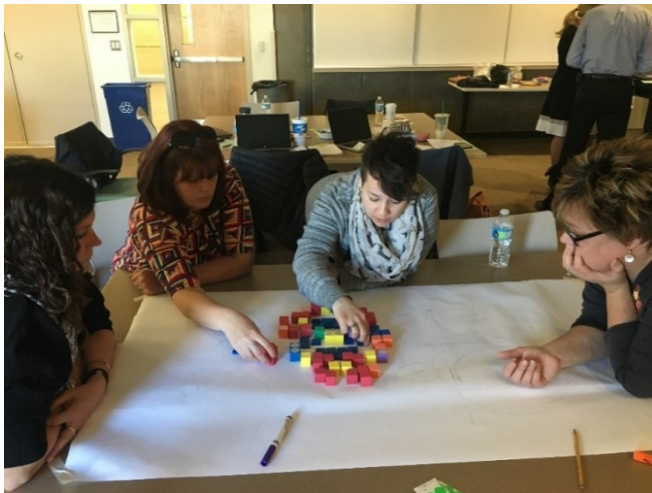


thinkSMART Planning, Inc./ Process and Work Plan

What Sets Us Apart? – We Create “Common Ground”

Years of working with communities around the US have revealed to us that great schools are the product of intentional consensus-building. How can we create these wonderful environments for teaching and learning if we weren't able to meet the diverse and varied needs of all those who use these places? And how could we get the type of authentic input needed from students, educators, administrators, community organizations, business leaders, maintenance and operations personnel, and many others who will learn, work and play in these facilities? Surely a method honoring the variety of experience, expertise and interests was needed in order to develop the Big Visionary Goals needed to make our schools outstanding.

“Creating Common Ground” is a process that has been developed over many years and with dozens of school communities. It was originally derived from the idea that every person communicates and learns differently. During early workshops, it was evident that educators generally favored verbal/written communication while architect/designers preferred visual and hands-on communication. How, then can they ever successfully communicate? The process described below addresses and engages the communication styles of all, including non-professionals such as community members, parents, and students.



The purpose of a good planning process is to develop the comprehensive vision required to integrate user goals, facilities, personnel, and community goals into a long-range plan that will guide both the district and the design team and in creating a dynamic and flexible facilities.

The educational specification process typically consists of four large group meetings with intermittent activities. The ideal timeline is 12 weeks, allowing all parties to bring information to the table during each session. The following summarizes the process and outcomes expected:

Educational Specifications Process & Work Plan





Workshop 1 Learning Context

All workshops are guided by a facilitator; the role of the facilitator is to function as a guide or “discussion leader” for the group. The process of facilitation is a way of providing leadership without taking the reins. A facilitator’s job is to get others to assume responsibility and take the lead. The facilitator skillfully and thoughtfully guides the content and process in order to evoke participation and creativity.

In Workshop 1 we ask the participants to set the Learning Context. Participants are asked to describe current district/ school/ project strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and aspirations. We work together to establish project vision, goals and objectives.

Additionally, the facilitator will work to get everyone on the same page by providing a base of information on current trends in teaching and learning as well as school facility trends. Activities at the first workshop include presentations in any number of formats including the following:

Presentations

Quick and informative with lots of graphics. Here are a few techniques:

Pechakucha: A way to get a lot of information from multiple speakers in a short time; 20 slides are shown for 20 seconds each (6 minutes and 40 seconds in total). The format keeps presentations concise and fast-paced.

Blended Learning/Videos: A lot of great ideas are shared on the web through Ted Talks, Edutopia, etc. One way to get ideas across for group discussion is to share informational videos, either in the workshop or as homework – in a blended learning approach.

Wiki-Sites: Free website hostings such as “Google Sites” allows the facilitator to post information to the whole group efficiently. Group members can study resource materials (white papers, web links, videos, project materials) and make comments online at their leisure.



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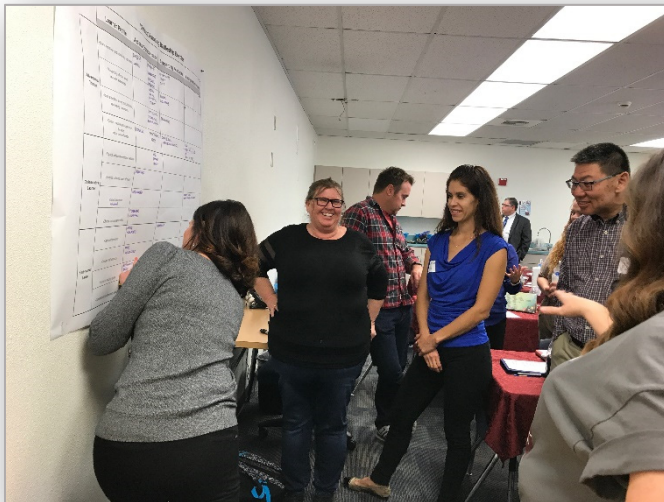
Input: Interviews & Gathering Input

Gathering Input The next big question is how to efficiently and effectively get input from everyone?

It is most important to get the right people to the meeting. Educators work along-side students, designers, and community. The most interesting solutions arise from very different viewpoints. Each representative brings ideas and experience that others do not have. A variety of group meetings, from large comprehensive to small focused user groups must be conducted. Some participants won't talk in front of a group, but have a lot to say when in a small group.

The most important aspect of gathering input is that the facilitator only guides, never manipulates the group's work. Authentic solutions don't arise from a pre-determined template designed to produce the desired outcome. It is important that the work of a committee must be organic.

Our team gathers input through a community and stakeholder engagement process; this includes a variety of stakeholders including students, staff, educators, downtown associations, community-based organizations, governmental representatives, and parents.



Most planners and architects are taught to interview users in order to find out about their needs. While lots of great information comes out of the interview process, it falls short in the area of prioritizing. Who is ultimately responsible for deciding what the most important ideas or concepts to pursue? We have found a few different survey methods that incorporate visual, verbal, and written communication.

One on one interviews: allow individuals to bring personal ideas and issues to the table.

Carousel Questions: designed to get feedback in small groups, the large group is divided into 3 smaller groups. Each group receives a question to work on together. After a short period of time, each group rotates to another station/question. After all groups have rotated, the larger group discusses areas of agreement or disagreement.

03

Workshop 2 Learning Process

Workshop 2 is to discuss the District's Big Picture Goals for teaching and learning.

Activities at this workshop include exercises designed to ferret out ideas and bring about visionary thinking. Some of the activities are listed below:

Battleship Charts: Utilizing a matrix, groups work together to identify and describe characteristics of learning, space and programs.

Prioritization: After creating a number of great ideas and possibilities, the workshop teams will need to reach consensus and establish priorities. We use several tools to guide this.

04

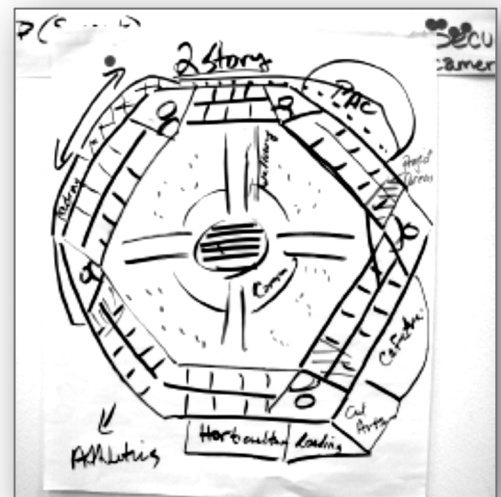
Tours

Touring peer facilities, whether virtually or physically can be extremely helpful in transferring new ideas and new building organizational strategies to the committee.

05

Workshop 3 Learning Organization

At Workshop 3 the Planning Team discusses Learning Organization; the ways in which we can cluster students, subjects, time and environments. Many types of learning environments are shared with the group and ideas are openly discussed such as project-based learning, STEM subjects, grade-level groupings, etc.



06



Surveys

Depending upon the project need, a variety of **Surveys** are developed to garner information:

Community Surveys: allows for a large number of community members to contribute to the process, this can be online, paper or verbal.

Pop-up Surveys (taste test): in a group activity, we like to show the group multiple images (camp fire, kids fishing, technology, etc.) to get a “gut reaction” – then we discuss what it was about this imagery they found appealing or distasteful.

Visual Survey: We paste up images of many different schools, classrooms, science labs, collaboration spaces, outdoor areas, etc. on large sheets of paper and have group members vote on which of these feel like what they envision for their school. We ask them to write comments about what they like/dislike. These comments help to inform the design through materials choice, lighting, exterior finishes, etc.



07



Workshop 4 Learning Environment

In order to address the unique communication styles of the diverse workshop participants, we utilize a variety of hands-on workshop exercises to explore functional relationships, express ideas about the characteristics of a desired learning space, or to express how activities might happen in the school.

In this workshop, the planning team begins to express functional relationships by using a number of different manipulatives and exercises. Some of these are explained below.



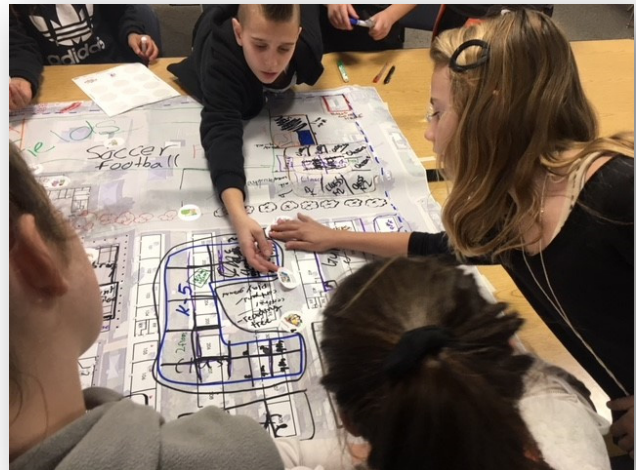
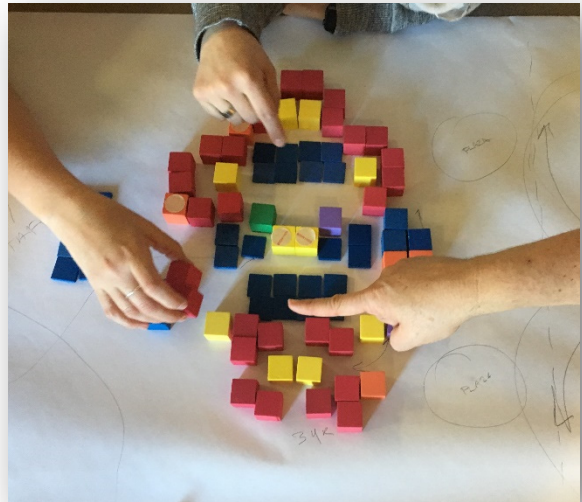
Block Exercises: Foam blocks are utilized as a tool to assist the committee in quickly communicating ideas regarding facilities to one-another. Non-professionals quickly grasp the concepts and communicate ideas to the group as a whole. All ideas are cataloged as part of the overall facility planning process.

Legos: Legos are a great stacking tool that can characterize vertical relationships as well as horizontal.

Kit of parts: A kit of parts consisting of markers, post-its, pipe-cleaners, masking tape, tiny characters, palm tree, etc. are often provided to teams to express ideas graphically and creatively.

Post-it Note Prioritization: A large-scale grid is created indicating “do-ability” on one axis versus “desirability” on the other. Participants are charged with cataloging ideas in just a few words on small post-its, and then placing the note within the parameters. Those items falling within the High “do-ability” and High “desirability” quadrant are identified as key items for top consideration.

Floor Plan Stickers: Utilizing a tool for evaluating several concept designs, participants are given stickers with student activity symbols such as quiet study, group work, messy projects, noisy activities, large gathering, etc. These stickers are then placed on each plan. Plans with a lack or abundance of desired qualities (such as collaborative breakout areas) are quickly identified for further study.



Documentation

Final documentation of the process results in a “recipe book” for design – the educational specifications. This document may be used for new construction, renovations, additions, or components. We provide this in an electronic format so that all designers and engineers will have ready access. The educational specifications document consists of the following basic components:

Part I Project Description – An overall description of project scope, goals and vision for the project as developed in committee work

Part II Project Design Factors– Contains building design parameters such as building design concepts, campus configuration, enrollment, growth, demographics, and key concepts.

Part III Activity-Area Requirements– Describes all component areas for the project such as administration, teaching areas, athletics, food service, etc.

Part IV Summary of Area Relationships– Functional relationship diagrams for each area and the overall campus

Part V Summary of Space Requirements– The programmatic areas and space needs associated.

Appendices- Room detail sheets for each room describing finishes, fixtures, use, etc.