

School Construction & Renovation

School construction and renovation takes on a whole new meaning for the Principal, staff and students when it occurs during the school year. New construction, for most of the year, can be confined to a fenced off area separated from the existing building and secured from school activities. Complex or large renovation projects often carry over into part of, or the entire school year. For these projects, the school Administration, the Architect and Contractor should work together to understand how construction activities affect the occupants, what preparation steps need to be taken and what the school is required to do before, during and after projects are completed.

Ongoing Activities

Communication is the first step to achieving a successful construction project. As construction starts it's a good idea to include the Administration as part of the construction team. Scheduling frequent planning meetings keeps everyone informed and up to date on all construction activities. Contractors should also be aware of how their activities can affect school operations.

Here are some questions to ask regarding everyday construction activities:

- Will construction material deliveries be limited to before school opens or after school?
- When will noisy activities (drilling, hammering) occur?
- When will the utilities be disconnected and how long will each disruption last?
- Will there be times when the windows should remain closed due to fumes from outside activities; such as pavement or roofing?
- Do all contractors have proper identification?

• Do all contractors understand the established rules regarding separation of worker / student when working inside the school?

As shown above, a few simple planning steps by Administration, Architects and Contractors can make the school day run a lot smoother.



Preparation

When construction is scheduled to begin in a particular area, it is common for the Administration to have their staff prepare the area ahead of the construction activities. Moving teacher's furniture and material to temporary locations requires time and manpower. It's important for the Administration to be able to work with the schedule created by the contractor. All parties should understand when and how they may be responsible for a part of the construction time line so proper staff time allotments can be made.

During Construction

Throughout the construction process it is important for the Administration to disseminate information developed with the Architect / Contractor to all involved parties. This includes staff, students, parents and other outside groups who interact with the school on a daily basis. Principals can act as the liaison between staff and construction personnel to keep the staff aware of where the construction activities will be occurring. Students need to be safeguarded and should be educated about dangers around construction sites. Newsletters can

be distributed which address the construction progress, review safety items in place, and expectations of the staff, students and parents, during construction. District deliveries, Postal deliveries, and cleaning personnel all need to be aware of when an entrance may be closed or a parking area is inaccessible.

Follow Up

After construction is completed and the building is cleaned there is more for the District staff to do. Custodial staff can now receive training in the proper use and care of all the new finishes and equipment. The District will need to relocate furniture and install Owner purchased items such as pencil sharpeners and maps. Teachers need to set up their rooms and prepare for incoming students. Contractors will be back in the building to fix minor 'punch list' items over a period of weeks or even months; sometimes before, after, and frequently during school hours. The Administration should have involvement in coordinating all of these activities.

Communication between school personnel, architects, and contractors at the beginning of construction will go a long way toward a smooth construction process. Working closely with the Architect / Contractor and planning weeks or even months in advance will lead to smooth transitions during the entire process.

Photo: New Hampshire High School, CUSD 300, Carpentersville, IL

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