

The Strength Of Strategic Partnerships

Let Go Of What's Familiar And Choose The Right
Partner To Meet Your Facilities Goals

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Overview

Educational facilities management leaders are constantly juggling the demands of budget planning and facility advancement. While they are expected to deliver optimal results, they are often stretched thin and lack the support of additional staff and advanced technology. In this challenging landscape, the right partner can make a world of difference. They can bring expertise in facilities management, provide valuable insights for intelligent budgeting, and grant access to essential data and tools. With their support, leaders can effectively enhance and elevate the state of their educational facilities.

In a study commissioned by Gordian, Forrester Consulting surveyed 204 US facilities planning and management decision-makers from K-12 school districts with 5,000 or more students first about facility management and improvement efforts and then about facility management and planning partnerships.

Key Findings



K-12 facilities leaders struggle to pinpoint strategic management and improvement priorities, and they have narrow margins in their budgets that limit their ability to drive change.



Challenges that K-12 facilities leaders face include lacking the right partners (55%), data (54%), and internal staff/expertise (50%).



Although 44% of respondents said all their projects are managed by preferred providers, 84% said they want to consolidate providers and build strategic partnerships so they can streamline operations.

K-12 Facilities Leaders Are Already Under A Lot Of Pressure

K-12 facilities leaders have many priorities competing for their attention. Program consistency is the top facilities management driver (42%), and respondents from school districts with less than 10,000 students said it's even more desirable (51%), which implies a lack of resources. There's also little variation among respondents' chosen management and improvement drivers, indicating that there is little clarity about how best to manage day-to-day operations while simultaneously investing in long-term sustainability. Some priorities outrank others, but two drivers are consistent in each list: accessing funding and creating and maintaining safe and sustainable places while constantly improving the environment for everyone.



Top Facilities Management Drivers

42% Program consistency
(e.g., consistent experiences across facilities/technology)

42% Environmental, social, and governance (ESG)

40% Health and safety

40% Accessing funding

39% Addressing deferred maintenance backlog



Top Facilities Improvement Drivers

43% Accessing funding

42% Competitive differentiation

40% Rapidly changing population size in our jurisdiction

40% Accelerating pace of change

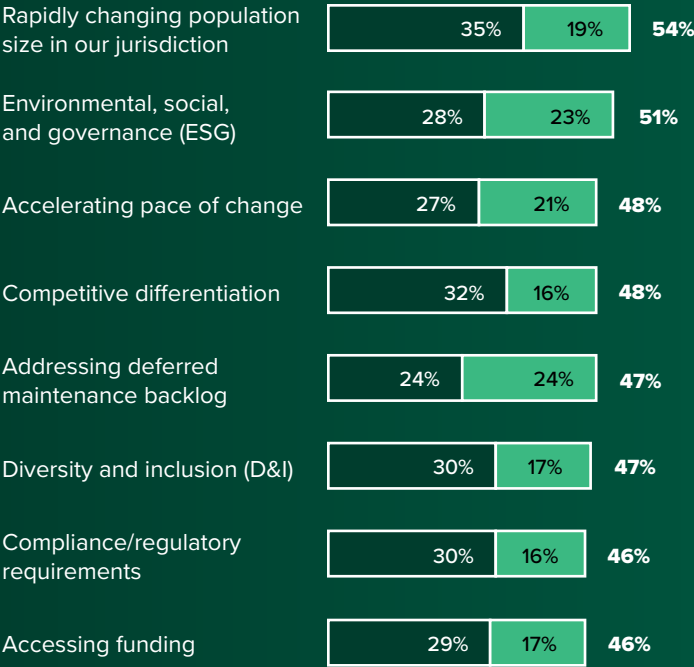
39% Health and safety

K-12 Facilities Leaders' Goals Are Still Out Of Reach

Almost half of surveyed K-12 facilities leaders said they are falling behind on their top goals. These goals include adapting to rapidly changing population sizes (54%); making environmental, social, and governance investments (51%); accelerating pace of change (48%); increasing competitive differentiation (48%); addressing deferred maintenance backlog (47%); improving diversity and inclusion (47%); adhering to compliance/regulatory requirements (46%); and accessing funding (46%).

Organization's Performance On Its Facilities Targets

- Our organization is somewhat behind.
- Our organization is significantly behind.



Base: 204 US facilities planning and management decision-makers from K-12 school districts with 5,000+ students
Note: Showing top results; total percentages may not equal separate values due to rounding.
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gordian, August 2023

Falling Behind On Goals Has Consequences

As a result of not meeting goals, respondents' organizations compromised their safety and health conditions (52%), they were fined (47%), and they failed to acquire and/or utilize funding (43%). Fifty-one percent of leaders said a key driver of this is a lack of full visibility into the state and management of their facilities. This problem is exacerbated among school districts with less than 10,000 students. Fifty-six percent of respondents from districts of that size said they lack visibility into these issues. And since they don't have full, accurate pictures of their facilities today, they need better data and insights.

51%

of K-12 facilities leaders said they lack clear understanding and direction of the overall state and management of their facilities.

“Which of the following, if any, has your organization experienced due to falling short of its facilities management and improvement goals?”



Base: 204 US facilities planning and management decision-makers from K-12 school districts with 5,000+ students
Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gordian, August 2023

K-12 Facilities Leaders Struggle To Strategically Allocate Their Budgets

To achieve their goals, facilities leaders need to allocate funding more strategically. They need help prioritizing, demonstrated by little variation in where they've focused their budget increases. For most of the respondents, their ability to pursue actions hangs on such a narrow margin that their ability to execute is fragile. Depending on the action, 96% to 99% of respondents said their district would increase its level of activity if funding increased in any amount. And all respondents said their district would have to seek additional funding to continue an action if the budget decreased at all. On average, 42% of respondents said it would take a 5% to 10% budget increase, and an average of 55% said it would take an increase of 20% or more.

Only 1% to 4%

of K-12 facilities leaders have approved budgets to support assessments, preventative maintenance programs, and upgrades.

“Where applicable, what level of facilities budget *increase* would drive your organization to do each of the following?”

- 5% budget increase
- 10% budget increase
- 20% budget increase
- 30% budget increase
- 50% budget increase

Upgrade existing facilities to meet environmental sustainability standards



Expand facilities to accommodate growing populations or program expansions



Invest in preventative maintenance programs to reduce long-term repair costs



“Where applicable, what level of facilities budget *decrease* would drive your organization to do each of the following?”

Implement energy-saving practices to reduce utility costs



Consolidate facilities or spaces to reduce operational and maintenance costs



Reduce the frequency of non-essential maintenance activities



K-12 Facilities Leaders Can't Continue To Manage And Plan On Their Own

K-12 leaders recognize the pressing need to optimize budgets, yet many grapple with the absence of a clear roadmap. A significant 38% said their current budget is consumed by contingencies and deferred maintenance, which constrains the potential for regular upkeep and modernization. While budgeting decisions should ideally be driven by concrete insights, they often hinge on a facilities leader's intuition. The value of a knowledgeable partner — one that comprehends unique needs, offers data expertise, and aids in securing board approvals for enhancement projects — cannot be overstated. Confidence in data accuracy simplifies future budgeting processes, yet a notable 55% of leaders feel unsupported by their partners, and 54% admit to a deficiency in relevant data and insights, further restricting maintenance and renovation opportunities.

Factors Preventing Additional Resource Allocation To Facility Improvement

55% Lack of appropriate partners or collaborators



54% Absence of essential data or insights to guide decision-making



54% Uncertainty about future budget allocations



50% Difficulty in obtaining management or board approval for larger-scale projects



50% Insufficient staffing or lack of a workforce with the necessary skills or training



49% The necessity of basic operations (e.g., “keeping the lights on”) takes precedence



48% Lack of clear return on investment or business case for facility improvement



47% Regulatory or policy restrictions that limit investment in facility improvement



Choosing The Right Partner Should Be About Strategy, Not Existing Relationships

Leaders often gravitate toward the familiar when selecting partners. A telling 44% of respondents said they consistently opt for “preferred” providers. This trend is further pronounced in school districts with less than 10,000 students as 49% of those leaders said they favor familiar partners. Yet, comfort does not equate to strategic proficiency.

Facilities leaders require partners that bring strategic depth to management and planning. While two-thirds of respondents said they collaborate with eight or more partners, quantity doesn’t guarantee quality. A striking 85% said they search for fewer, more adept partners — those with financial planning expertise, the

ability to furnish precise and pertinent data for capital plans, and the capacity to offer bespoke solutions in line with the organization’s goals.

Two-thirds

of respondents said their district has 8 or more partners.

Elements Of A Successful Partnership With Facilities Planning Partners*

☐ Important ☒ Very important

Expertise in strategic facilities planning and lifecycle management	37%	39%	76%
Provides accurate and relevant data needed to build and defend capital plans	36%	39%	75%
Ability to provide tailored solutions and services to meet specific organizational needs	35%	39%	74%

Organization’s Approach To Selecting Facilities Planning Partners

- 44%** All of our organization’s projects are managed by preferred providers that our organization consistently relies on.
- 18%** Most of our organization’s projects are handled by a select group of preferred providers that we consider first.
- 19%** Our organization has a select group of preferred providers that we consider first for some of our projects.

Base: 204 US facilities planning and management decision-makers from K-12 school districts with 5,000+ students
 *Note: Showing top responses by total.
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gordian, August 2023

Consolidating To Fewer Strategic Partners Yields Greater Benefits

While a significant two-thirds of respondents engage with eight or more providers, a compelling 85% see the merit in refining these partnerships. Moving beyond the comfort of familiar relationships to critically evaluate partnerships based on strategic capability gaps is a recognized challenge. Many view consolidation as a pathway to enhanced collaboration, streamlined communication, scalable innovation, and risk mitigation. This perspective is even more pronounced in school districts with fewer than 10,000 students.

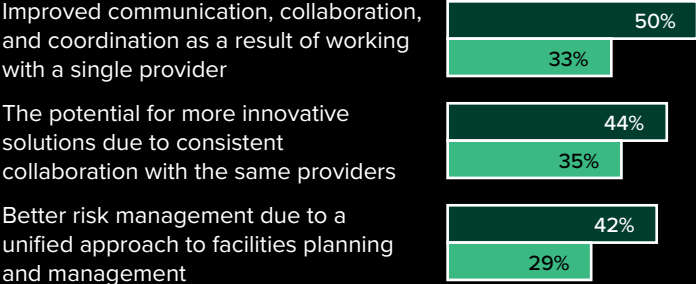
Beyond these operational benefits, respondents expect their consolidated partnerships to garner positive feedback from stakeholders, employees, and the public; to promote ESG and social responsibility; and to provide ways to seamlessly integrate into the organization’s existing systems.

85%

of respondents want to consolidate their facilities planning and management providers.

Potential Benefits From Partner Consolidation

○ 5,000 to 9,999 students ○ 10,000+ students



Metrics For Successful Partnerships*

33%

Positive feedback from stakeholders, including employees and the public

30%

Strong commitment to environmental sustainability and social responsibility

29%

Seamless integration with our existing processes and systems

Base: 204 US facilities planning and management decision-makers from K-12 school districts with 5,000+ students
 Note: Showing top responses.
 *Note: Showing top three ranked responses.
 Source: A commissioned study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Gordian, August 2023

Conclusion

Educational facility leaders face regular pressure to make the right decisions, often quickly. Most, however, fail to prioritize their goals, especially within narrow margins of their budgets. Once they can strategically allocate their funds, they will make a difference. But they lack key planning resources like staff and data-driven insights. Strategic partners can help with these bandwidth and knowledge gaps, but even though the leaders in this study said they work with multiple preferred partners, the partners fail to resolve these issues. To reach their goals, streamline operations, and improve planning, K-12 leaders must engage truly with strategic partners, not just today's familiar preferred providers.

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Methodology

This Opportunity Snapshot was commissioned by Gordian. To create this profile, Forrester Consulting supplemented this research with custom survey questions asked of 204 US facilities planning and management decision-makers from K-12 school districts with 5,000 or more students. The custom survey began in July 2023 and was completed in August 2023. The study was conducted in a double-blind fashion.

Demographics

STATE	
California	15%
Texas	15%
New York	14%
South Carolina	13%
New Jersey	13%
Florida	11%
Georgia	10%
Arizona	10%

SCHOOL TYPE	
Public	60%
Private	27%
Charter	13%

CURRENT POSITION/ DEPARTMENT	
Facilities	42%
Executive leadership/ administrator	21%
Finance/accounting	19%
Procurement	9%
Operations	8%

REGION	
United States	100%

STUDENT AGE GROUP	
K-12	100%

Demographics, cont.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AT ORGANIZATION	
Facilities management	74%
Facilities planning	72%

ORGANIZATION SIZE	
5,000 to 9,999 students	50%
10,000 to 24,999 students	29%
25,000 to 49,999 students	15%
50,000 to 99,999 students	5%

TITLE	
District-level leader	56%
School principal or facilities administrator	28%
Facilities manager/ maintenance director	7%
School business manager	6%
Procurement officer	2%

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

ABOUT FORRESTER CONSULTING

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The background is a dark green, almost black, field filled with a complex pattern of thin, light green lines. These lines form a series of interconnected triangles of various sizes, creating a faceted, crystalline appearance. The triangles are oriented in different directions, some pointing upwards and others downwards, giving the overall effect a sense of depth and movement. In the center of this geometric pattern, the word "FORRESTER" is written in a white, serif, all-caps font. A small registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the top right of the word. The text is centered both horizontally and vertically, standing out clearly against the dark, textured background.

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