

Service Associate Q&A

Chad Bathke of VJS Construction talks school design trends, benefits of athletic turf fields and other school design issues



Chad Bathke is a partner and chief operating officer for VJS Construction



You Can Build on That

Q. *Are there any new products or design features that are changing the way schools are being built and/or designed?*

A. The way that teachers teach, students learn, and the tools that enable each of these continues to evolve. Technology has played a major role in this change. Currently, many of our clients are interested in flexible, innovative, comfortable learning environments. The goal is to create an environment where learning happens not just in the classroom but throughout the building, where it makes the most sense and is most comfortable for the teachers and students.

Building security has remained a top priority for all of our clients. Secure entrance designs that include electric door strikes, cameras and visitor flow through the main office are common themes. Designs are also evolving to create safe areas within the schools which limit the ability of anyone entering the school to access student populated areas.

Q. *School districts are increasingly moving to a turf surface for their football/athletic field. What are the advantages and disadvantage of a turf field?*

A. There are several advantages to a turf field including increased playability which minimizes game cancellations due to excessive rain because you can immediately play on a turf field after a heavy rainfall, claims that there are fewer injuries, faster game pace and conservation of water.

What should districts be aware of when considering a turf field is that the field provides a warmer playing surface. Also, depending on the use of the field, there is a life expectancy of the turf. You will need to groom the field at least once a week. Grooming the field stands up the fibers, balances the infill and picks up any trash that is in the infill. You will most likely need to do a more detailed field cleaning twice a year. You will also need to add infill to areas over time. You may want to buy more sophisticated groomers along with having the proper equipment to pull the groomers. Ensure that these costs are incorporated into your projected field costs.

Q. *How have school district facilities changed over the past 20 or so years?*

A. School district facilities are moving toward larger spaces to accommodate an expanding student population, more flexible learning environments, the need for technology, safety and accessibility upgrades, the need to upgrade facilities with more sustainable designs and a way to provide career exploration opportunities for students.

More classroom space seems to be a high priority for the school districts we have been working with recently. Multi-purpose or flexible learning spaces are also becoming more of a trend and help to create more collaborative space for both teachers and students and provide areas that can be used for different academic outlets.

Q. *From a design standpoint, what do you think the ideal school would look like?*

A. When constructing a school for our clients, we look at all the efficiencies that can be incorporated into the school. We want to work with districts to provide a school that accommodates the unique learning needs of every student and helps them develop academically. We also want to help the districts construct a facility that will evolve with learning spaces adaptable to future changes and needs.

The ideal school would be designed to have the best working environment for teachers, the flexibility and adaptability for students to learn and grow, and a place where everyone feels safe. It would foster an environment that promotes creativity, the desire to learn and an atmosphere where students would strive to do their best. ■

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