

WHAT IS THE EDUCATION FACILITIES REPORT?

The *Arkansas Statewide Education Facilities Assessment* is the culmination of 18 months of work commissioned by the Arkansas General Assembly to assess the adequacy and equity of public school buildings across the state. In the ongoing effort to address the mandates of the *Lake View III* decision, made by the Arkansas Supreme Court in November 2002, the legislature's Joint Committee on Educational Facilities commissioned a task force to conduct a comprehensive survey of facilities, equipment, and technology. The 60-member task force, including legislators, school officials, and state department officials, together with architects, engineers, business leaders, and interested citizens, contracted with the DeJong Group and its partners to complete the study which was delivered to the Joint Committee in November 2004.

Having assessed every public school in the state, the task force members developed recommendations for renovating or replacing inadequate school facilities. Also, they estimated the cost of this work and suggested methods of funding it. Further, the task force evaluated the equipment and technology needs of each school and made recommendations concerning these needs as well. They found that Arkansas' public school buildings need almost \$2.3 billion in repairs and improvements, including \$86.7 million in immediate needs for repairs critical to health and safety. The addition of more classroom space in crowded schools, together with future repairs, brings the total estimated cost to \$4.5 billion.

WHY DID THE LEGISLATURE DECIDE TO COMMISSION AN ASSESSMENT OF ALL PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES?

In June 2003, the Arkansas General Assembly's Joint Committee on Educational Facilities

established the 60-member Task Force to the Joint Committee to address the eight mandates regarding educational facilities set forth in the Arkansas Supreme Court's *Lakeview III* decision. The mandates are as follows:

1. Review the *Lakeview III* decision;
2. Recommend what constitutes adequate school facilities for elementary education, middle school education, and high school education;
3. Recommend a method of providing substantially equal facilities and equipment;
4. Establish a process to review and assess the school facilities;
5. Recommend policies and criteria for renovating, replacing or discontinuing inadequate buildings and facilities;
6. Recommend the costs of adequate school facilities;
7. Recommend a method of funding such costs; and
8. Recommend a system or method to assess, evaluate and monitor school facilities across the state to ensure that school facilities are adequate and equal, and will continue to be so.

HOW DID THE TASK FORCE DETERMINE FACILITY NEEDS?

Before task force members began their survey of school facilities, they developed a work plan, approved by the Joint Committee on Education Facilities, which built the assessment process on the following assumptions:

- All buildings would be brought up to the proposed standards if they needed renovation;
- The current state guidelines for student/teacher ratios would be maintained;
- Current cost models and states of condition were accurate and not in need of escalation factors;

- The number of school buildings and school districts would remain the same;
- Alternative uses of facilities for the purpose of generating income, reducing operating expenses or reducing capital expenditures were not included;
- The need for additional space for growing districts was included, while existing space in declining districts was assumed to continue in use (that is, possible consolidation was not a factor);
- Additional square footage for schools that do not meet proposed education suitability standards was added, but no credit was taken for schools that exceeded space standard; and
- Temporary buildings were not included in total available square footage.

Beginning with these assumptions, the task force identified three variables that contributed to the adequacy and comparability of school facilities:

1. the present condition of each structure,
2. its suitability for supporting the educational programs it houses, and
3. the future needs of districts based on 5- and 10-year projections of growth in enrollment.

Utilizing these criteria, the task force developed an *Arkansas School Facility Manual*, authorized and approved by the legislature's Joint Committee on Educational Facilities. Designed to assist school districts in developing or refurbishing facilities to meet current and future needs, this manual included sections with general policies and procedures, standards and guidelines, maintenance requirements, and furniture, equipment, and technology needs.

Assessing the Condition of Existing Facilities

The task force defined facility condition as follows: "the state of repair of the building infrastructure... (taking) into consideration all of the building systems from roofs and windows to electrical and mechanical systems." The criteria for assessing school facilities were to determine the cost of bringing each building up to current building codes and safety standards. This was critically important for older buildings. The task force noted that more

than half of Arkansas' schools are at least 40 years old.

The Criteria Utilized for Facility Assessment

The task force identified two variables important to assessing the condition of school facilities: *current deficiencies* and *year zero lifecycle* concerns. The *year zero lifecycle* designation identifies those systems or components that have exceeded their life expectancy but remain in operation, such as heating or air conditioning units, roofing, etc. Thus, the task force determined facility condition by calculating the sum of the current deficiencies and the year zero lifecycle concerns.

Further, the task force prioritized the immediacy of need with respect to improving school facilities by placing identified problems within one of four categories. They are as follows:

- *Priority 1 - Mission Critical Concerns* - These involve "deficiencies or conditions that directly affect the school's ability to remain open, or deliver the educational curriculum," such as health and safety concerns that require immediate attention;
- *Priority 2 - Concerns with an Indirect Impact on Mission* - These are deficiencies that "if not addressed in the near term, may progress to a Priority 1 item," such as deteriorating roofs, plumbing, and electrical systems;
- *Priority 3 - Short Term Conditions* - These include improvements that are "necessary to the mission of the school, but may not require immediate attention," those necessary to "maximize efficiency and usefulness of the facility" and to keep the school environment "safe, dry and healthy;"
- *Priority 4 - Long Term Requirements* - These items would be "an enhancement to the instructional environment" or require less immediate attention; they include paving areas, removing abandoned equipment, or building cabinets for storage.

The Process Utilized to Determine Cost

Part of the responsibility of the task force was to estimate the future life cycle cost of the facility. Recognizing that the structure and infrastructure of a building requires ongoing maintenance and

periodic replacement of equipment, the concept of future life cycle cost is that size of the building, predicted needs, and escalated costs may predict the long-term demand for maintenance funding.

The task force utilized a Facility Condition Index (FCI) to compare the cost of repairs with the cost of replacements on a scale of 0% to 100%. A low FCI indicated of good condition, while a high FCI indicated poor condition. The Executive Committee indicated that if a facility has an FCI of 65% or greater (that is, a very high need for renovation) replacement of the building may be preferable, but they recognized that each situation would have to be evaluated independently.

Educational Suitability of Existing Facilities

A second significant component of the educational facilities survey was the assessment of each structure's education suitability. To determine this, the task force evaluated the adequacy of available space and whether that space was utilized productively. First, the task force considered the code requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) concerning accessibility of restrooms, doorways, corridors, and stairwells, along with air quality, multi-sensory warning systems, and related requirements. Additionally, they considered the suitability and size of each learning space (square footage per student), given the intended use. For example, gymnasiums, cafeterias, media centers, science labs, and computer labs were viewed differently than were standard classrooms. At times, such considerations resulted in a need for more square feet per student than the minimum as schools require regulation gymnasiums, regardless of the number of students enrolled. Also, the necessity of separating science labs or media centers from standard classroom space may result in additional square footage per student in low enrollment schools. The findings of the task force with respect to suitability of existing facilities were as follows:

- Most elementary and middle schools with fewer than 100 students had more than twice the

number of square feet per student recommended by *Arkansas School Facility Manual* guidelines;

- Most middle schools with fewer than 250 students had more than the recommended amount of space per student;
- Most elementary and middle schools with more than 1,000 students had fewer than the recommended number of square feet per student;
- Most high schools with fewer than 100 students had considerably more than the recommended amount of space per student;
- Most high schools with more than 2000 students had somewhat less than the recommended amount of space per student;
- Additionally, some schools lacked adequate spaces for special purposes such as art, music, and special education.

Planning for Growth in Enrollment

The third component of the educational facilities survey was the projection of enrollment growth over the course of the next two decades based on growth patterns noted in census data over the past 45 years. Over the next ten years, total enrollment for the state is projected to increase at a faster rate than it has in the past ten years. Alongside projected growth, some districts had projected *decreases* in enrollment. The task force recommended that school districts pay close attention to such demographic variables as socioeconomic growth or decline and the aging of the population in planning for the future educational needs of the community.

THE COST OF PROVIDING ADEQUATE AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION FACILITIES

As previously noted, *Arkansas Statewide Education Facilities Assessment* determined that Arkansas' public school buildings need almost \$2.3 billion in repairs and improvements. Table One offers a breakdown of these costs by priority and level.

Table 1: Facility Condition Costs by Priority

	Priority 1	Priority 2	Priority 3	Priority 4
Schools				
Pre-K	428,263	8,085,465	500,712	2,537,307
Elementary Schools	35,113,732	603,621,196	38,064,187	175,484,558
K-8 Schools	631,671	13,989,201	254,177	4,590,650
K-12 Schools	880,340	8,621,808	1,471,934	2,421,494
Middle Schools	18,709,559	331,087,645	27,651,268	63,290,604
Middle/High Schools	9,169,400	242,680,044	15,725,420	75,179,025
High Schools	17,915,353	370,053,260	22,282,468	72,976,935
Alternative/Other Schools	2,032,269	30,099,837	2,191,327	8,224,152
Total School Costs	\$ 84,880,587	\$ 1,608,238,456	\$ 108,141,493	\$ 404,704,725
Other District Facilities				
Administrative, Maintenance, & Athletic Facilities	1,786,402	65,777,142	2,497,495	2,174,157
Grand Total	\$ 86,666,989	\$ 1,674,015,598	\$ 110,638,988	\$ 406,878,882
Combined Total:				\$2,278,200,457

Source: Arkansas Statewide Facilities Assessment-2004, p. 46

WHAT DID THE TASK FORCE RECOMMEND CONCERNING SCHOOL FACILITIES?

The task force submitted the following findings and recommendations to the Joint Committee on Educational Facilities to ensure that the *Lakeview* mandate requiring adequate and equitable school facilities will be met:

- Activate the Arkansas Division of Public Schools Academic Facilities to be included within the Arkansas Department of Education.
- Establish a State Educational Facilities Oversight Committee.
- The State of Arkansas establishes an ongoing uniform process for collecting, inventorying and updating facility information.
- Adopt statewide educational facility standards and guidelines.
- Develop a state program for school facility construction.
- Review and update the Arkansas School Facility Manual on an annual basis.
- The Division of Public School Academic Facilities must report annually on the state of educational facilities statewide.

- The Division of Public School Academic Facilities must provide an annual report and forecast of ongoing facilities projects.
- Maintain a public access website.

CONCLUSION

The Task Force to the Joint Committee on Educational Facilities contracted with several consulting firms to produce a well-researched and detailed discussion of current and future local needs with respect to school facilities. Because the provision of adequate and equitable school facilities is a mandate, the State of Arkansas will utilize the *Arkansas Statewide Education Facilities Assessment* to determine how to address this mandate. The debate concerning which of the report’s recommendations to accept and how to fund them promises to play a prominent role in the 2005 Arkansas General Assembly.

The complete text of the report to the Joint Committee on Educational Facilities may be found on the Task Force’s website as follows:

<http://www.arkansasfacilities.com/statereport.asp>
Additional policy briefs and other education policy information may be found on the website of Office for Education Policy at the University of Arkansas at <http://www.uark.edu/ua/oep> or may be ordered by contacting the Office at (479) 575-3773.