What is EFEI?

EFEI is a tool that provides a detailed measure of a school building and campus’ effectiveness to support 21st century teaching and learning modalities.

It is unique in that it measures the most important elements of a school’s design relative to its ability to support education. In the past, these elements such as a welcoming entry and strong indoor-outdoor connections had been considered un-measurable and, therefore, marginalized in the design of school facilities. EFEI allows such elements to take their rightful place as the key measures of a design’s success because they are the ones most influential in any school’s bottom line – its effectiveness as a place for teaching and learning.

Who developed it?

EFEI was developed in mid 2005 by Prakash Nair and Randall Fielding, the owners of DesignShare.com – the foremost resource for innovative schools worldwide with nearly 300 published case studies from 20 countries. Nair and Fielding built EFEI upon the foundation of 25 universal design principles detailed in their new book titled, The Language of School Design. In its latest iteration, EFEI contains 30 design principles and several sub-principles.

Who is using EFEI?

EFEI is a new tool, but interest in its use is growing rapidly. Already, several government agencies have expressed interest in using it and it has been used to evaluate $100 million worth of school facilities projects in Devenport, Launceston, Kingston and Hobart, Tasmania; Geelong, Echuca and Bendigo in Victoria; Perth and Bunbury in Western Australia; Albuquerque, New Mexico; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Durham, North Carolina.

Has EFEI Influenced Government Funding Decisions?

In almost every instance of its use, EFEI has informed government funding decisions. This has happened in several ways. 1) The EFEI review has provided an objective assessment of a particular school’s educational effectiveness and thus helped determine its eligibility for funding; 2) The EFEI review specifically identified the areas in which the physical campus was deficient from a teaching and learning standpoint and helped focus spending on those aspects of the school’s building and campus that would directly benefit its educational mission;
3) The EFEI review allowed the government to prioritize scarce capital dollars in situations with competing priorities by allowing decision-makers to assess the “educational bang for the buck” of spending decisions and allocate funds accordingly; 4) For already funded projects, EFEI is providing a common framework that all stakeholders can use to determine the most effective way in which those monies should be spent to achieve the desired educational objectives; 5) For projects that have been recently completed, EFEI is providing a common vocabulary to gauge how well the campus is meeting its educational mission while providing low-cost or no-cost options to optimize its value from a teaching, learning and community use standpoint.

The above are only some of the many ways in which EFEI is already having a significant impact on capital budget prioritization and spending.

What are its advantages?

1. **It provides a reliable and consistent measure of quality**: As discussed below, EFEI utilizes many criteria that had traditionally been considered “qualitative” and yet it permits reliable quantitative results to be obtained.

2. **It is easy to understand**: The criteria against which school buildings and campuses are measured are intuitive and easy to understand. They are based on environmental qualities of learning and living spaces that have been well researched and documented over many decades and not on current fads.

3. **It is locally customized, yet globally relevant**: It can be finely tuned to the needs of each individual school and, yet, results of EFEI can be compared across a region, a state, the country and even the world. For example, a particular score of say 40% means the same thing in Sydney as it does in New York. This is possible because the score is actually saying, "On a scale of 1% to 100%, these two schools scored 40% in terms of how effectively they responded to the educational vision of their respective communities."

4. **It is richly textured but weighted for importance**: EFEI accommodates a broad range of criteria that are important to any given community, and yet, because of the built-in weighting system, it permits more important criteria to factor more heavily in the actual scoring of design solutions.

5. **It is a formative and not a summative tool**: That means, it allows a school community to closely monitor the efficacy of solutions throughout the process of visioning, planning, designing, constructing, occupying, maintaining and refurbishing a school building and campus. In this way, it enables a school community to make small, but meaningful changes throughout the process which is a better guarantee of quality than a
summative tool which only allows the school community to realize after the fact if a design was a success or a failure. Obviously, EFEI goes a long way towards eliminating the uncertainties of summative tools.

6. **It permits early testing of various solutions to preclude costly mistakes later on:** It allows the school stakeholder community to “test” and “score” many different solutions on paper at a holistic campus-wide level as well as at an individual building component level very early in the planning and design stages. This kind of early testing means that costly mistakes in the later stages of a project that have a much bigger negative impact on budgets and schedules can be avoided.

7. **It is highly participatory and inherently democratic:** It enables transparent decision-making and the establishment of priorities. While trained experts must be available to realize the full benefits of the tool, EFEI is designed to encourage participation and buy-in from the entire school stakeholder community. Spending and prioritization decisions that flow from the use of EFEI are, therefore, transparent and easily defensible. Across schools and communities, this transparency allows equity arguments which had previously been associated with spending levels to now be tied to quality.

8. **It can save a significant amount of money:** Used properly, EFEI can result in significant cost savings. Individual schools can save money by properly prioritizing spending decisions, building only what is likely to yield the maximum educational value, creating greater net-to-gross efficiencies, helping with funding (funding decisions are easier to justify when the educational benefits of slated improvements are easily understood), proper selection of materials, improving the long-term energy savings and maintenance costs, recruiting students and teachers to participate directly in the day-to-day upkeep of the facility and grounds as an integral part of the curriculum and building only what is absolutely necessary from a teaching and learning standpoint.

**Licensing**

EFEI will be licensed for use by individual schools, groups of schools and entire school systems for a nominal fee.

**Training**

EFEI can be put into effective use with minimal training. Training is currently provided by Fielding Nair International and its authorized agents in the USA, in Australia and Singapore. FNI is now working to offer EFEI to schools and school systems in other countries.
**Automation**

EFEI is currently provided in a simple-to-use Excel file format. For larger applications, FNI will work with user groups to produce database versions of the tool. FNI principals are also able to conduct workshops showing how this tool can be used to measure the ramifications of facilities solutions on a number of social and economic indicators. EFEI can also be combined very effectively with existing and new GIS systems to provide “big-picture” cost-benefit analyses of educational facilities spending decisions.

**Additional Information**

EFEI is continuing to be developed and refined by the copyright holders. For additional information, please contact Prakash Nair at Prakash@designShare.com or call him in New York at 1-917-406-3120.