

NCLB IMPACTS FACILITY PLANNING

While the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law impacts teachers, students and schools throughout the nation, it also impacts education facility planners. In fact, they have to completely realign recommendations they make to districts because of NCLB's Public School Choice option.

The law stipulates that local school districts must provide all students enrolled in a Title I funded school, which has not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for two consecutive years, with the option to transfer to another school that has not been identified for school improvement.

This option — known as open enrollment — allows facility planners to provide urban school districts with more facilities opportunities than ever before.

Redistricting

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) helps facility planners determine current and future student enrollment when district officials are considering redistricting. As long as a district has historical data regarding the migration of students from one school to another, GIS is very helpful during the redistricting process, especially with the advent of open enrollment.

Before NCLB, facility planners made decisive recommendations to district officials about redistricting because their GIS data provided concise migratory patterns among students. With NCLB's open enrollment, facility planners present their findings to district officials with one caveat. They ask how the district plans to market individual schools to its target audiences (students and parents) because that may determine whether students stay in a neighborhood school or choose another school elsewhere in the district.

Close, Renovate or Build

The NCLB law greatly impacts the decision to close, renovate or build a new school. No one wants to close a neighborhood school because it isn't achieving AYP. Instead, facility planners look at every facility in the district to determine which ones can be renovated and which ones should close because they are beyond renovation. If increasing enrollment is the case, sometimes building a new school is the answer. However, because of NCLB, parents and children may opt to enroll at the new

school, which can lead to overcrowding, while the schools left behind experience declining enrollment. That situation always involves equity issues.

Community Involvement

While it's true that NCLB gives school districts several new facilities options, it is often difficult for districts to predict which option will best serve the students and community. There is, however, one way to find the ideal solution — community involvement.

One of the criticisms of NCLB is that the federal government doesn't provide enough funding for districts to implement the law. However, collaborations among communities and entities like businesses and universities to create magnet schools based on students' career goals are a very positive solution. Not only can these entities often provide additional funding to make a dream school a reality, but they also ensure that community members have a stake in the education process.

A genuine commitment to broad-based community involvement is integral to a successful planning process. Not only is trust developed but community support is gained. A shared vision among all entities expresses common goals. It also establishes an agreement with an altruistic focus to improve education and educational facilities.

So whether redistricting, closing, renovating or opening new schools, NCLB provides both opportunities and challenges to educational facility planners and the districts they serve. Community involvement is one of the best ways to ensure the children are not "left behind" but prepared to move forward. Facilities that meet the needs of the community are just one component.

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