

What is an education model?

A school district’s educational model is the big-picture framework that reflects district and community values and guides how teaching and learning take place across all schools in the system. It acts as a roadmap, helping to ensure that students have a coherent experience from the time they enter kindergarten until the day they graduate. The model includes not only what is taught and how it is taught, but also how the district organizes its grade levels—for example, whether elementary schools serve grades K–4 or K–5, how middle schools are structured, and what programs are offered in high school. These grade level configurations shape how students transition through the system, how curriculum is sequenced, and how teachers collaborate to meet the developmental needs of different age groups. A district’s educational model ties together grade configurations, curriculum, instruction, assessment, and culture, creating a consistent pathway designed to help every student succeed.

A district’s educational model has a direct impact on facilities planning. The way grade levels are configured and learning is organized shapes the types of spaces schools need in order to deliver on the model’s goals. For instance, if the model emphasizes hands-on, project-based learning, facilities may need flexible classrooms, labs, and collaborative areas. If the district configures schools as K–5 elementary, 6–8 middle, and 9–12 high school, each building must be designed to support the developmental and academic needs of those particular age groups. Even choices about class size, special education inclusion, or career and technical education pathways influence the number and type of classrooms, specialized spaces, and common areas required. In this way, facilities are not just buildings—they are physical expressions of the district’s educational vision. Careful facilities planning ensures that the spaces students and staff use every day align with the district’s model, creating environments that make the desired teaching and learning experiences possible.

Why review the model now?

The recent failure of the town-wide vote to support a new elementary school building project has left the community at a critical crossroads. The Riverdale school is over 100 years old, Oakdale is over 120 years old, and Greenlodge is approaching 80 years old. These facilities no longer fully support the needs of students, staff, or the broader community. According to the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA), many of the challenges in older school buildings—such as outdated mechanical systems, limited accessibility, insufficient instructional space, and inadequate safety features—can directly hinder the quality of teaching and learning. These conditions not only affect day-to-day classroom experiences but also increase ongoing operational and maintenance costs, placing added strain on both district and town finances.

In the months since the failed vote, a range of ideas have surfaced in the community about how to move forward—ideas that touch on grade level configuration, school consolidation, program offerings, and how best to use limited resources. Each of these ideas, if enacted, would change or redefine the district’s educational model—the framework that guides how teaching and learning are structured across schools. Before any specific facilities solutions are advanced, it is essential for the School Committee and community to step back and ask: *What is the educational model that Dedham Public Schools should be advancing for the next generation of learners?*

By reviewing and rearticulating its educational model, Dedham has the opportunity to:

- Align grade level configurations and program priorities with the developmental and academic needs of students.
- Clarify how teaching and learning should be organized in ways that reflect community values and future-ready skills.
- Ensure that any future facilities investments, whether through MSBA partnerships or local initiatives, are designed to physically support the district’s vision.
- Provide the community with a transparent and shared understanding of the “why” behind decisions about school organization, budgeting, and capital planning.

The intersection of aging facilities, fiscal constraints, and the community’s collective desire to provide an outstanding educational experience for its youth make this an opportune moment to reaffirm Dedham’s educational model. Doing so will allow the district to integrate the District’s five year strategic plan into an education model that can guide facilities planning and decision making.

Why use a consultant?

The Dedham Public Schools are at an important turning point. Following the failed vote on the proposed elementary school building project, the community faces the dual challenge of addressing aging facilities while also determining the best path forward for teaching and learning. Many ideas have surfaced—ranging from new grade level configurations to program adjustments—that, if adopted, would significantly reshape the district’s educational model. Before advancing new building solutions, it is essential for the community to align around a clear and shared vision for how Dedham will educate its students in the years ahead.

To support this work, the School Committee intends to enlist the services of an external consultant through a competitive Request for Proposals (RFP) process. A consultant brings both expertise and neutrality: expertise in aligning educational vision with facilities planning and Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) requirements, and neutrality in facilitating inclusive, transparent discussions across a wide range of community perspectives. Their role will be to help Dedham assess current conditions, explore possible models, and engage families, staff, and residents in meaningful dialogue that leads to consensus.

By investing in professional guidance, Dedham ensures that decisions about its educational model are thoughtful, data-driven, and rooted in community values. This process will provide the foundation for future facilities planning, strengthen public trust, and position the town to make strategic, student-centered investments that serve the community for decades to come.

How do the education model and facilities master planning process work together?

The District’s educational model and the Town’s facilities master plan are inherently connected—one defines *what* the district wants teaching and learning to look like, and the other determines *where* and *how* that vision can be supported through physical spaces. Running these two processes in parallel creates an opportunity for alignment and efficiency, provided the work is carefully coordinated.

1. Shared Baseline Data

- Both efforts begin with a clear understanding of current conditions. The district’s review of grade configurations, program priorities, and student needs can directly inform the facilities assessment, while the town’s facilities data (building age, capacity, system conditions, and MSBA metrics) provides critical context for educational planning.

2. Aligned Scenarios

- As the educational model work generates possible pathways (e.g., K–5 vs. K–4 schools, middle school restructuring, or expanded career/technical programs), the master planning team can test how those scenarios fit into existing or future facilities.
- Conversely, facilities constraints or opportunities identified in the master plan can help the district refine which educational model options are most viable.

3. Community Engagement

- A coordinated engagement process avoids “planning fatigue” by combining forums, surveys, and focus groups. This ensures residents see how their input about teaching, learning, and building needs are part of one integrated conversation rather than competing discussions.

4. Financial and Operational Alignment

- Both processes will raise questions about cost, efficiency, and long-term sustainability. Running them together allows the town and district to evaluate trade-offs—such as the financial impact of consolidating schools, or the operational costs of maintaining aging facilities—while keeping educational priorities at

the center.

5. MSBA Readiness

- MSBA requires a clear articulation of the district’s educational program as part of its facilities planning process. By aligning timelines, Dedham can ensure that the educational model review produces exactly the kind of programmatic clarity needed to strengthen any future MSBA application.

6. Unified Roadmap

- The outcome of the two parallel processes should be a single, coherent roadmap: one that links Dedham’s vision for student learning to a practical facilities plan that the community understands, supports, and can afford