

**To:** Dedham Finance and Warrant Committee  
**From:** Ian Kelly, Deputy Superintendent  
**Date:** October 16, 2025  
**Subject:** Responses to Follow-Up Questions – Article 4, Educational Model Redevelopment

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Thank you for your thoughtful review of the Dedham Public Schools’ Article 4 request and for the opportunity to provide additional information. The questions raised reflect a careful reading of the materials submitted and a genuine desire to understand the educational and operational rationale underlying this initiative. The responses below are intended to clarify the purpose of the study, outline the current educational model, and describe how this work will inform both near-term decisions and long-term planning.

### **The Current Educational Delivery Model and Its Relationship to Facilities Evaluation**

Dedham’s current educational delivery model reflects a traditional grade-level configuration. The Early Childhood Education Center is configured for PK-K, elementary schools are organized as grades 1–5 buildings, followed by grades 6–8 at Dedham Middle School and 9–12 at Dedham High School. Within this structure, instructional practices emphasize foundational literacy and numeracy in the early grades, content-area specialization in middle and high school, and a range of supports for special education, English learners, and student wellness.

While this model has served the district for many years, it does not fully align with current approaches that emphasize interdisciplinary learning, collaboration, and flexible pathways toward college and career readiness. Today’s students benefit from instructional models that integrate technology, project-based learning, and real-world application of skills—all of which require adaptable, student-centered spaces.

Facilities play a critical role in realizing that vision. The district’s older schools were designed for a teacher-centered paradigm—rows of chairs in fixed seating configurations, limited areas for collaborative learning, no space for educator collaboration and professional learning, and few spaces designed for hands-on, cross-disciplinary learning. As the district evaluates its educational model, it must simultaneously assess how well existing buildings support those desired learning experiences. The educational model review will therefore provide the framework to ensure that future facility investments—whether renovation, consolidation, or new construction—directly reflect the teaching and learning priorities of Dedham’s schools.

### **The Educational Paradigm and the Role of a Consultant in Building on Existing Knowledge**

The “educational paradigm” refers to the prevailing philosophy and structure of how education is delivered. Historically, Dedham’s schools—like many built in the early and mid-20th century—were designed for a model centered on teacher-led instruction, fixed schedules, and compartmentalized subjects. In contrast, today’s best practices emphasize inquiry, collaboration, social-emotional development, and integration of technology and flexible learning modalities. Modern educational environments require spaces that support small-group instruction, student collaboration, and specialized programs such as STEM labs, makerspaces, and inclusive learning settings. Our existing facilities, some of which are more than a century old, were not designed for this level of adaptability. While we have been successful in the renewal of the Middle School, Avery, and ECEC, we need to ensure that each future project aligns with a coherent, districtwide educational framework rather than proceeding in isolation.

The consultant’s role is to provide independent expertise and a systems-level perspective that connects the educational model with physical infrastructure and financial reality. While Dedham has a strong base of local knowledge regarding facility conditions, this work requires comparative benchmarking, professional facilitation of community dialogue, and synthesis across educational, operational, and fiscal dimensions. The consultant will help the district and community evaluate multiple scenarios—grade configurations, program distribution, and space utilization—and determine which options best meet Dedham’s long-term goals for learning and equity.

### **The Strategic Roadmap and Anticipated Impacts of the Study**

The consultant’s deliverable will be a strategic series of options that integrate educational priorities, program structures, and facility planning into an actionable framework. Beyond considerations of consolidation or grade configuration, the roadmap will examine how Dedham’s educational systems can evolve to meet future needs.

Specific elements likely to be addressed include:

- **Alignment of grade configurations and transitions:** Evaluating whether current structures (PK-K, 1-5, 6-8, 9-12) best support student development, curriculum coherence, and efficient use of space.
- **Program and service distribution:** Assessing where specialized programs (special education, early childhood, world languages, STEM, career pathways) are best located for both educational and logistical effectiveness.
- **Instructional space design:** Identifying facility features that enhance instructional flexibility, including small-group areas, collaboration zones, and integrated support spaces.
- **Community and operational considerations:** Reviewing enrollment trends, transportation patterns, and building capacities to balance educational quality with fiscal responsibility.
- **MSBA readiness:** Ensuring that Dedham’s articulated educational program meets the clarity required by the Massachusetts School Building Authority for future capital partnership opportunities.

The roadmap will position Dedham to make decisions that are educationally sound, fiscally responsible, and community-informed. It will serve as the foundation for both short-term adjustments and long-term capital planning.

### Updating the Existing Educational Model

An update to the current educational model would focus on refinement and alignment rather than reinvention. Dedham already has a robust educational framework grounded in the *Instructional Core* (Elmore, 2009), emphasizing the interaction between teacher, student, and content. Updating the model would build on existing structures such as:

- Current grade configurations (PK–K at the ECEC, Grades 1–5 at elementary schools, Grades 6–8 at Dedham Middle School, Grades 9–12 at Dedham High School);
- The district’s established instructional framework, including guaranteed and viable curriculum, data-driven collaboration, and universal design for learning;
- The district’s current emphasis on inclusion, co-teaching, and multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) to meet diverse student needs; and
- Core strategic priorities already articulated in Dedham’s Educational Program and visioning documents—safe, student-centered, flexible, and community-connected learning environments.

Under an update to the model, the consultant’s work would likely concentrate on clarifying and codifying what already exists: documenting current practices, identifying inconsistencies across schools, and making targeted adjustments to address gaps between educational intent and facility capacity. The deliverable would include a refined framework and set of facility design implications that can directly inform the Town’s Facilities Master Plan.

This approach would potentially be lower-cost, shorter in duration, and emphasize *synthesis and documentation* rather than extensive scenario modeling. It would provide Dedham with a cohesive, clearly articulated roadmap for improving facilities and instructional delivery within existing parameters.

### Building an Entirely New Educational Model

Constructing a new educational model would represent a broader, more visionary undertaking. This approach would invite the community to reconsider, from first principles, how Dedham organizes teaching, learning, and student support in the 21st century. It would examine foundational questions such as:

- How should grade levels be configured to best serve student development (e.g., K–4 vs. K–5 vs. K–6 models)?
- How might Dedham reimagine school sizes or neighborhood boundaries to improve access, efficiency, and program delivery?
- What instructional models—such as project-based learning, flexible grouping, or interdisciplinary teaching—should define the district’s identity going forward?

- What physical spaces, technological capacities, and professional structures are necessary to realize that vision?

A new educational model would integrate academic visioning, community engagement, and facilities strategy into a comprehensive framework for long-term transformation. The cost and timeline for this work would be more significant, as it would require broad-based consultation, comparative benchmarking with other districts, and multiple scenario analyses. However, it would also yield a higher-impact roadmap capable of shaping Dedham’s educational system for decades.

### **Scaling the Study to Budgetary Constraints**

The proposed Article 4 appropriation was designed to provide flexibility. The study could be **scaled in scope and depth** depending on available funding and priorities. Possible approaches include:

- **Phase 1 – Foundational Review (Baseline Study):**
  - Focus on documenting the current model, assessing alignment between educational practice and facility design, and identifying immediate gaps.
- **Phase 2 – Targeted Redesign and Stakeholder Engagement:**
  - Expand to include facilitated engagement with educators, families, and community members to explore alternative grade configurations, instructional models, and facility options.
- **Phase 3 – Comprehensive Redevelopment and Implementation Planning:**
  - Integrate detailed scenario modeling, fiscal analysis, and MSBA readiness documentation to produce a fully articulated, forward-looking educational model.

By structuring the work in this phased manner, Dedham could advance critical educational and facilities alignment work within the community’s fiscal capacity. This approach would require an adjusted timeline as phasing will take a longer period of time to complete.

The choice between updating or rebuilding Dedham’s educational model is not binary. The district can begin with a structured update that builds clarity and alignment around current practice while establishing the foundation for deeper redesign in future phases. This approach reflects both fiscal prudence and strategic foresight—ensuring that Dedham continues to move forward, thoughtfully and responsibly, toward a shared vision for the future of teaching and learning.

The redevelopment of Dedham’s educational model represents a strategic opportunity to align educational vision, facilities, and community investment. By engaging a professional consultant, the district seeks to ensure that decisions about future schools are guided by a clear, evidence-based framework that reflects both Dedham’s values and the realities of 21st-century education.

The ultimate goal is to equip the community with the knowledge and confidence to make informed choices that sustain Dedham Public Schools as a vibrant, forward-looking system for decades to come.