

Governor's Commission on School Construction – Meeting Summary

Date: June 26, 2025
Location: via Zoom
Time: 10:00 a.m. – noon

Key Topics

1. Master Planning
2. Demographics, Enrollment, and School Building Consolidation

Desired Outcome

Commission determines next steps on above topics. Options include identifying additional information or analysis needed for decision-making and/or endorsing a recommendation in concept to be further developed with language for the commission's review and decision.

Attending

Commission Members. Valerie Landry (Chair), Fern Desjardins, Chelsey Fortin-Trimble (on behalf of Commissioner Pender Makin), Roy Gott, Chris Howell, Anthony Jaccarino, Jane McCall, Rhonda Sperrey

Maine DOE Staff. Scott Brown, Glenn Cummings, Laura Cyr, Chloe Teboe

Action Items

- ➔ **A breakout session is scheduled for July 8** to identify options for an entity that could lead, manage, coordinate, and/or monitor the many aspects of school construction.
- ➔ **The next general commission meeting is scheduled for Thursday, August 7.**
- ➔ **Superintendent Rhonda Sperrey** will provide information regarding the benefits—financial and qualitative—resulting from the consolidation of schools in her district.
- ➔ **Identify the type of information needed for master planning at the state or district levels or both.**

1. Master Planning

(Note: Unless explicitly stated, the comments below do not necessarily reflect agreement among commission members but rather questions or statements offered by one or more members or staff.)

Members agreed to continue to examine this topic, with the following comments and questions:

- It is important to identify the type of information needed by future decision-makers for planning at the district or state levels or both (e.g., assessment of infrastructure, projections for renovations and/or replacements based on age, site assessments, demographics, enrollment, capital costs, etc.)
- Master planning is data-heavy with benchmarks refreshed on a regular basis. What should the interval be?
- Master planning can establish a clear, comprehensive view of all that is happening, including urgent priorities, actions that could be delayed, competing interests, etc.

- Having more comprehensive, usable information may be helpful for districts. Less clear is the level of district interest in greater state-level involvement in either planning or technical assistance.
- More consistent standards for school construction would be beneficial.
- The Maine DOE obtains substantial information from the Maine Capital School Construction Program via the school visits during the rating process. It has an inventory (not an assessment) that could serve as a starting point.
- At the state level, could the capital planning process be simplified by identifying the oldest tier of facilities and addressing them first as part of a threshold recommendation?
- Planning requires resources (time and money) and expertise. Years ago, the Maine DOE attempted to implement a software program to be used by districts for planning purposes. It was overly complicated and abandoned. This might be, in part, why districts—although required by statute to have a 10-year capital plan—tend to focus on the immediate future.
- Another factor that may negatively affect long-term capital planning at the district level is the relatively high turnover of school board members and superintendents, making it more challenging to develop institutional knowledge and to undertake long-term planning. Also, knowledge and expertise surrounding school facilities is specific and may not always exist at the district level.
- There is a need for a consistent approach at the district level. At the moment, it is on a case-by-case basis, making it difficult for the state to move forward with the information.
- If the state is funding close to 100% of construction, is it possible to have a mindset shift in which the state identifies the schools most in need, as opposed to solely responding to applications, which some schools are not able to undertake due to capacity issues? Ought the application process be reconsidered?

2. Demographics, Enrollment, and School Building Consolidation

(Note: Unless explicitly stated, the comments below do not necessarily reflect agreement among commission members but rather questions or statements offered by one or more members or staff.)

Members agreed to continue to examine this topic, with the following comments and questions:

- It is important to move beyond the divisive nature of consolidation and identify the actual financial and qualitative results or projected results.
- Consolidation is not the sole solution for the school facility funding issue, but it would contribute to solving the problem, with the understanding that in some areas, it is neither possible nor beneficial.
- Consolidation would reduce long-term operational costs due to infrastructure improvements and staffing benefits (e.g., school envelope, grounds work, school nurse, facilities director, mechanical equipment, energy efficiency savings).
- Could incentives exist for consolidation within or across district lines?
- Consolidation benefits cut across different categories. The qualitative factors of consolidation for students are abundant, with the long-term financial advantages as a supporting aspect.
- It may be helpful to share a “10-years-later” perspective and advice from districts that have gone through the consolidation process.
- RSU 64 is a good example of the consolidation process and the results.

- For some, it is not about distance; it is about the destination—the education. For others, it is about community identity. Greater hesitation appears to exist regarding consolidated high schools. Often, the decision to consolidate comes down to where a school will be located.
- If the state funds 100% —and where circumstances are realistic from a distance perspective—should districts be expected to consolidate? If they choose not to, they have the option of using local funds.
- The 21-step process includes a regional analysis.
- What is the rate of districts breaking apart that have consolidated?
- This is an opportunity to leap forward with policy changes that help to address the problems stemming from limited resources and the existing backlog.
- Commission recommendations should be as precise as possible.