

Governor's Commission on School Construction – Meeting Summary

Date: February 21, 2025
Location: Zoom
Time: 1-3:30 p.m.

Topics

Upcoming Commission Activities
Subcommittee Reports
Midpoint Summary Review

Attending

Commission Members. Valerie Landry (Chair), Jenny Boyden, Elaine Clark, Hollis Cobb, Fern Desjardins, Roy Gott, Christopher Howell, Anthony Jaccarino, Jane McCall, and Rhonda Sperrey
DOE Staff. Scott Brown, Abigail Cram, Laura Cyr, Chelsey Fortin-Trimble, Chloe Teboe
Other Attendees. Robbie Feinberg (MSMA)

Action Items

- Visits to schools will begin the week of February 24. Commission members are asked to identify visits they are able to attend. Additional information will be sent shortly.
- Approximately one month remains to formulate concepts for inclusion in the report due April 15. It was discussed that the Commission will offer to extend the work past April 15, to more fully evaluate emerging strategies.
- The Commission will dissolve Subcommittees in order for the Commission to meet as a whole for the duration of the project.
- The next regular Commission meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 21, 2025, from 1-3:30 p.m. via Zoom. Special meetings will be scheduled, as needed.

Discussion

1. Design/Construction Subcommittee Update

Scott Brown, Maine DOE Director of School Facilities, summarized recent discussions:

- Reviewed the Maine Capital School Construction Program—including management, oversight, and the five projects now in the construction/planning pipeline.
- Reviewed the Maine DOE 21-step process for school construction—from selecting an architect and site through concept design, final budgeting, and financial oversight via bidding and monthly reporting.
- Experts in the design process were invited to present the following:
 - Ted Hall presented the “Educational Specification Document,” which helps to determine the vision for a new or renovated school. Educational specifications are developed by local school administrative units (SAUs)—with input from staff,

community members, business leaders, educators, students, architects, and school administrators.

- Ruby Yehle presented the “Space Allocation Guidelines,” which provides standards for the average expected square-feet per student—helping school planners to understand deficiencies and needs for future functions and spaces. This worksheet eventually becomes the template for architects and building committees to design the building.
- Lyndon Keck presented “Public School Standards for School Construction and Major Renovation Projects,” covering design principles, school safety and security, site planning, exterior envelope, interior equipment, HVAC, and electrical data systems. These standards allow the Maine DOE to control costs and standardize components without mandating specific designs.
- The Subcommittee reviewed the oversight of budgeting and construction—and the partnerships that Maine DOE has with other State agencies to complete this process—as well as the Maine DOE’s role in reviewing bonding requirements, furniture/equipment purchases, and audits of final projects.

2. Finance/Policy Subcommittee Update

Abigail Cram, Project Manager, summarized recent discussions:

- Finance and Policy Subcommittees merged for better synthesis of issues and solutions.
- The Subcommittee reviewed funding challenges raised in focus group and Commission meetings by inviting subject matter experts to present including:
 - Ann Pinnette, Division Coordinator for Maine DOE Office of School Facilities, presented information regarding the School Revolving Renovation Fund (SRRF)—how it works, funding source, priorities, and the difficulty associated with modifying the SRRF to encompass \$8-12 million capital projects.
 - Dr. Michael Allen, Associate Commissioner for Tax Policy, provided information on the pros and cons of dedicated taxes and tax policy challenges in Maine.
- The Subcommittee discussed challenges and proposed solutions.
- Interest was expressed regarding learning more about public-private partnership (P3). As a result, leadership from Prince George’s County Public Schools, which successfully utilized the P3 model, will be present to the Commission on February 26, 2025, from 9-10:30 a.m. via Zoom.

3. Midpoint Summary Review

(Comments do not necessarily reflect agreement among Commission members but rather topics or questions raised by one or more members or staff for discussion, clarification, or analysis.)

- Discussed *potential solution* to decouple Major Capital School Construction Program funds from Essential Programs and Services (EPS) funding. Separating debt service appropriations from General Purpose Aid will support greater clarity around what is debt service and what is not. Added clarity would better align the Maine DOE (the entity that approves projects) with the Maine State Board of Education (the entity that approves debt service).
- Discussed *potential solution* to earmark a percentage of State share of education budget and move it to an interest-bearing account.
- Discussed *potential solution* to increase the debt service limits in a manner more consistent with need.
- Discussed *potential solution* to increase investment in Revolving Loan Fund—and the fact that the SRRF may not be sufficient.
- Discussed *potential solution* to incentivize and invest more funds in maintenance, the impact on school budgets, and requiring maintenance as a project and funding condition.
- Discussed *potential solution* of alternative funding approach to support more projects and smaller projects—and consider moving from the debt to cash model to reduce interest.
- Discussed existing 21-step process and potential consolidation of aspects of processes. Discussed how master planning could support this.
- Discussed the concept of a School Building Authority to do bidding and bonding, rather than keeping it as a local process.
- Discussed *potential solution* to create incentives to develop consolidated schools and whether this is the right solution (and under what circumstances).
- Discussed *potential solution* to incorporate special ed design needs into prototypes—and the need to determine scope and scale.
- Discussed *potential solution* to incorporate pre-K in statewide master planning—and need to determine scope and scale.
- Discussed *potential solution* to incorporate adaptable, forward-looking IT infrastructure in design and renovation—and the need for equity and adequacy.
- Discussed *potential solution* of creating a state-level resource for planning, architectural engineering, and other services and the cost-benefit of such an approach.

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