

EDUCATIONAL FACILITY STIMULUS FUNDING: A focus on excellence in Lovell, Wyoming

By Franklin Hill

Spending educational construction money efficiently, effectively and with a focus on educational excellence is always a complex and challenging goal to accomplish. During these slow economic times, to do so with a successful eye on stimulating local employment is even more complex. Accomplishing both requires a well-established connection between state educational leadership, school district leadership, and a team of facility planning and design professionals who work in coordination toward a common educational vision.



Lovell High School

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An excellent case study for this strategy of education and stimulus planning is the scheduled remodeling of Lovell High School in Lovell, Wyoming.

New Construction Versus Remodeling

Whether to build a new building or to remodel the existing one is a common question facing many school districts nationally. Options for Lovell High School appeared to favor a new building, but the state-funding formula would have delayed construction for many years and seriously delayed needed

upgrades to meet present and future educational needs. Wisely, the State Department implemented a program of educational suitability assessment of existing buildings that allowed the district to reexamine the question of remodeling and to determine whether such remodeling could appropriately meet 21st Century education and technology demands.

In consultation with Franklin Hill & Associates, educational facility planners and futurists behind educational change, and Plan One Architects of Cody, WY, a determination was made that the school district can not only effectively remodel the existing Lovell High School, but it could be done in a fashion that will out-perform the functional standards proposed in a new building at a much lesser price, while also providing more immediate employment opportunity to the local community.

How can this possibly be the case you ask?

The answer is in having a clear district vision for the future, practical understanding of facilities and function, and a concerted effort by the Wyoming Department of Education to do what is best for students at an economical and affordable cost.

District Expectations

The expectations for learning by Big Horn School District No. 2 are very high. "Each student will be provided the best possible educational opportunity in each of the areas listed below. In addition, each student will be proficient or above in reading, writing, and math as measured by state assessments." To accomplish this expectation, the percentage of the students proficient or above in reading, writing, and math will increase 4 percent each year as measured by state assessments.

Core subjects included:

- Reading
- Writing
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social Studies
- Technology/Vocational
- Arts
- Health and Physical Fitness

The district utilized the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development Publication "What Works in Schools" by Robert J. Marsano as the operating framework for the curriculum effort. Finally, all recommendations must correspond with North Central School Accreditation as well as meet the standards of the Hathaway Achievement Scholarship Guidelines.

Maximizing Past Facility Investments

Buildings have a history reflecting past maintenance, capital improvements, space standards developed under different administrations and enrollment/utilization patterns. In Lovell High School, all of these issues supported the long term continued use of the existing building.

Many spaces are very well sized and have been remodeled extensively over the years. One of the sci-

ence laboratory spaces measures about 1500 SF and is divided into well configured lecture/laboratory spaces. Projection video is used and the laboratory stations are recently remodeled with additional support storage and a fume hood.



Under new standards, this room would be much smaller and probably have less storage space.

Others rooms, such as the Family and Consumer Science laboratory, measure over 2500 SF and were included in a 1981 addition. This is one of the finest examples of a foods laboratory in the state, but would never be this extensive in a new building.

Other programs, such as the vocational education welding program, are also very well sized and equipped. Updated ventilation systems make this an environmentally friendly space. And, its location in the building offers opportunities for easy integration and collaboration with other core subjects as the curriculum and technology advances.



This program might be deleted and the space lost in a new building. Whereas here, it can be converted to a variety of alternative emerging tech programs and maximize the already constructed building.

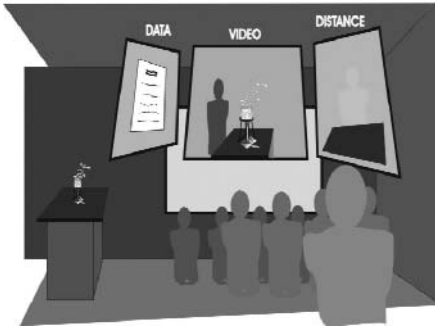


If the existing building were evacuated, alternative uses are limited because of the unique layout and size of spaces such as the science areas, foods labs, and multi-purpose music rooms. So, evacuation has its negative economic externalities for the community, if not directly for the Department of Education.

Future Trend Analysis

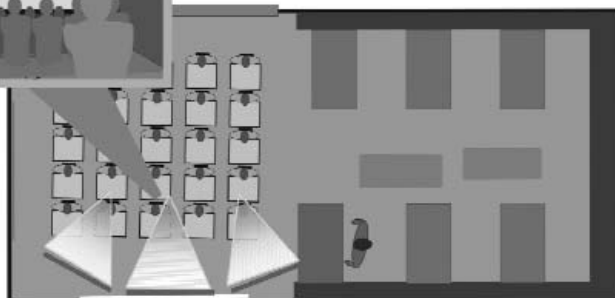
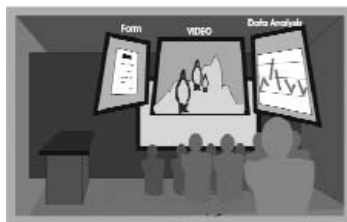
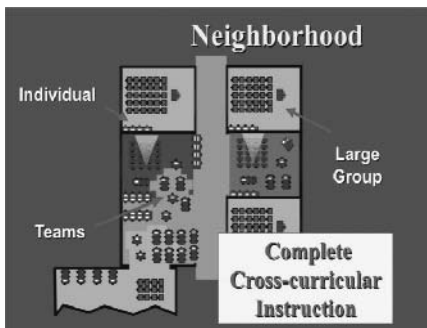
The planning process incorporated the educational goals and existing program successes within the context of *future* state-wide and national educational trends. Workshops conducted by Franklin Hill & Associates assess current practices and desired goals, within the context of national trends occurring throughout the United States and Canada. By enhancing local practices with national trends, the most appropriate "School of the Future" can be accurately assessed and applied to the new school versus remodeling decision. Points of educational focus were:

- Core subject enhancement through small learning communities
- Advanced science education and technology use
- Seamless cross-curricular integration of digital multimedia technology
- Integration of career tech programs with core subjects such as math and science
- Enhancement of performing and visual arts
- Enhancement of inclusion of special needs student



Design Performance Standards

To correlate future trends successfully to facility assessment, it was essential to establish clear facility functional performance standards that can be applied objectively to the existing building. The graphic below shows the overarching trend for the establishment of small learning communities that include resource area, core curricular subjects, and science.



Multi-Screen Lecture/Lab Model

Advanced science education is intended to promote distance learning, digital media, and integration with career technical programs.

Recommendation to Remodel

With the above assessment accomplished in less than two months, it became clear to the community, school board, and administration that remodeling of the existing building was the answer. When this option was measured against the state's guidelines for educational suitability, the state further endorsed the intention to remodel. This decision alone equated to approximately \$10 million in cost savings compared to new construction, met or exceeded future educational goals, and offered the opportunity for immediate design and construction to begin in a variety of construction phases to stimulate the local economy.

Architectural Master Planning – *integrating education and maintenance*

The architectural firm of Plan One, in coordination with Franklin Hill & Associates, will conduct a two-month exercise to establish schematic design criteria to specifically implement the educational goals in a design framework. This step will allow for the important opportunity to overlap and coordinate expenditures related to mainte-

nance that are currently under consideration with the now equally defined and proactive educational goals for educational excellence into the future.

The unique, strategic thinking to coordinate maintenance with educational vision within a comprehensive facility master plan creates the framework for accepting remodeling as the correct solution and phasing construction documents to maximize local job employment opportunities.

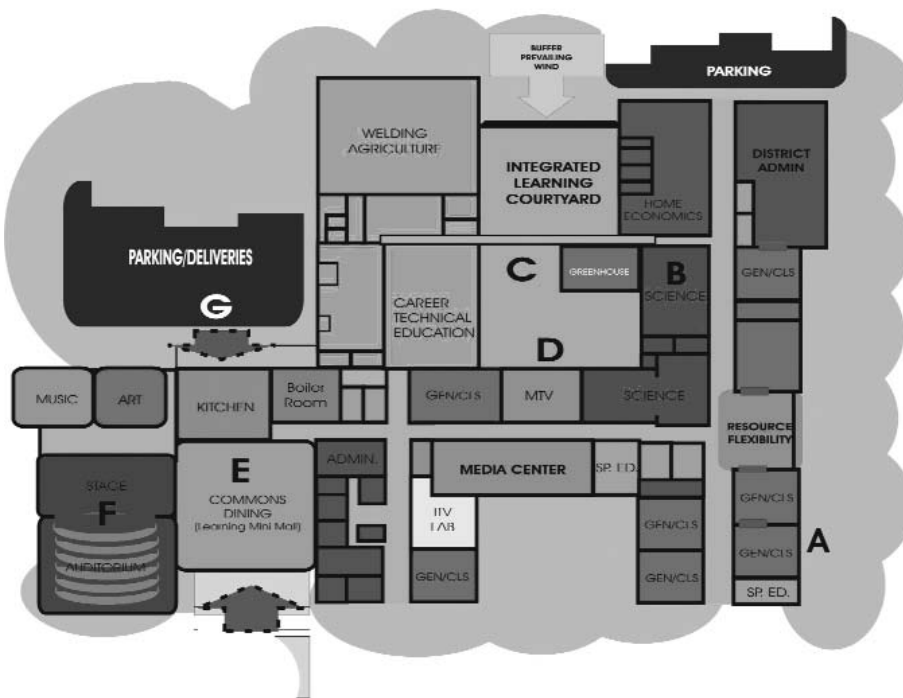
Construction Management – *“Shovel ready projects”*

By realizing that the correct decision is to remodel, a complete architectural assessment for education and maintenance upgrades can be accomplished in less than 90 days. Then, through the utilization of a Construction Manager at Risk, bid packages can be identified and awarded to conduct work in multiple phases and at multiple dollar values.

Creating a variety of bid packages allows smaller, local contractors with limited bonding capacity to bid on and participate in the varied scopes of work that are applicable to this renovation project and thus participate in the employment and economic stimulus benefit. And importantly, those funds will *remain* in the local community, and not be carted off to the big city, so to speak. As in many small towns, contractors coordinate between each other to better accomplish the project scope and further assure that monies are spent *quickly and locally*.

The bid packages for Lovell High School may fall into a variety of categories that deal with both new construction and remodeling, but also include acquisition of materials and equipment related to educational delivery that enhance vendor participation.

The graphic on the next page shows how the building renovation and new construction solution can be divided into varied phased packages.



Future phased packages may include:

- Core classroom neighborhoods – A
- Commons and auditorium/art edition – E and F
- Science renovation and remodeling – B
- Enhancement and transition from vocational programs to technology education programs – C

Vendor bid packages may also be enhanced in such areas as:

- Upgrading digital multimedia equipment through upgrading to laptop computers, the creation of a TV studio, and building-wide television distribution – D
- Science technology through multimedia, multiscreen distance learning connected to the statewide educational distance learning network – B & D
- Technical education equipment to replace the outdated woodshop program – C

All of the above scopes of work are directly correlated to the educational vision established by the school district and endorsed by the State Facilities Commission (SFC) for Wyoming. This unique coordination between state and local governments ultimately results in appropriate and meaningful expenditure of funds.

Maintaining Future State Standards – Long Term Equity and Stability

The coordination between the Wyoming Department of Education, the State Facilities Commission, and the Lovell School District embodies the effective techniques by which all of the state educational and stimulus objectives can be met in a timely and effective manner.

Quickly spending monies for a stimulus package on excessive, oversized, but expeditiously built facilities is an easy fix. However, this is an unwise decision. Such spending might meet the short-term goal of employment and economic stimulus but not reach the “grass roots” of the economy. And, it can likewise set the stage for unrealistic expectations for future facilities that

need to be constructed for many years to come and set an inequitable delivery standard.

Essential to the success of any stimulus package, whether state or federally funded, is that the projects be planned, designed, and constructed within a framework of standards that will provide equity as well as viability for maintenance and operation over the long term. And, most importantly, it must be educationally focused so as not to set erroneous standards that cannot be successfully maintained by the state when stimulus monies no longer exist.

The best news...it applies to rural, suburban, and urban educational construction situations!!! ■

Franklin Hill, PhD of Franklin Hill & Associates, Kirkland, Washington was the educational facility planner and futurist for the assessment of the existing Lovell High School and recommended renovation as the best solution. In coordination with Plan One/Architects, Dr. Hill assisted in outlining the educational trends and functional challenges for the schematic design solutions relevant to phasing construction packages to meet and maximize the most pressing educational requirements and economic stimulus goals. Hill has credential in economics and urban planning prior to his focus on educational facility planning and design. His previous experiences include being a vice president of an architectural and program management firm, as well as director of facilities for a 100,000 people school district. He now provides international consulting assistance for K 12, university, and corporate educational facilities.