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## The Smart and Proactive Approach To Tackling K-12 Facility Challenges And Opportunities



By *Beth Penfield and Kayla Anthony*

A significant pipeline of capital needs is arguably one of the most daunting challenges facing school districts. Whether it's a portfolio of facilities with a growing deferred maintenance backlog or increasing demand for capacity and services due to population growth, districts and their superintendents are forced to reconcile needs and wants with resource constraints.

In response to these formidable challenges, school districts are innovating, looking for opportunities, and developing best practices. These efforts are helping staff, leadership, and the community work together more effectively—forging key partnerships that make these challenges surmountable. Ultimately, being smart and proactive in confronting the realities you face begins with three questions:

### **1. Do you have a clear understanding of the physical condition of your district's facilities and their lifecycle needs?**

An important first step for any school district is conducting a Facility Conditions Assessment (“FCA”) to quantify the physical condition of the facilities across your portfolio. This allows decision makers to compare facilities apples-to-apples and make objective decisions for capital improvements. From there, a long-term Facilities Master Plan (“FMP”) provides a comprehensive view of capital needs and serves as the road map for achieving a district's vision.

### **2. Do you have a targeted vision for your future that is easy to communicate to all staff and stakeholders?**

Without endless resources, hard decisions must be made. Having a vision is critical to keeping leaders focused when making decisions and weighing priorities, and when

discussing projects with the community—especially when those projects involve trade-offs.

### 3. What tools or shifts in behavior can help you get there?

The answer to this question must be tailored to your school district and community needs. Some examples B&D has facilitated include:

- Creating citizen committees to objectively review current practices
- Evaluating relevant legislation and internal policies that might need updating
- Piloting alternative deliveries of capital projects
- Engaging in joint discussions to overcome departmental silos

B&D recently guided the City of Alexandria, Virginia, and Alexandria City Public Schools through a similar process. [Read about this joint discussion.](#)

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## Ambitious Effort To Modernize Austin Schools Pays Off



Here's a compelling example of the above approach.

The Austin Independent School District (“AISD”) in Texas has a mission to reinvent the urban school experience for its 84,000 Pre-K to 12th grade students in 130 schools. An important first step in achieving this mission was of course to modernize the district’s portfolio of aging schools, address deferred maintenance issues and a changing demographic landscape, and find a way forward from a history of 50% of bond propositions being

voted down by Austin residents. Not only was change therefore needed, but the undertaking had to be carefully planned and executed.

AISD engaged B&D and its team of subconsultants<sup>1</sup> to develop a long-range plan for all of its school facilities via a year-long planning process in collaboration with AISD leadership and staff, and an 18-person citizen committee. At the outset, B&D helped the team develop visioning and a planning strategy. From there, the B&D Team:

- Helped redefine the [Educational Specifications](#) being used with DLR Group;
- Reviewed and synthesized objective data such as student enrollment, demographic projections, and building utilization;
- Developed and applied planning strategies; and
- Helped lead a comprehensive community collaboration effort using 21st century means and methods such as stakeholder engagement “roadshows” and digital engagement (e.g., Twitter town halls, Facebook livestreams, video postings).

The community collaboration effort was particularly intensive, including a series of 25 regional meetings, social media and website campaigns, over 400 individual community engagement opportunities, and over 300 community organizations contacted. The effort also reached diverse segments of the population, including historically hard-to-reach demographics.

In March 2017, B&D delivered the [2016-17 Facility Master Plan Update](#), providing a road map of transformational school modernization projects for the next 25 to 30 years. The update was approved by the Board of Trustees in April 2017, and was used to inform the planning of a November 2017 bond referendum. That referendum passed, with Austin voters approving the most ambitious bond in Central Texas history—\$1.1B. Further, the bond passed with overwhelming support from the community—72% voter approval—a testament to the objective, community-driven process.

AISD is now set to modernize its schools and fulfill its mission to reinvent the urban school experience—the biggest win of them all.



## What Has B&D Been Up To Recently?



So much—starting with celebrating! We joyously announced our 25th anniversary year, and celebrated **Karen Summerville** and **Kayla Anthony** for winning B&D’s Catalyst award. We were also very excited to announce (1) our **expansion in Northern California**,

involving leadership from new hire Mark Newton (with over 28 years of industry experience in NorCal), (2) new hire Jeff Bonvechio, an expert of 20 years in the design and construction of public education, recreation, and library facilities—and with experience in the DC government, and (3) our new work with San José–Evergreen Community College District in California and Prince George’s County Public Schools in Maryland.

Giving back to the community has given us so much, as we have spoken at several conferences and events, including Brian Hanlon speaking at a resiliency panel, **Kate Dydak** presenting at AIA|DC CAE’s “Back to School” program, **Beth Penfield and Chet Roach** presenting at P3C, and **Sarah Pearlstein** not just moderating a panel at the Women in Construction conference—but helping plan the entire event. Finally, B&Ders gave back by **helping build a new playground** for DCPrep with KaBOOM!

To continue engaging with the industry and growing as professionals, we also attended a number of conferences, including Beth Penfield and Ty Specht at **A4LE** in Atlanta, Mark Newton and Ola Gbadamosi at CASH, and Greg Smith and Jeff Bonvechio at TASBO.

Thinking ahead, **we look forward to seeing you at the A4LE Southern and Northeast Regional Conferences in Waco, Texas, and Baltimore, Maryland, where Greg Smith is presenting with AISD on the Facilities Master Plan, Beth Penfield is moderating a panel with industry colleagues from Maryland and DC, and Kelly Connelly is facilitating a tour and discussion with our Baltimore City 21st Century Schools Program. Additionally, Ty Specht, who serves as the Treasurer, Board of Directors Southwest Region, will attend the Southwest conference in Denver.**

In the news these past few months, you could read about B&D in The Spectrum magazine, which discussed our work in the **Redwood City School District** (page 5). Beth Penfield’s participation in the City of Alexandria’s blue ribbon task force was also written up **here** and **here**. B&D is also reviewing and monitoring **legislation** that may impact our Maryland clients.

Some of our experts are also active on social media, so we hope you’ll engage with them:

- Ty Specht is on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**
- Shilpa Khatri is on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**
- Beth Penfield is on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**
- Kayla Anthony is on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**
- Sarah Pearlstein is on **LinkedIn** and **Twitter**
- Greg Smith is on **LinkedIn**

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*B&D has three quarterly newsletters (Higher Education, K-12, and Venues). **Learn more.***

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