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EVALUATION OF THE 2000 LONG-RANGE FACILITIES PLAN FOR
DENNIS TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

By
M. Elizabeth Barrett

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
Of
The Graduate School
At
Rowan University
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Approved by

Date Approved 4/20/05

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ABSTRACT

**Elizabeth Barrett
Evaluation of the 2000 Long-Range Facilities Plan for
Dennis Township School District
2004-2005
Dr. Dennis Hurley
Educational Leadership**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate Dennis Township School District's Long-Range Facilities Plan (LRFP) submitted to the Commissioner of Education in October 2000 to comply with the New Jersey Educational Facilities and Construction Act. All New Jersey school districts are required to submit a Long-Range Facilities Plan to the New Jersey Commissioner of Education every five years. The law does not allow any district to advance a school facilities building project for which they are seeking capital funding from the State until the district has an approved Long-Range Facilities Plan. The document detailed the district's school facilities needs and how it addressed those needs over the succeeding five years. Since 2000 Dennis Township has built a new primary school, and has made extensive renovations to the existing elementary/middle school. All projects were scheduled to be completed before the next LRFP is due on October 1, 2005. The Long-Range Facilities Plan is composed of five sections. They are: an existing building and site inventory; evaluative criteria; existing facilities assessment; plan development; Long-Range Facilities Plan submission; and a strategy for delivering education that is consistent with the Core Curriculum Content Standards.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

		PAGE
	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
CHAPTER		
ONE	INTRODUCTION.....	1
	Focus of the Study.....	1
	Purpose of the Study.....	1
	Definitions	2
	Limitations of the Study.....	3
	Setting of the Study.....	3
	Significance of the Study.....	5
	Relationship of the Study to ISLLC Standards.....	6
TWO	REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	7
	Inadequacies of the Facilities.....	7
	History of the Court Decisions and Law.....	7
	Highlights of The Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act.....	8
THREE	DESIGN OF THE STUDY.....	14
	Condition of the Facilities Prior to 2000.....	14
	Deficiencies within the District.....	14
	Condition of the Facilities in 2005.....	17
FOUR	FINDINGS.....	18
	Areas of 100% Compliance.....	18
	Areas of 80% Compliance.....	19
FIVE	CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FURTHER STUDY.....	22
	Conclusions.....	22
	Implications.....	24
	Further Study.....	25
	REFERENCES.....	26

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

Focus of the Study

New Jersey is addressing the problem of aging, overcrowded and outdated schools as reflected in the Department of Education's vision statement: "To provide every child in the State of New Jersey with a safe, educationally enhanced experience" (NJDOE, 2003). Safe, modern, state-of-the-art learning facilities are a critical aspect. Public resources will be maximized through comprehensive and collaborative local and statewide planning, design, construction, and financing (NJDOE, 2003). Legislation in the form of the New Jersey Educational Facilities and Construction (NJEFC) mandated efforts to develop a Long-Range Facilities Plan (LRFP) for school facilities needs. This study examined the 2000 LRFP drawn up by Dennis Township School District in its effort to assure that current and future needs of all pupils in the district were met.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Long-Range Facilities Plan for Dennis Township School District met the district's facilities needs and complied with New Jersey statutes. The LRFP is composed of an inventory of existing buildings and sites, enrollment projections, school models, funded projects, rooms' inventory; facilities condition assessments, proposed rooms, and scope of the work. The study resulted in an assessment of the LRFP that was submitted to the Dennis Township Planning Board and the New Jersey Commissioner of Education on October 1, 2000.

Definitions

Abbot v. Burke: New Jersey Supreme Court case filed February 5, 1981, charged that the State had failed to remedy the disparities between the wealthy and poor districts, and the 30 listed districts were not capable of providing a system of thorough and efficient education.

Area Cost Allowance: \$138 per square foot allowance used in determining preliminary eligible costs of school facilities projects.

Core Curriculum Content Standards: Standards developed by the New Jersey State Department of Education in 1996 that established expectations for students to meet in seven academic and workplace readiness areas.

Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Finance Act of 1996 (CEIFA): New Jersey statute that adopted the Core Curriculum Content Standards to ensure that all students will have the programs necessary to meet the thorough and efficient requirements, funding to implement programs, and testing to ensure success and accountability.

District Factor Group: Ranking of school districts prepared by the New Jersey Department of Education based on indicators available in the decennial census. Districts are arranged in ten groups, DFG A through DFG J, A being the group with the lowest socioeconomic status, J being the highest.

School Facility: any structure, building or facility used wholly or in part for academic purposes, including fixtures, furnishings and equipment.

School Facilities Project: the acquisition, demolition, construction, improvement, repair, alteration, modernization, reconstruction or maintenance of a school facility.

Unhoused Students: The number of students in excess of the functional capacity of a school facility and a community provider facility providing early childhood programs for preschool.

Useful Life: the applicable recovery period for depreciation purposes determined under Section 168 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to the facilities at Dennis Township Primary, Elementary, and Middle Schools in Dennis Township, Cape May County, New Jersey. The new primary school on Hagan Road in Clermont, which opened in April of 2004, houses a Pre-school Handicapped Program, three full-day Kindergartens, and four First Grades, and four Second Grades

Setting of the Study

Dennis Township, New Jersey is a rural community covering 61.4 square miles in Northern Cape May County. It extends from the shores of the Delaware Bay to the wetlands and intercoastal waterway that separate the barrier island of Sea Isle City from the mainland.

In 1826, the new township of Dennis was created when the New Jersey Legislature divided Upper Township to the north in half. The name was taken from Dennis Creek and Landing. The area was a center of lumbering and shipbuilding at the time, and one of the most prosperous precincts in the county (Hunter, 1965).

The township is today composed of seven villages: Ocean View, Clermont, South Seaville, South Dennis, Dennisville, Eldora, and Belleplain. Much of the township is in

the area known as the Pinelands. Large areas are protected wetlands. Except for the Route 9 and Route 47 corridors, there is little commercial development.

According to the latest census, the population of Dennis Township is 6,492. The racial profile indicates that 97.4% of the residents are white; 1% African American, .1% American Indian/Alaskan Native, .4% Asian, .6% other, and .5% two or more races (U.S Census, 2000).

Social characteristics of adults over 25 years of age show that 83.2% are high school graduates, and 20.5% have achieved a bachelor's degree or higher (U.S. Census, 2000).

In economic terms, 62.9% of the residents, 16 years of age and older, are employed in the labor force. The median family income is \$61,445. Four percent of the population fall below the poverty level. The median value of a single family owner-occupied home is \$135,500 (U.S. Census, 2000).

Based on these census figures, the New Jersey Department of Education has ranked Dennis Township School District with a District Factor Grouping of DE. Ranking ranges from J, the highest to A, the lowest socioeconomic status. The DFG system is used, in part, to determine a school district's level of state aid to education for which it qualifies.

Dennis Township School District is a Pre-K through Eighth Grade District in Cape May County, New Jersey. Since 1952 all grades had been housed in the K-8 Building in Dennisville. With a pattern of increasing enrollment and the passage of the \$8.6 billion school construction legislation, the voters of Dennis Township approved a bond referendum to construct a new Pre-K through Grade 2 primary school and make

extensive renovations to the existing building. By 2004 the Board of Education operated two schools. The Primary School was located on Hagan Road in Clermont. It housed a Pre-K Handicapped class, three Kindergarten classes, four First Grade classes, and four Second Grade classes. The other school was located on Academy Road in historic Dennisville. Extensive renovations began in 2003 and were completed by December 31, 2005. The Elementary and Middle Schools shared the building and core services, including the cafeteria, media center, gymnasium, health suite, music area, art room, and computer lab. The Elementary School housed three Third Grades, four Fourth Grades, and Four Fifth Grades. Four hundred eighty-two children attended classes in the primary and elementary grades. The Middle School housed 306 students in grades six through eight. The professional staff in the district numbered 78.

From 1998-1999 through 2003-2004 the district's school population had decreased by 8%. Shrinking school populations was a condition found in every district in Cape May County. Real estate prices had risen to a level beyond the reach of many middle class families (The Press, 9/13/04)

Significance of the Study

On July 18, 2000 The New Jersey Education Facilities Construction and Financing Act (NJEFCA) launched the New Jersey School Construction Initiative (NJSCI). With this initiative, New Jersey took a lead in addressing a nation-wide problem of aging, overcrowded, and outdated facilities. Further, the New Jersey Supreme Court's 1998 Abbott Decision required the State to provide certain educational infrastructure improvements to special needs districts. The NJEFCA of 2000 provided a program that covered all school districts in the State. The development of a five-year

Long-Range Facilities Plan assured that current and future needs of all pupils in the State would be met.

Relationship of the Study to the Interstate Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards

Standard 4: A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources. The administrator has knowledge understanding of community relations and identifying and using community resources. The administrator believes in, values, and is committed to community and families providing resources for the enhancement of learning. The administrator facilitates and engages in activities ensuring that there is use of community information from all, even diverse, stakeholders.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

INADEQUACIES OF FACILITIES

In a report conducted between January 1994 and March 1995 by the United States General Accounting Office, school officials in a national sample of schools reported that most schools met key facilities and environmental requirements. However, most were unprepared for the twenty-first century in critical areas. Most schools reported that they did not fully use modern technology. They lacked the system or building infrastructure to fully use computers and television. Many schools reported that computer and other equipment were not networked or connected to the Internet. Over 14 million students attended 40% of the schools that reported that their facilities could not meet the functional requirements of laboratory science or large-group instruction. Over 50% of the schools reported unsatisfactory flexibility of instructional space necessary to implement many teaching strategies. About two-thirds of respondents reported they could not meet the requirements of before-or after-school care or day care. Overall, schools in central cities and those with 50% or more minority populations were even more likely to have insufficient technology elements and a higher number of unsatisfactory environmental conditions, especially lighting and physical security. The report concluded that the nation's schools needed about \$112 billion to repair or upgrade America's multimillion dollar investment in school facilities to good overall condition (USGAO, 1995).

HISTORY OF COURT DECISIONS AND LAW

In New Jersey the Abbott v. Burke, 1997 decision ordered the Commissioner of Education to "review the facilities needs of the then 31 Abbott Districts and provide

recommendations concerning how the State should address those needs... including consideration of appropriate and alternative funding as necessary” (Abbott v. Burke, 1997). The court also found that “the State must, as part of its obligation, under the education clause, provide facilities for children in the Abbott districts that will be sufficient to enable students to achieve the substantive standards that now define a thorough and efficient education and the quality of the facilities cannot depend on the district’s willingness or ability to raise taxes or incur debt” (Abbott v. Burke, 1997).

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL FACILITIES CONSTRUCTION AND FINANCING ACT

Lawmakers then approved \$6 billion for new urban schools and \$2.6 billion in funding for suburban schools (P.L.2000,18A:7G-1). Thus began one of the most ambitious efforts to replace and repair the most unsafe, overcrowded, and dilapidated schools in the State of New Jersey. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) contracted with the Vitteta Group, a recognized expert in school architecture and educational space planning, to assess all school buildings in the Abbott districts. The assessment identified deficiencies and provided an estimate of the costs to remedy those deficiencies. The assessment included information pertaining to:

- Capacity, enrollments, and average class size
- Program provisions and functional issues
- Conformance with the State Technology Plan
- Building sizes, ages, and construction types
- Site conditions, including play areas and circulation
- Exterior and interior building components
- Mechanical, plumbing, and fire protection systems

- Electrical and lighting systems
- Current code compliance (NJDOE, 2003).

Considering that Abbott districts at that time contained 429 public school buildings, and the average age of a building was 67 years old, and the average age of an addition was 33 years old, the DOE had a monumental goal to achieve (Sack, 2004).

In July of 2000, the New Jersey Legislature passed The Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act to assist in complying with the Constitution of the State of New Jersey which required the Legislature to provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools ensuring that students are educated in facilities that are safe, healthy, and conducive to learning. In order to ensure that the responsibility for adequate educational facilities was met, there was a need to establish efficiency standards for facilities at elementary, middle, and secondary levels. School facilities construction must be achieved in as efficient a manner as possible, and a mechanism to assure proper maintenance of new facilities was established and implemented to reduce the overall cost of the program and preserve the infrastructure investment (P.L. 2000,C.18A: 7G-2).

Beginning in the school year 1999-2000 each school district in New Jersey was required to prepare and submit to the Commissioner of Education a Long-Range Facilities Plan, which detailed the district's facilities' needs, and plans to address those needs in the ensuing five years. Every five years thereafter each district was required to submit an updated LRFP. Any application for a school facilities project would not be approved unless the district had filed a LRFP that was consistent with the application and

had been approved by the Commissioner (P.L.2000, C.18A: 7G-4). Among other requirements each LRFP included a cohort survival methodology accompanied by a certification by a qualified demographer that served as the basis for identifying the capacity and program needs detailed in the LRFP. Each LRFP included an educational adequacy inventory of all existing school facilities in the district, the identification of all deficiencies in the district's current inventory of facilities, and any proposed plan for future construction and/or renovation. Each district determined the number of unhoused students, and submitted the LRFP to the local municipality's planning board for review (P.L. 2000, C.18A:7G4).

If the Commissioner determines that a school facilities project meets the required criteria, the Commissioner will calculate the preliminary eligible costs, and the excess costs, if any. For Abbott districts, the state share would be 100% of the final eligible costs. For all other districts, the state share will be the amount equal to 115% of the district aid percentage, but not less than 40% of the final eligible costs (P.L. 2000, C.18A7G-5). The State will calculate eligible costs by determining the amount of allowable square footage (as per facilities efficiency standards), and multiplying that square footage by \$138 (the per square foot cost allowance). The facilities efficiency standards provide for 125 square feet per elementary student. For example, the total allowable square footage for a building housing 50 additional elementary students would equal 6,250 (50 students x 125 square feet). The State determines the district's state aid by multiplying the square footage (6,250) by the square foot cost allowance of \$138 ($\$138 \times 6250 \text{ square feet} = \$862,500$). If a district qualifies for the minimum 40% state

aid, it would be entitled to an up-front cash grant of \$345,000 (.40 x \$862,500= \$345,000) (NJDOE, 2003).

In addition to the LRFP, each school district was required to make an annual report of its progress in conforming to the standards for the evaluation of school performance (P.L. 2000, C.18A: 7A-11).

The Board of School Estimates shall fix and determine the local share amount necessary for all projects and certify the amount to the local Board of Education, and the governing body of the municipality (N.J.S.18A: 22-19).

Notice of a public hearing by the School Board with regard to the amount of money to be raised locally will be published in at least one newspaper seven days prior to the hearing (N.J.S.18A: 22-28).

On the date and time of the public hearing, taxpayers and other interested persons will have the opportunity to present objections (N.J.S 18A: 22-29).

A bond referendum, framed as a single question, will ask for voter approval for the total cost of the project, and will disclose the State debt service aid, and the amount of any costs in addition to the final eligible costs of the project (N.J.S.18A: 22-39).

A school district with a state aid percentage of less than 50% can opt to receive state aid for the project as debt service, or as a cash grant. The district also has the option of constructing the project on its own, or using the New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA). Abbott districts must use the Authority, and approved costs will be paid by the State through NJEDA financing (NJDOE).

The Comprehensive Maintenance Plan, Title 6, Chapter 24 has set rules intended to implement the provisions of the EFCFA. The law requires districts to have a

Comprehensive Maintenance Plan (CMP) for school facilities, and to make the appropriate investment in the maintenance of school facilities. Each district's first plan is due to the Division of Facilities and Transportation on October 30 of every school year.

Requirements include:

- Actual expenditures for the two years prior to the filing year
- Required maintenance activities and estimated costs
- Each school's facilities maintenance plans and estimated costs allocated

separately

- The annual maintenance-reserve deposit
- Asbestos abatement activities
- Required testing, including those for radon and safe drinking water
- Certifications of accuracy
- A plan to implement corrections of deficiencies (C.M.P., N.J.A.C. 6:24-3.1).

Newly constructed school facilities must obtain certification that the contractor has provided a maintenance package that contains manufacturers' warranties, owners' manuals, required maintenance and testing instructions, and a summary of all of these. The maintenance package must cover the useful life of the project, and be incorporated into the Comprehensive Maintenance Plan. The (CMP) will be reviewed by the Division to determine if the amount of the maintenance deposit is correct; activities are accurately reported for the current and prior year; and all certifications by school administrators are completed (C.M.P., N.J.A.C. 6: 24-3.2).

Despite considerable efforts to make improvements in school facilities in New Jersey, concerns were still being expressed over the condition of many of the State's

public schools. A survey commissioned by The Education Law Center in Newark reported that facility shortcomings in Abbott districts “clearly need attention”. The survey received 456 responses from 1700 questionnaires sent to principals across the State. The response rate was 27%. Eighty percent of respondents said their schools were adequate overall, but some said their buildings had inadequate facilities for subjects such as science, music or art. High schools received lower marks than elementary schools and middle schools. In the highest-poverty districts, 65% of principals reported their facilities to be adequate. Only 45% of high schools were deemed adequate compared with 95 % of the wealthiest subgroup of districts (Sack, 2004)

CHAPTER 3 DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Dennis Township School District submitted its Long Range Facilities Plan to the New Jersey Commissioner of Education in October of 2000. It contained information on the number of existing facilities, the current and projected enrollment figures, the educational adequacy, or lack thereof, of the existing facility, planned corrections and their costs, and the number of substandard spaces. Based on the then current enrollment of 891 students, the number of unhoused students was determined to be 453. The projected enrollment was 1065.

CONDITION OF THE FACILITIES PRIOR TO 2000

The single existing facility was built in 1952 when the Board of Education consolidated seven of the village schools that operated within the district. The new school was constructed and opened in September 1952. It consisted of four classrooms. It housed fifth through eighth grades. In 1957 an addition was built to accommodate the Kindergarten through fourth grades. A third wing was added in 1965 providing more classrooms, a cafeteria, and front office (Hunter, 1965). In 1980 a middle school wing was added. In 1989 a gymnasium, media center health suite, and eight classrooms were built to accommodate increased enrollment. The most recent addition of ten classrooms in 1998 completed the last phase of expansion. The maximum allowable percentage of building coverage has been reached.

DEFICIENCIES WITHIN THE DISTRICT

By 2000 the oldest sections of the school were over fifty years old. The inadequacies of educational spaces and facilities deficiencies were considerable. Attempts to update were sporadic and piecemeal. The school needed to be modernized to

meet the needs of the 21st Century, especially in the area of technology. Wiring for Internet capability, cable and telephone, new PA system and sound fields were needed throughout. Air conditioning and heating improvements were called for. New doors, interior, exterior, and hardware, windows and window treatments were necessary. Flooring needed to be replaced. Walls needed painting. Ceiling tiles needed to be replaced. Restroom needed to be updated to meet the requirements of The Americans with Disabilities Code. Blackboards, bulletin boards, and furniture needed replacement. Fire Code violations needed correction. Structural and foundation deficiencies required concrete footings and slabs to be replaced. Replacement of structural steel, concrete block and brick veneers were called for. Sections of the oldest portions of the roof needed to be replaced. An expanded and updated cafeteria and new offices for the Child Study Team were planned. Additional storage area for the gym equipment was necessary. Finally, a connector hallway between wings was planned.

In order to take advantage of the 40% State Aid available to Non-Abbott districts, the Board of Education put a bond referendum to the voters to authorize construction of a new primary school to house Pre-K through second grade, as well as, to fund the much needed renovations to the existing school building. In 2002 the referendum was approved and plans moved forward to acquire a desirable building site.

In this endeavor, a delay of several months occurred when the owner of the selected parcel of land was adamant about not selling the property. When condemnation procedures began, vocal opponents of the process attended public hearings. The issue polarized the citizens. Distrust of the Board of Education, the Superintendent, and the School Business Administrator grew. The new school came to be perceived as something

the community did not want and could not afford. After some delicate negotiations the sale finalized. As a consequence, however, all phases of the projects were delayed. In the school elections the budget, which called for a 52-cent increase in property taxes, was soundly defeated. The new primary school, targeted to open 2003, would contain preschool and regular classrooms, a cafetorium, library, computer room, health suite, plus main and district offices. Estimated costs to achieve the planned repairs, upgrades, additions and new construction amounted to \$13,666,278. Finally bids went out and contracts were awarded. Groundbreaking for the new primary school took place on March 29, 2003. Site work has already begun and the work progressed in a timely fashion. The goal now was to have a "soft opening" in the spring of 2004 in order to vacate rooms in the existing building to allow work to begin as soon as possible.

By April of 2004, the Primary School received Certificate of Occupancy. Over the Easter Break the Pre-K and first grade classrooms moved into the new building. Two third grade classes and the art room relocated to the empty classrooms. Work began immediately on the kitchen expansion and Child Study Team offices. Work continued in full force over the summer. When school opened in September the Primary School was fully operational. Classrooms in the Elementary/ Middle School were mostly complete. Some work remained to be completed in the cafeteria. It remained closed. Bag lunches were prepared in the Primary School and transported to the Elementary/Middle School until the middle of October. The art room was also not ready for students. Flooring, plumbing, and shelving were incomplete. Students used an empty classroom for art instruction for the first three weeks of school. The computer lab and Child Study Team

offices were not available until November. Interior doors and hardware installation were completed in November as well.

CONDITION OF THE FACILITIES IN 2005

As of January 2005, the following areas were completed: the hallway connector, between the Middle School and the Elementary School, two small group instruction rooms, the middle school teachers' workroom, and one restroom. Plans for a new Middle School office suite were postponed indefinitely, and plans for a porte-cochere for the middle school entrance were cancelled.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

Dennis Township School District filed its Quality Assurance Annual Report (QAAR) in November of 2004. In Section V, Condition of School Facilities, the report indicated that the two projects identified in its 2000 Long-Range Facilities Plan were completed with a cost of \$11,331,526. The capital projects addressed in the LRFP were the construction of a new Primary School (PreK-2) at a cost of \$7,345,600 and renovation of the existing Elementary/Middle School (3-8) at a cost of \$3,985,926.

AREAS OF 100% COMPLIANCE

Administrative

A certificate of compliance with the Uniform Fire Code was issued by the local fire official/inspector within the year. An annual inspection report of the local health official was available. An approved and current asbestos management plan was available. An annual inspection report of the Department of Environmental Protection for the operation of a sewage treatment plant was available. Licenses for high and low pressure boiler operators were current. A potable water supply inspection report for water supply from a private source was available.

Exits and Exteriors

Securely fastened weatherproof plates covered exterior switches and receptacles. Exterior fixtures were securely mounted with no exposed wires. All exterior exits were operable and free of obstructions. Panic hardware was provided on exit doors of all spaces with an occupancy load/capacity of 50 or more persons.

Interior

Securely fastened plates covered switches, receptacles and junction boxes. Electrical wires are completely enclosed or in surface mounted cabinets. Metal covers protected fuses and/or circuit breaker panels, and all unused circuit breaker openings were covered. Combustible items were a minimum of 36 inches from electrical power sources or equipment. Instructional areas were free of all unapproved construction. Doors on any occupied space were free of dead bolts or slide bolts and permitted exiting without use of a key. Unobstructed vision panels with code-approved glass were installed in doors with opening into corridors. All exterior glazing was safety glazing (QAAR, 2004).

AREAS OF 80% COMPLIANCE

Exits and Exteriors

Exterior walls were free of structural cracks, loose masonry and crumbling parapets. Lintels were free of rust and flaking. Ground fault interrupters were in place in accordance with code. Gutters and downspouts were in good condition and were secured to the soffit and wall. Runoff was unobstructed. The grounds were free of holes, glass, stumps, roots, rocks and other hazardous obstacles. The playground area equipment was in safe operating condition. A soft composition was provided at the base of playground equipment in order to prevent injuries. Playground equipment complies with NJAC 5:23-11 and the district maintained documentation of compliance and annual inspections. General-purpose play areas and fields were provided for the conduct of physical education programs and free play. Fences were maintained and were free of holes. Exit access corridors were free of excessive combustible materials and items being stored.

Interiors

The student enrollment of the school as reported on the Fall Survey did not exceed the educational functional capacity of the school. Emergency evacuation procedures were posted at a visible height and standard location in all instructional areas and instructional staff was familiar with procedures. Individual mechanical ventilation units or central mechanical ventilation units were operating in all instructional rooms, toilet facilities and other student occupied areas. Air conditioners were operational in windowless interior areas. Chalkboard, whiteboard or display boards in instructional areas were free of cracks and jagged edges. Electrical extension cords were used appropriately. Multi-taps were not used. Lighting levels in all areas, as measured with a light meter complied with code. Lens covers were supplied. Ceilings, walls and floors were free of holes, sags, evidence of water damage and other hazardous conditions. Floors were clean and free of trash, and facilities were provided for disposal of trash. Storage racks in all areas were properly secured from tipping. Student lockers were usable with doors and locks operable. Gas-powered equipment was stored in proper areas and not located in boiler rooms or other hazardous areas. Flammable and combustible materials were stored in rated cabinets. Drinking fountains were provided with sufficient water pressure. Student toilet facilities were accessible, at all times, during occupancy of the building. Stall partitions were secured and doors were provided. Noninstructional areas were free of all unapproved construction.

Vocational and Laboratory Areas

Corrosives, toxic and other hazardous substances were stored in proper corrosive storage cabinets and were properly labeled. Required space was available for the safe operation of machinery. Floors and aisles in all shop areas were free of slipping and tripping hazards. "Eye Hazard Area- Wear Your Eye Protection" signs were posted. Personal protective equipment for welding operations was provided. Power tools and machines, which generate dust, were provided with dust collecting equipment (QAAR, 2004).

Construction crews and equipment were gone from the Elementary/ Middle School building and grounds when classes resumed in January 2005. After years of discussion, discord and delay the Dennis Township School District had two state-of-the-art schools ready to serve the needs of students and community members for years to come.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FURTHER STUDY

CONCLUSIONS

Did the Long-Range Facilities Plan successfully address the facilities needs of Dennis Township School District? The LRFP identified five areas of greatest need. They were finances, renovations, capacity, educational programs, and safety.

Finances

The first issue regarding finances was the possible availability of a one-time grant of \$5.6 million through the New Jersey School Construction Initiative (NJSCI). This amount was nearly 50% of the estimated total construction costs of \$11.3 million, the highest percentage awarded by the State. But, it was only available if the voters approved the bond referendum. The possibility of losing this aid was one of the most compelling selling points for passage of the referendum. The Board of Education pointed out that the average property owner would pay only \$77 more per year in taxes to take advantage of the state funds.

The second issue dealt with the availability of an unusually low fixed interest rate of 4.5%. Approval of the referendum would allow the Board to lock-in at this excellent rate. Proponents emphasized that the district would lose millions of dollars in state aid, and would not be unable to take advantage of low interest rates if the referendum failed. Voters approved the bond referendum on December 11, 2001.

Renovations

The one building in operation in 2001 desperately needed upgrades and renovations. A history of deferred maintenance contributed to the need for such

extensive renovations. The Board often chose to maintain small classes and make program improvements over the cost of facility needs. The 2000 LRFP identified deficiencies in the areas of storage, cafeteria, administrative offices, rest rooms, science labs, windows, door panels and locks, cabinets, lockers, chalkboards and bulletin boards, gymnasium seating and equipment, paint, flooring, exterior stone and brick veneer, roofing, concrete block and slabs, structural steel, corridors, acoustical tile and heating, ventilation and air conditioning. Funds from the referendum corrected all deficiencies by December 2004.

Capacity

Student enrollment in School Year 1999-2000 numbered 891 from Pre-K to Grade Eight. The one school had a functional capacity of 654. Overcrowding was a fact in many areas. Academic classes came to exceed 25 students in many grades. Art, music and foreign language teachers taught from carts. Physical education classes numbered 50-75 students per class. Gifted & talented and basic skills classes operated in closets. Gym equipment stored in hallways violated fire code. Special education classes shared single rooms with no dividers to cut down on noise. The cafeteria began serving lunch at 9:45 A.M. and continued until 1:50 P.M. New Jersey Pineland Laws prohibited making any more additions on the site. The district needed a new primary school.

When the new primary building opened in September of 2004, the district had a total capacity of 1068 seats, a gain of over 200. In the Middle School, three unused classrooms were available for future needs.

Programs

To meet the demands of the 21st Century, the district installed cable television lines, telephone connections, an upgraded PA system and data ports in all instructional, administrative and student support service areas. All teachers who previously worked from carts or in closets had their own full-sized classrooms. The new primary building provided all core services to its students, e.g. computer lab, art studio, music room, library/media center, stage, and a combined cafeteria/gymnasium.

Safety

In 2001 Dennis Township School District did not meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Handicapped students could not use water fountains or rest rooms facilities. Improvements included replacing doors and hardware, partitions, dispensers and signage, and installing grab bars in restrooms. The fire alarm system did not meet fire safety code. A new fire alarm system replaced the outdated one. Sprinkler systems, fire rated doors, and an additional corridor now protect the students. The district also fixed electrical and plumbing problems, replaced leaky windows and doors, and installed an air conditioning system that solved the problems of mold and bacteria growth.

IMPLICATIONS

Since the major issues of finance, renovations, capacity, educational programs, and safety had been successfully addressed by the 2000 LRFP, the Board of Education determined that the school district would need only to continue implementation of its Five Year Maintenance Plan. With the passage of S-1701 in July of 2004 and the freezing of State Aid to Education in the 2005 State Budget, implications are that plans

for a new Middle School Office, entranceway and landscaping will be permanently cancelled. Playground equipment for the Primary School will be installed with donated funds rather than district funds. The Board of Education accepted a donation of \$10,000 from an anonymous private trust in February of 2005. The Board had recently accepted other donations of cash from individuals and organizations for items such as computers, musical instruments, and student activities like field trips and sports programs. This practice may be the beginning of a trend with the Board of Education appealing to philanthropic sources to provide needed assistance.

FURTHER STUDY

Research for this report has suggested possibilities for further study in the area of school facilities. One such topic would be development of the district's Long-Range Facilities Plan for 2005. Other possible studies might include the development of the Annual Comprehensive Maintenance Plan or the Quality Assurance Annual Report.

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