

Supporting Teaching and Learning Through School Design



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SERVICE ASSOCIATE Q & A

Q. *What is the architect's role in a school construction/renovation project?*

A. Every facilities project has its roots in the needs, wants and dreams of the school community. It is the role of the architect to bring those visions to life but also to help a diverse group of stakeholders navigate a sometimes complex decision-making process. While the primary responsibility of the architect is always to ensure the health, safety and welfare of those who will use the finished space, the architect also needs to connect with the building users at a personal level to build consensus in a shared vision of a facility that often will serve the community for 50 or more years.

Q. *Do you have any tips on how a school board can successfully communicate to an architect its vision for a school building project?*

A. School districts do not typically engage in large construction projects on a regular basis. Therefore, it is important when embarking on such an effort that time is taken at the outset to clearly establish and articulate achievable objectives for the project. The school board must rely on its administrative team to carry out the prescribed project as it is not realistic for a board to be constantly available to address the myriad questions that come with such a complex undertaking.

This is not to say that the board should be without representation during this process. During the design and construction phases of any project, there will likely be regularly scheduled project team meetings. It is often valuable (and hopefully fun!) to have a board representative as part of that team. This person's role is to represent the board, assist with any needed interpretation of the board's direction and also typically report back to the board on progress being made.

Q. *What are some of the trends you are seeing among new school buildings?*

A. Flexibility and variety of space types are top of the mind when designing a new educational facility. The acknowledgment that all students have individual learning preferences has led to a change in the way many classrooms are run. The ability to offer a variety of accommodations to meet those individual needs is accomplished through the introduction of different types of furniture, various finish material selections and provision of auxiliary learning spaces.

Greater emphasis is now being placed on the spaces that connect all of the primary classrooms together. We see those "in between" spaces as tremendous opportunities to offer the educators and students another place to learn beyond the four walls of their classroom. The use of glass

to provide visual connection between these spaces is critical. Teachers need to feel comfortable sending students out to collaborative areas to work so providing good sightlines for supervision is necessary.

Q. *Can you give an example of how school design (good or bad) can impact student achievement?*

A. An example of how school design can negatively impact student achievement is the dreaded "open concept" schools of the 1970s. This movement was a case of architecture getting ahead of pedagogy. Learning from these experiences, today we are very careful to ensure the facilities that we design support the teaching and learning that is happening today but also provides flexibility for continuous evolution into the future. ■

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