Maine Department of Education

1

EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Revised October 2025

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INTRODUCTION

Reimagining Maine's Schools For A New Era Of Learning

As we design schools for a rapidly evolving future, Educational Specifications, along with Maine's Space Allocation Guidelines and Public School Standards and Guidelines, serve as foundational planning tools. These documents aren't just technical blueprints—they are a vision for what learning environments must become in an age defined by innovation, inclusion, and adaptability.

Today's students are digital natives growing up in a globally connected, information-rich world. They demand more than passive learning; they need dynamic, engaging, and personalized experiences that prepare them to lead in an economy driven by creativity, collaboration, and continuous change. Learning no longer stops at the school walls—it extends into homes, communities, and the digital sphere. Facilities must reflect this shift, creating spaces that are flexible, future-ready, and inclusive for all learners.

Designing a school today means integrating emerging educational practices with insights from cognitive science, equity research, and student wellness. High-performing schools of today and tomorrow should:

- Foster rigorous academics alongside real-world, project-based learning.
- Prioritize equity, inclusivity, and universal design—particularly for students with disabilities and multilingual learners.
- Encourage collaboration through flexible spaces that support interdisciplinary teaching teams and personalized student groupings.
- Create healthy environments—with access to natural light, fresh air, and calming aesthetics—that support mental and physical well-being.
- Seamlessly embed technology, enabling hybrid learning models and expanding access to global learning networks.
- Function as lifelong learning hubs—adaptable for students, families, and community members beyond the traditional school day.

The guidelines that follow offer more than design standards—they provide a roadmap for building environments that reflect the aspirations of our communities and the evolving needs of learners. An investment in school construction offers a critical opportunity to think beyond the traditional school model and reimagine spaces where students can thrive.

Across the country and around the world, inspiring examples show what's possible when learning environments are intentionally crafted to support curiosity, engagement, and a sense of belonging. This is the moment to create schools that are not just buildings—but ecosystems for innovation, equity, and lifelong learning.

Guiding Principles For Future-Ready School Design

To meet the needs of a diverse student population and prepare for a rapidly changing world, new school facilities should be designed around the following principles:

- **Academic Excellence:** Support rigorous, standards-aligned instruction while allowing for individualized learning paths.
- **Real-World Relevance:** Integrate project-based, hands-on learning that connects students to their communities and future careers.
- **Equity and Access:** Design with every student in mind, removing barriers and ensuring universal access to quality learning opportunities.
- **Personalized Learning Environments:** Organize schools into smaller, supportive learning communities that emphasize strong relationships and safety.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** Include movable furniture, multi-use spaces, and modular layouts to accommodate evolving pedagogy and technologies.
- **Health and Wellness:** Foster well-being through improved air quality, natural lighting, quiet zones, and biophilic design (connecting building occupants to nature by incorporating natural elements, materials, and patterns into the built environment).
- **Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning:** Create spaces that encourage teacher collaboration, coaching, and co-planning.

Embracing Innovation While Honoring Community

Maine communities have a unique opportunity to shape educational environments that are both forward-thinking and deeply rooted in local values. Design should reflect the culture, history, and aspirations of each community while being future-focused and adaptable.

The state and local investment in new school construction is more than a building initiative—it's a commitment to equity, innovation, and community growth. Traditional classroom layouts and outdated assumptions about how students learn must give way to evidence-based design that supports how learning actually happens today.

Schools must be envisioned as learning ecosystems that are inclusive, sustainable, and agile—ready to meet not only today's expectations but also tomorrow's unknowns.

A Call to Action

These Educational Specifications are not static documents; they are living blueprints for transformative learning. We invite school administrators, architects, educators, and community stakeholders to think boldly, act collaboratively, and design with the future in mind.

Together, with state and local support, we can build schools that empower every learner, inspire every educator, and uplift every community.

SECTION I.
EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS DEFINITION

"Educational Specifications are the means by which a school administrative unit describes its educational goals and activities, and the interrelationships between those educational goals and activities and their associated spaces that need to be provided in a proposed or renovated school facility."

– Maine State Board of Education

SECTION II.
DEVELOPING EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS
A Collaborative Guide For School Communities

Creating strong Educational Specifications is essential to ensuring that a new or renovated school building truly supports the educational program and reflects the needs of the community it serves. This process should include broad input and collaboration from all user groups.

Who Is Involved?

While the school board holds ultimate responsibility for a school construction project, they often delegate planning tasks to one or more ad hoc building committees. These committees are responsible for:

- Conducting research
- Gathering input from stakeholders
- Ensuring alignment between educational programs and building design

Well-developed Educational Specifications help guide this alignment.

Approval Process

Before Educational Specifications can be submitted as part of the Concept Approval Process with the Department of Education, the school board must formally vote to approve them.

Note: The Department of Education does not approve the Educational Specifications themselves but requires them as part of the overall concept submission.

Representation Matters

To create effective and inclusive Educational Specifications, input from a wide range of stakeholders is essential. Please include a list of all individuals involved in the development process, along with the groups they represent.

At a minimum, the following groups must be represented:

- Students
- Faculty
- Staff
- School Administration
- Parents

- Community Members
- Local Officials

Role of the Architect

Architects may serve as advisors and technical resources during this process.

Key Objective

A major goal of this process is collaboration and communication among stakeholders. When user groups have the opportunity to work together thoughtfully, the resulting Educational Specifications are more likely to meet the educational, functional, and community goals of the project.

SECTION III.
THE EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS DOCUMENT

Instructions

- Please respond to each of the eight prompts in this section, using the guiding considerations to organize your response.
- Feel free to provide additional information that will help to better define your school's Educational Specifications.

Your completed Educational Specifications must include one print and one electronic copy with the following:

1. A completed cover page.
2. A list of all individuals involved in the preparation of the Educational Specifications.
3. Date, time, agendas, and minutes of all meetings involved in developing the Educational Specifications.
4. Minutes of the board meeting where the Educational Specifications were approved.
5. Narrative responses to each of the prompts, identifying each response using the corresponding number and title.
6. A list of site visits (location, date, those attending) to schools that informed the development of the Educational Specifications.
7. Any additional information, data, or research that will help others to better understand your school's Educational Specifications.

Question 1: **Purpose and Vision**

Prompt: What are your overarching educational priorities, and how does your vision foster inclusive, innovative, and future-ready learning environments for all students?

Guiding Considerations:

- Whole learner development
- Culturally responsive and inclusive practices
- Community identity and partnership
- Equitable access and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)
- Student voice and co-creation
- Personalization and future-ready skills
- Career and life readiness

Question 2: **Equity, Excellence, and Engagement**

Prompt: What programs will be housed in the facility, and how will they ensure inclusive access to the resources and opportunities necessary to meet high expectations for all learners?

Guiding Considerations:

- Inclusive support for diverse learners
- Competency-based and personalized learning
- Emerging technologies and blended learning
- Flexible pathways and holistic assessment
- Community-connected curriculum
- Engaged, responsible, and ethical citizenship

Question 3: **Program-Driven Design**

Prompt: How will the design and layout of your facility elevate teaching and learning, support flexible pedagogy, and foster a sense of belonging and connection across the school community?

Guiding Considerations:

- Agile, multi-use environments
- Interdisciplinary collaboration hubs
- Makerspaces and project studios
- Indoor/outdoor integration
- Flexible furniture and learning zones
- Transparency and student exhibition

Question 4: **Organizational Strategies For Success**

Prompt: How will the configuration and grouping of students, staff, and support services promote collaborative learning, efficient resource use, and strong community connections?

Guiding Considerations:

- Small Learning Communities
- Developmental or thematic layout
- Staff collaboration areas
- Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Connections
- Commons and central hubs
- Career-integrated learning pathways

Question 5: **Sustainable and Health-Promoting Design**

Prompt: What environmental and technological design strategies will ensure a healthy, sustainable, and inspiring learning environment?

Guiding Considerations:

- High-performance and efficient systems for heating and cooling
- Biophilic and resilient design
- Lighting systems including daylighting
- Indoor air quality
- Acoustical considerations
- Outdoor learning environments
- Durable and maintainable systems
- Building and site as teaching tool

Question 6: **Safety, Security, and Well-Being**

Prompt: How will the facility promote a culture of safety and wellness through design strategies that balance security and openness?

Guiding Considerations:

- Trauma-informed and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) design
- Access control and communication technology
- Separation between public and private spaces
- Transparency, ownership, and mental health supports

Question 7: **Adaptability and Innovation Over Time**

Prompt: How will the facility remain relevant and responsive to future shifts in pedagogy, technology, and community needs?

Guiding Considerations:

- Modular and flexible infrastructure
- Technological readiness
- Evolving career pathways and learning models
- Designing for adaptability and potential expansion
- Utilizing ongoing community feedback

Question 8: **Community Integration and Partnerships**

Prompt: How will the school serve as a civic hub that supports learning, wellness, and engagement beyond the school day?

Guiding Considerations:

- Shared access to school amenities
- Community and service partnerships
- Civic engagement and public programming
- Outdoor and multigenerational use

SECTION IV.
SCHOOL SYSTEM AUTHORIZATION

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School

_____

School System

_____

Date Approved by School Board

_____

Vote

_____

Superintendent's Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX

EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS RESOURCE GUIDE

MAINE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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APPENDIX
MAINE DOE EDUCATIONAL SPECIFICATIONS RESOURCE GUIDE

Executive Summary

This document provides a curated collection of resources—statewide and national—to assist school districts in the development of Educational Specifications (Ed Specs). These resources are organized by the prompts and guiding considerations used in the planning process for school facilities and programming. The intent is to streamline access to high-quality references aligned with Maine Department of Education (Maine DOE) goals and national best practices.

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1. Resources For Purpose and Vision

Prompt: What are your overarching educational priorities, and how does your vision foster inclusive, innovative, and future-ready learning environments for all students?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine DOE	maine.gov/doe	SEL, Equity, Future-Ready Learning
Maine Learning Results	maine.gov/doe/learning/diplomas/MaineLearningResults	K-12 Academic Standards
Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI)	mepri.maine.edu	Research On Equity, Instructional Practice
Maine Community Foundation	mainecf.org	Community-School Partnerships

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
U.S. DOE	ed.gov	Equity, Student-Centered Learning
National Education Association (NEA)	nea.org	Professional Development, Policy Guidance
Future Ready Schools	futureready.org	Tech Integration, Future-Forward Teaching
Learning Policy Institute	learningpolicyinstitute.org	Whole Child Education
Edutopia	edutopia.org	Innovative Instructional Practices

2. Resources For Equity, Excellence, and Engagement

Prompt: What programs will be housed in the facility, and how will they ensure inclusive access to the resources and opportunities necessary to meet high expectations for all learners?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine DOE	maine.gov/doe	SEL, Equity, Special Education, Maine Learning Results
Maine Learning Results	maine.gov/doe/learning/diplomas/MaineLearningResults	K-12 Academic Standards
Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI)	mepri.maine.edu	Differentiated Instruction, Equity
Maine Parent Federation	mpf.org	For Students with Disabilities and Special Education Programming
Equity and Excellence in Maine Schools	usm.maine.edu/equity-excellence-maine-schools	Equity in K-12 Schools

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
U.S. DOE	ed.gov	Equity, Personalized Learning
Future Ready Schools	futureready.org	Tech Integration, Future-Forward Teaching
Learning Policy Institute	learningpolicyinstitute.org	Personalization, Differentiation, Equity
Edutopia	edutopia.org	Innovative Instructional Practices
CAST: Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	cast.org	Differentiated Instruction, Equitable Learning Environments
Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)	exceptionalchildren.org	Special Education Best Practices
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)	iste.org	AI, Blended Learning, Virtual Learning
Portrait of a Graduate (P21 Framework)	portraitofagraduate.org	Fostering Citizenship
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL)	casel.org	SEL
PBL Works	pblworks.org	Project Based Learning

3. Resources For Program-Driven Design

Prompt: How will the design and layout of your facility elevate teaching and learning, support flexible pedagogy, and foster a sense of belonging and connection across the school community?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine DOE	maine.gov/doe	Collaborative and Project-Based Learning, Small Learning Communities, Flexible Environments
Maine School Facilities Management Association (MSFMA)	msmaweb.com	Flexible, Multi-Use Spaces and Modular Furniture Solutions
Maine Parent Federation	mpf.org	Creating Environments to Support Hands-on and Collaborative Opportunities
Maine Arts Commission	mainearts.maine.gov	Branding and Identity, Display

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Future Ready Schools	futureready.org	Tech Integration and Flexibility
American Architectural Foundation (AAF)	archfoundation.org	Collaborative and Adaptable Spaces
Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)	a4le.org	Small Learning Communities, Multi-Use Space, Outdoor Learning
Edutopia	edutopia.org	Interdisciplinary Teaching, Project-Based Learning, Collaborative Environments
Fielding International	fieldingintl.com/?playlist=bfc-4fa2&video=c213546	Creative Learning Environments
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)	iste.org	Integrating Technology

4. Resources For Organizational Strategies For Success

Prompt: How will the configuration and grouping of students, staff, and support services promote collaborative learning, efficient resource use, and strong community connections?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine DOE	maine.gov/doe	Organizational Models, CTE, Small Learning Communities
Maine Career and Technical Education (CTE)	mainecte.org	CTE Programs and Career Pathway Integration
Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI)	mepri.maine.edu	Organizational Models, Inter-disciplinary Connections
Maine Community Foundation	mainecf.org	Community-centered Education
Maine Workforce Development Board	maine.gov/swb	Career Pathway Development and Technical Programs

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
U.S. DOE	ed.gov	Organizational Models, Small Learning Communities, Equitable Distribution of Resources
National Education Association (NEA)	nea.org	Small Learning Communities
Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)	a4le.org	Planning Adjacencies, Zones, Professional Workspaces
National Middle School Association (AMLE)	amle.org	Grade-level Zones, Small Learning Communities
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)	nassp.org	Organizational Models, Small Learning Communities, Whole-School Connections
National Center of Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE)	safesupportivelearning.ed.gov	Safe, Supportive Learning Environments

5. Resources For Sustainable And Health-Promoting Design

Prompt: What environmental and technological design strategies will ensure a healthy, sustainable, and inspiring learning environment?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine DOE	maine.gov/doe	Sustainable School Design, Outdoor Learning, Subsidies
Efficiency Maine	efficiencymaine.com	Programs and Incentives
Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP)	maine.gov/dep	Sustainable Building Practices, Waste Reduction, Environmental Impact Assessment
Maine Audubon Society	maineaudubon.org	Connecting Buildings to Nature
Maine Public Utilities Commission (PUC)	maine.gov/mpuc	Renewable Energy Credits and Funding Opportunities
University of Maine Cooperative Extension	extension.umaine.edu	Outdoor Learning, Nature-Based Education

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
U.S. Green Building Council (LEED)	usgbc.org/leed	Sustainable Design, LEED Principles
Collaborative for High-Performance Schools (CHPS)	chps.net	Healthy, Sustainable, High Performance Learning Environments
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools	epa.gov/iaq-schools	Healthy Indoor Environments
National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL)	nrel.gov	Renewable Energy Systems in Schools
Living Building Challenge	living-future.org/lbc	Regenerative School Buildings as Teaching Tools
Green Schools Alliance (GSA)	greenschoolsalliance.org	Sustainability Best Practices
The Center for Green Schools (USGBC)	centerforgreenschools.org	Sustainable and Environmentally Conscious Schools
AIA Committee on Architecture for Education	aia.org/cae	Sustainable Design Principles

6. Resources For Safety, Security, And Well-Being

Prompt: How will the facility promote a culture of safety and wellness through design strategies that balance security and openness?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine School Safety Center (MSSC)	maine.gov/doe/schoolsafety	Safety and Security Best Practices
Maine Emergency Management Agency (MEMA)	maine.gov/mema	Emergency Preparedness
Maine CDC Public Health Emergency Preparedness (PHEP)	https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/healthy-living/health-and-safety/preparing-for-emergencies	Health and Safety Measures

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	dhs.gov/school-safety	Comprehensive Resources
Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) Guidelines	cpted.net	Principles and Training for Safety Through Design
National Association of School Resource Officers (NASRO)	nasro.org	Training and Resources to Support School Safety
Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS)	rems.ed.gov	Designing Communication Systems
National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC)	ncpc.org	Defensible Space Principles
Sandy Hook Promise - Safe Schools Initiative	sandyhookpromise.org	Culture of Safety, Accountability, and Student Ownership
American Institute of Architects (AIA) School Safety Design	aia.org	Integrating Safety into Design

7. Resources For Adaptability and Innovation Over Time

Prompt: How will the facility remain relevant and responsive to future shifts in pedagogy, technology, and community needs?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine DOE - School Facilities and Technology	maine.gov/doe	Future-Ready Schools, Technology Infrastructure, Career Pathways
Maine Learning Technology Initiative (MLTI)	maine.gov/doe/learning/technology/MLTI	Technology Infrastructure, Blended, Virtual, and AI Learning
Maine State Library - Digital Equity Resources	maine.gov/msl	Equitable Access to Technology and Digital Learning Tools
Maine Energy Office - Sustainability in Schools	maine.gov/energy	Sustainable Design that can Adapt to Technology Integration

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
U.S. DOE - Office of Educational Technology	tech.ed.gov	Integrating Technology into Learning Environments
Future Ready Schools	futureready.org	Adaptable School Facilities
International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)	iste.org	Leveraging Technology and AI for Future-Ready Schools
National Association of Career and Technical Education (ACTE)	acteonline.org	Innovation Pathways and Career Technical Education Programs
Consortium for School Networking (CoSN)	cosn.org	Support for Technology Infrastructure in Schools
21st Century School Fund	21csf.org	Planning for Adaptability and Future School Additions
Learning by Design (LBD)	learningbydesignmagazine.com	Case Studies for Technology-forward School Environments
Education Design Lab	eddesignlab.org	Facilities Aligned with Innovative Teaching and Learning Strategies
Digital Promise - Innovation in Learning Environments	digitalpromise.org	Blended, Virtual, AI-driven Learning Technologies

8. Resources For Community Integration and Partnerships

Prompt: How will the facility remain relevant and responsive to future shifts in pedagogy, technology, and community needs?

MAINE STATE RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Maine DOE - Community School Initiatives	maine.gov/doe	Schools as Community Hubs, Integrating Community Resources
Maine Adult Education Association	maineadulted.org	Integration of Adult Education and After School Programming
Maine Municipal Association (MMA)	memun.org	Alignment with Local Government and Community Programs
Maine CDC - Community Health Initiatives	maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc	Community Health and Wellness Initiatives in Schools
Maine Recreation and Parks Association	merpa.org	Athletic Fields, Playgrounds, Outdoor Amenities
Maine State Library	maine.gov/msl	Library Learning Commons to Support School and Community Use
Maine Revised Statute Title 20-A, Chapter 333 - Community Schools	mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-a/title20-Ach333sec0.html	Community Schools

NATIONAL RESOURCES		
AGENCY	**WEBSITE**	**KEY AREAS**
Coalition for Community Schools	communityschools.org	Schools as Community Hubs
National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA)	nrpa.org	After School and Summer Enrichment Activities in Schools
Safe Routes to School National Partnership	saferoutespartnership.org	Safe Community Access to School Facilities and Amenities
American Planning Association (APA)	planning.org	Integrating Schools with Community Infrastructure, Planning for Public Access

Maine Department of Education
Office of School Facilities
www.maine.gov/doe/schools/facilities/mcscp
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