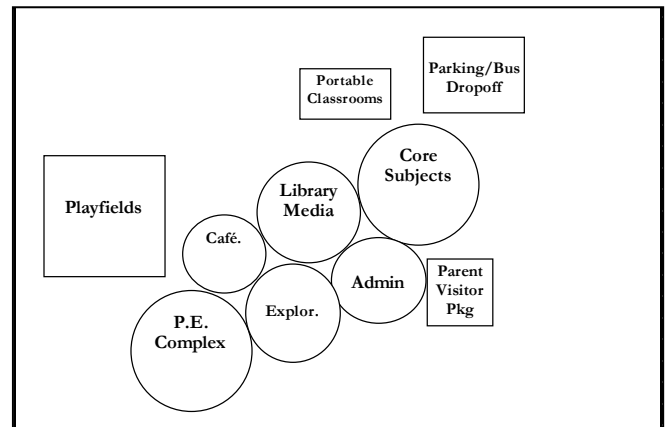
Solution: SRW assisted the committee in developing educational specifications using a three-step approach:

Step 1. Grade Configuration: The first step was for the committee to identify the “ideal” grade configuration to support its pre-K (PK) through 12th grade instruction. At the time the district housed students in PK-5 elementary schools, 6-8 middle schools, and a 9-12 high school. SRW worked with the committee to assess existing school capacity by level in terms of serving current enrollment and future enrollment potential using the existing grade configuration. The committee determined that considerable additional capacity would be necessary at some point in the future to serve the student potential.

Considering growth potential in conjunction with existing educational programs, curricular requirements, and existing facility locations, the committee decided that the existing grade configuration was not the best model for serving potential growth. Based upon these factors and the district’s mission and goals, the committee determined that the grade configuration best suited to accommodate current and future educational needs was a PK-2 primary; 3-5 intermediate; 6-8 middle; and 9-12 high school arrangement.

Step 2. Space Descriptions: SRW worked with the committee to develop educational specifications based on the modified grade configuration. Educational specifications were created, detailing the educational program desired for a variety of disciplines, including language arts, music, and technology, for example. These were documented for the specific sizes and types of spaces needed as well as amenities necessary to foster a positive environment.

Step 3. Design Criteria: The committee established design criteria and other considerations such as relationships to other spaces, utility needs, and functions of the space. Special design issues were also taken into consideration, including sound attenuation, lighting, and technology requirements. An important goal was to provide sufficient flexibility to ensure utilization efficiency. SRW worked with the committee to graphically depict special relationships. (see right)



Conceptual School Organizational Plan

As a result of developing educational specifications, the committee created a strategic and thoughtful plan for facilities in the district. The educational specifications helped the district build a framework and set standards for meeting the demand for additional space. In addition, the educational specifications provided the district with information it could utilize to identify gaps in existing facilities for a more comprehensive educational program.

