



# OSFC builds a history of innovation and success

*David Williamson, executive director, Ohio Facilities Construction Commission/Ohio School Facilities Commission*

In the spring of 1997, legislative leaders and the administration of Gov. **George V. Voinovich** were huddled in Columbus looking at ways to address the Ohio Supreme Court’s recent decision in *DeRolph v. State of Ohio*.

This landmark ruling addressed virtually every area of school funding, including that of the state’s facilities construction program, then administered by the Ohio Department of Education (ODE). In its decision, the court didn’t indicate an issue with how the program was administered but did state that it was significantly underfunded.

There was little doubt that there were serious issues with the condition of Ohio’s school facilities, and legislative leaders were aware that they would have to be addressed. A study

by the federal General Accounting Office rated Ohio’s schools among the worst in the nation, and the PBS/**Bill Moyers** documentary, “Children in America’s Schools,” illustrated the situation in vivid detail. Despite this public acknowledgement, there was still the matter of finding a way to construct the buildings with available state resources.

As part of the state’s response, an immediate \$300 million appropriation was made for constructing and renovating public school facilities. That appropriation was to be administered by a new agency — one with the ultimate goal of addressing the facility needs of all Ohio districts — the Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC).

The organization and funding of OSFC over its 20-year history in guiding the state’s school rebuilding program has



*The Ohio School Facilities Commission (OSFC) has helped fund the construction and renovation of 1,143 school buildings since it was established in 1997. Above is Dayton City’s Thurgood Marshall STEM High School, which opened in 2008.*

led to the opening of 1,143 new or renovated buildings serving an estimated 650,000 students. As part of the state’s effort, over \$11.5 billion in state funding alone has been spent on both classroom facilities and a series of programs directed at such issues as school security and mitigating lead in drinking fountains. Through its fully funded rebuilding programs or through its grant programs, OSFC had touched nearly every district in Ohio and completely addressed all facilities needs in 259 of those districts. A look at the map, at right, gives a good perspective on just how extensive the commission’s work has been.

While these numbers are impressive, they really do not tell the whole story. They don’t, for example, capture the imagination and pride found within a school’s four walls.

For students, teachers and administrators, there is nothing like the passion and energy that emerge from children learning in state-of-the-art facilities. OSFC-administered programs have resulted in a landscape filled with bright, clean, well-ventilated facilities, punctuated by as much natural sunlight as possible and filled with well-equipped learning spaces. This historical program has truly made a difference in the lives of thousands of Ohio’s children.

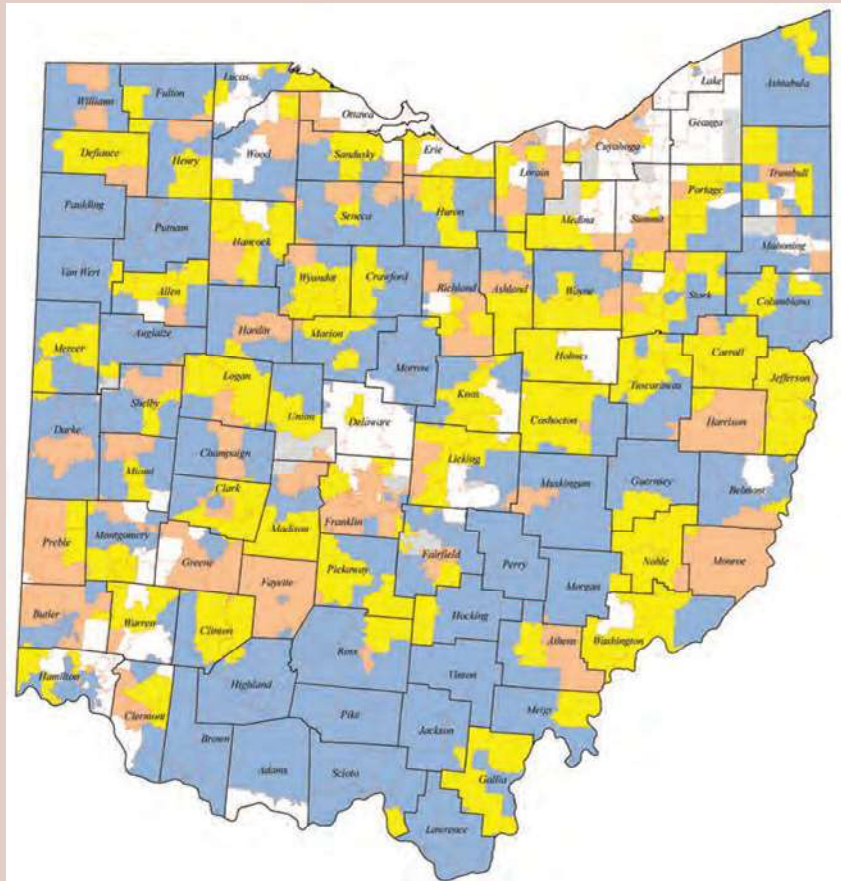
Another story the numbers don’t tell is the innovation that went into developing OSFC, the programs it manages and the innovation that has continued from the beginning. Prior to OSFC’s creation, when the state operated its school facilities program through ODE, funding was provided through competitive grants to districts that submitted applications for specific buildings.

The program did not address the overall needs of a district. There also was significant subjectivity in the decision-making process as to which grant was approved, what state funds would be available and what local funds would be required.

The first innovation was the decision, through the enabling legislation of Senate Bill (SB) 102 and the development of the Classroom Facilities Assistance Program (CFAP), about how a district becomes eligible for state funding. Unlike the previous grant-based application, SB 102 designated that districts must be funded in order of their property wealth.

Language in the Ohio Revised Code requires the commission

### OSFC Master Facilities Plan Status (as of July 1, 2016)



#### Map legend

Blue: Districts that have completed all necessary construction and renovation work (259)

Yellow: Districts that have been offered state funding but have been unable to raise their required local share or have deferred (154)

Peach: Districts that have had their master facilities plans fully or partially funded (97)

Grey: Districts participating in the Expedited Local Partnership Program in anticipation of state funding (16)

to begin with the state’s lowest-wealth districts. Further, instead of funding on a school-by-school basis, the commission was required to provide funding for the entire facilities need within a district.

ODE annually ranks all Ohio public school districts based on their “adjusted valuation per pupil.” This formula is based on the total taxable value of the property within the district divided by the number of students attending its schools. Districts with the lower numbers are considered the least property wealthy and have the highest priority for funding.

The second innovation was OSFC’s use of a standardized building assessment process. Developed with the input of industry leaders and a national association specializing in school facilities, the process gives a thorough and measurable picture of



the condition of current buildings.

Additionally, the incorporation of projections of future student populations allows OSFC and the district to determine actual need and, from there, a baseline to determine the actual cost of a project. The use of these standardized protocols for eligibility and scope, rather than an application process such as first come, first served, is generally believed to be a major strength of the program.

The commission used CFAP exclusively through its earlier years; however, it rapidly became apparent that, in many instances, the schools with the greatest need were not always the ones with the lowest property wealth. Compounding that, despite generous funding allocations from the General Assembly, more districts were ready to begin their work than the state could realistically fund at any given time.

Once again, innovation and adaptability enabled OSFC to address the problem. In 1999, pilot programs for the Exceptional Needs Program and the Expedited Local Partnership Program were instituted, with full program status coming the following year.

The Exceptional Needs Program allows districts to apply for funding to replace specific buildings prior to the time

they would normally be eligible for CFAP funding. The buildings must pose a health or safety risk to students and staff and not be subject to renovation.

Meanwhile, the Expedited Local Partnership Program offers districts not currently eligible for state funding the chance to move ahead with needed construction or renovation immediately — with local funding only — but still receive credit for their eligible expenditures when they do become eligible for funding.

These programs are only two examples of how OSFC has addressed the unique needs of school districts without straying from the principles of objectivity and fairness.

Other examples include:

- To provide all districts with the opportunity for quality facilities, the commission developed the Ohio School Design Manual. This document, updated annually to change with the times, is a comprehensive set of standards and guidelines for constructing and renovating schools. The manual has been adopted by several other states.
- OSFC always has recommended that when the cost of renovating a building exceeds a certain percentage of the cost of new construction, the building be removed from the district's facilities plan in favor of a new

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*Students study in a commons area at Ridgemont Local's (Hardin) new K-12 building. The OSFC project was completed in 2015.*

building. Sometimes, local communities opposed abandoning historic buildings or facilities with a special meaning to the community, threatening the ability of districts to acquire their share of the project cost. In these cases, OSFC worked with districts to develop a program that waived the guideline, with the local community accepting responsibility for excess costs.

- Because of the size of their projects, some districts found it difficult to pass a bond levy that would cover the cost of their local share. OSFC worked with state legislators and education groups, such as OSBA and the Buckeye Association of School Administrators, to adapt state law to permit the use of project segments. This allowed districts to divide their projects into smaller increments that made the size of bond levies more manageable.
- Changes in teaching methods and the use of new technology have changed the way educational facilities need to look. The commission instructed its staff to develop methods to address these changes, resulting in the adoption of a supplement to the Ohio School Design Manual that specifically addressed high-performance schools.

OSFC also is a national leader in using environmentally friendly designs for educational facilities. In 2007, the commission voted to require that all OSFC-funded projects be designed using the standards of the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Schools program. LEED stands for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

The LEED for Schools Rating System is a comprehensive tool that incorporates design and construction practices, including classroom acoustics, indoor air quality, selection

of building materials and energy efficiency. Buildings are awarded points for how well they meet the required standards and are certified at various levels, depending on the number of points achieved. Ohio currently has more certified K-12 educational structures than any other state — 288 — with over a third of them exceeding the LEED program's highest certifications.

*In its 20-year history, OSFC has guided the state's school rebuilding program, which has led to the opening of 1,143 new or renovated buildings serving an estimated 650,000 students.*

In 2012, Ohio enacted the first major changes in public construction law in more than 130 years. In addition to allowing the use of additional forms of construction administration, the General Assembly established the Ohio Facilities Construction Commission (OFCC). This action merged two key players in public school facility construction: the former Office of the State Architect and OSFC as a commission-within-a-commission organization with single authority for public facility construction planning, funding, contracting and project management as well as post-construction oversight.

The merger combined the state's construction authority and



resources within a single entity that guides capital projects for state agencies, state-supported universities and community colleges and, most importantly, Ohio's public primary and secondary schools. OFCC sets uniform rules, procedures and standardized documents for public construction and is responsible for construction delivery methods, construction documents and processes and procedures.

The culture of innovation that served OSFC so well in

its early years continued through the consolidation of the agencies and the creation of OFCC. By bringing together planners, project managers and support staff from three different lines of business — state agencies, higher education and K-12 education — OFCC was able to institute best practices from each section into the others.

One notable example is that state agencies and institutes of higher education now have the opportunity to avail themselves of facilities planning options that were the standard for K-12 schools but never before available to the other public owners.

For OFCC, the bottom line is that the history of the commission has been one of success, founded on innovation and a willingness to work with all parties to accomplish the task. Change has never been an issue for OSFC; it's adapted as necessary.

The near future will bring more change. As of this writing, the General Assembly is considering language in the state's operating budget that would completely consolidate OSFC into OFCC. While this administrative change will mean the sunset of OSFC, it will not lessen the state's commitment to K-12 education.

We're fully aware that by no stretch of the imagination is OFCC's job done. We still have more than 300 districts to complete, not to mention the work that we'll do with our other partners. We will continue, however, to work with the passion and energy that's shown in the work of our ultimate customers — the children of Ohio. ■

## OSFC 20th anniversary (1997-2017)

For the past 20 years, the Ohio School Facilities Commission has administered the state's Rebuilding Ohio's Schools program. Here's a look at how those 20 years have gone.

