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Architects, Inc.

Firm History

Ability presents a body of architecture for client organizations who have received full value from the planning, design, and construction process from their association with WLC Architects. At WLC Architects, we believe that when public and private enterprises realize the full potential of their investment in space, buildings, facilities, and land development, they discover opportunities for perfecting work and service environments, meeting community needs, achieving environmental quality, and most important, creating a sustaining competitive advantage for the future.

While all of our projects result from unique opportunities and challenges, the ones chosen for this issue of *Ability* best reflect successful architecture made possible by a participatory design process. By combining problem-solving with research methods, WLC provides an open, clear, and accessible design process founded upon the design team concept used in our studio.

The WLC studio concept fosters the participation of our staff in a dynamic and interactive design team. The process produces affordable, functional, and innovative solutions. At WLC, we see ourselves as having something of value to contribute to your critical factors for project success. Resulting in trustworthy partnerships, our approach develops an intimate relationship between the firm and our clients. The numerous awards, commendations, and achievements of WLC Architects reflect that relationship.

Please come visit us! With Bay Area, Central Valley, and Southern California office locations, WLC Architects is conveniently located to provide optimum service—often minutes away from a major airport. See our WEB page on the Internet and write to us at: ability@wlcarchitects.com. With work throughout California, and projects in Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Hawaii, Alaska, and Texas, we have the ability to provide a solid basis for designing your future.

Educational Specifications *and Master Planning*

The era of the architect developing the Educational Specifications (Ed Specs) in isolation is over. Moreover, the highly egregious act of wholesale adoption of other districts' specifications just to meet a requirement is also a thing of the past. In this issue of the Facility Ability, we hope to put in perspective the relationship between the two processes. There is no doubt that they are interrelated and the master plan for facilities is derived from the educational plan summary. Attempting to go beyond basic facility fitness evaluation in the master plan process without a completed Ed Spec could jeopardize and ultimately compromise the entire planning effort.

The articles submitted in this issue will highlight some proven approaches that have resulted in effective facility master planning. When goals and objectives are clearly articulated, developed, and documented, the resulting facilities directly contribute to enhanced student learning outcomes.

Ron Pregmon
Director of Planning and
Business Development
WLC Architects, Inc.

The Role of Educational Specifications *in Facility Planning:*

Although the development of educational specifications is the backbone of the facility planning process, it is only one part of it.

The purpose of an educational specification is to assist school district staff in cooperation with school and community leaders. The document includes a definition of the specifications, suggested procedures, and a model format. More importantly, the purpose is to help craft visions for educational programs for the 21st century and the facilities necessary to support those visionary goals.

Comprehensive educational specifications link facility design to the educational program and serve as documentation for the completed facility. In future evaluations, understanding the reasons that shaped the spaces may be valuable in implementing changes necessitated by new development in teaching or technology.

Educators must remain active in facility development and not delegate program decisions or interpretations to others.

The best projects evolve from constructive dialogue between designer and educator. An architect can offer new alternatives in design and technology but may not be proficient in educational theory or instructional delivery systems. A complete educational specifications document helps keep the educator in charge and facilitates communication within the project stakeholder group. To be effective in this role, however, the educational specification document must reflect consensus in educational goals by all stakeholders: educators, students, and administrators.

Sherril Merrill
Facilities Planner
WLC Architects, Inc.

Everyone remembers the expression, *“When one door closes another door opens, but we so often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door, that we do not see the ones which open for us.”*

-Alexander Graham Bell

Using this wonderful line as a metaphor, I suggest that the time is ripe for superintendents and school trustees to apply this to the financial melt-down schools and colleges are trying to manage in the latter part of 2009 into 2010 (maybe even 2011). The closing door is obvious with big cut-backs in state funding, the economic downturn in the community, and unclear predictions of the time of recovery.

So let's look at the window analogy, using my own experience gained over 50 years in educational endeavors having worked at preparing for “better times” while managing “poor times.” Look carefully at the curriculum tablet. Carefully examine what is really important, and move to reduce or eliminate courses, programs, and activities that can't measure up to critical inspection. Of course, the ultimate justification is “times are tough.” This clean-up activity does wonders for the future and can seldom be done in good times.

Second, look at the buildings and infrastructure of the schools. A careful analysis by the district architect most likely will reveal important voids that have been overlooked, maybe for years. As an example, the absence of technology in the classroom and the administration offices causes inefficiencies. Next, look at the buildings for structure

deficiencies, access issues, and just plain eye appeal to parents, students, and the community.

My recommendation is to start now to develop the necessary plans that will be ready while construction costs are relatively low. In WLC's recent experience, construction costs are currently running 15% to 25% less than the last two years. Applying this savings to new construction or modernization means your funds now go a lot farther. On a new high school that could mean a second gymnasium and/or a fine arts facility.

Clearly, the door is closed; however, look for the “window of opportunity,” talk to the appropriate professionals now. A knowledgeable community will be thrilled to have their trustees on the ball.

A last thought, as a trustee of the San Bernardino Community College District for the last eight years, I am pleased to report that our board is moving in a way very close to the points of this article. “We are walking the talk!”

Charles S. Terrell, Jr., Ed.D.
Educational Resources
WLC Architects, Inc.

The Importance of *Educational Master Planning*

Never have the reasons for thoughtful planning of educational programs and facilities been more important for community colleges than the present. First and foremost, it is essential for effective planning and use of scarce resources. Secondly, it is essential that a thorough review of current and future programs has been studied so as to meet the future needs of the communities we serve. If any additional reasons need to be pointed out to convince one to systemically approach educational planning before finalizing your facility plan, you only need to look to the accreditation guidelines to find a compelling reason. Educational Master Plans are a key requirement of any district's Strategic Plan and are a major shortfall of many colleges in their accreditation review.

The commitment of community colleges is for significant input of all of the constituencies of the college in planning. The concept of collegial consultation is essential to achieving the plans of institutions. Involving all users of facilities

and all educational program faculty and staff in planning is not only politically correct, it is absolutely critical if you are to build facilities that meet the educational needs of the college. To not involve these key players will significantly increase the chances that the college will not be pleased or satisfied with the performance or appearance of its buildings. While award winning facilities can be designed and constructed, unless they meet the long range educational needs of the colleges, they will not achieve the most important objectives. Since many, if not most, of the facilities being planned on community college campuses today are locally funded with property taxes levied as a result of local bond elections, it is essential that they meet long term objectives that serve the community. The long term educational needs should be serving the community at least as long as the local taxpayers are paying for the bonds.

Robert Temple
Educational Resources

Ed Specs: *A Planner's Approach:*

First, let us all be clear on the development of district-wide Ed Specs. It is clearly the responsibility of the facilities department. In football terminology, the director of facilities is clearly the quarterback and the C/I division is the star running back. These are skilled players and will handle the ball most of the time. As the facility director you are in charge of the entire effort, organization, deadlines, and general guidance. First of all you have to bring the “right players” to the table and lead the effort.

Forming the committee is your first real challenge. It must have buy-in from all the members and you have to adopt the rules and procedures to include meeting times, location, and attendance. The next challenge is to insure the size of the committee is inclusive yet manageable. The following are some suggested members. Your particular circumstances may dictate other additional people. Board member, community participant, City staff (Parks and Recreation, Library, Health, etc.) Administrators, Curriculum/Instruction, Instructional Technology, Maintenance, Career Technical, teachers, parents, students, Architect.

The facility planner should lead a guided discussion and encourage the participants to integrate their educational goals and objectives into

concrete examples and specific requirements for ALL functioning spaces. This includes outside areas, school parking, campus entry to classrooms, gymnasiums, and performing arts centers. Each space should be designed based on the requirements developed during these discussions. District adopted policies must never be overlooked in this process.

The role of the facility planner and the architect should be one of consultation and expertise. These individuals should provide the experienced guidance to the committee in terms of what works and the drawbacks of other tried approaches. This is not the time to make judgments or base opinions strictly on price or costs. As we all know, that battle is better left to be fought at a later date.

Finally, plan in debt, start early, and leave time for adequate review at the superintendent and board levels. The board of trustees must sign off and adopt the findings presented to them by way of a board approved agenda item. Good luck and may the winds of good planning be at your back.

Ron Pregmon
Director of Planning and
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New for 2010

The new CDE/SFPD requirements for district developed and board adopted plans go into effect in July 2010, but districts need to get ready for these new changes. With all the focus on the immediate needs of budget reductions, this may get lost as we move through this challenging year.

Effective July 1, 2010, all educational specifications will now need to be approved by the LEA governing board and then submitted to the CDE as part of their plan summary. In addition, districts need to describe the educational program and the philosophy of emphasis or themes that may affect the design of the classroom or buildings. Districts will need to identify any features identified in the educational specifications that are not provided in the submitted plans, and then explain the reasons why these design features are not included. We will have to describe and identify all teaching stations/classrooms as to the instructional activities and functions that will take place within the classrooms or teaching stations.

While most city and county budgets have the same budget conditions as school districts, this may be

an excellent time to begin or continue discussions regarding joint use projects where the budgets of the individual joint use partners can be combined to deliver needed new facilities or modernization for current facilities within their communities. It is also a time to think “outside the box.” Previously, there were not the financial pressures on municipal agencies and school districts, and prior discussions regarding joint use projects may not have been given the attention they deserved. Various agencies may have been reluctant to venture into a joint use project; but now seems to be the ideal time for discussing new views of previous ideas that could not get traction.

A lot of challenges face California school districts this year and while we are faced with immediate budget issues, we cannot let the future needs be taken out of the conversations we need to have with our district staff, local communities, and our school boards.

Bob Ferguson
Educational Resources

Master Planning and Educational Specifications: *A Symbiotic Process*

Educational leaders face many and varied challenges in today's school systems. Not the least of these challenges may be housing students in state-of-the-art classrooms during tough economic times. Increasing pressures of "leaned-out" businesses have reduced workforces and increased technology to unprecedented levels for our current generation.

While it would be simple to point out many negative situations relating to the challenges of school district leadership, it is just as easy to point out what is "right" about today's challenge. In a recently re-published book entitled "How Full is Your Bucket?", by Tom Rath and Dr. Donald O. Clifton, the authors provide us with compelling evidence that when one focuses on the positive aspects of relationships or circumstances, more positive results are experienced.

Using this model, it is important to understand the recent changes in the planning and development of school facilities in a positive effect. No longer are school districts able to produce a set of plans indicating the layout of classrooms, laboratories, offices, sports facilities, etc. and move them forward for State approval.

Today's procedures require that an additional component, the inclusion of curricular and instructional rationale, be a vital part of the development and justification process for school site Master Planning. This process must include the specific uses of technology as an instructional methodology; the layout

of classrooms for multiple and varied instructional methodologies; the justification and specific uses for multiple use facilities such as theaters, auditoriums, studios, and fine art facilities; and the potential for sustainability of the facilities.

School architects are part of the overall team that produces the educational model that will drive the development of the school Master Plan. The input of the curriculum and instruction side of the house is included not as another "layer" of development, but as an integrated component or foundation.

The accountability of the new Master Planning process assures that today and tomorrow, California's students will be housed in facilities that are specifically designed for their specific instructional programs--not programs that are made to "fit" into classrooms.

When reflecting upon the research conducted by Rath and Clifton, this is truly a positive opportunity for school administrators, facility planners, curriculum and instructional personnel, and architects to develop school Master Plans that will meet the needs of today as well as be able to sustain themselves well into the future.

Dennis D. Murray
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What the Plan Summary Does:

AS of July 1, 2010, new construction projects must have a board-adopted educational specification. Many will look at this as additional interference by a state agency but at WLC, this is just work as normal. Educational Specifications have always been required through Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations. The intent of the Ed Spec is to ensure compliance with Title 5 and it provides the District with guidelines to ensure the design of your project supports and enhances the educational program.

In addition to compliance with Title 5, many other benefits to a comprehensive Educational Specification are realized.

- Defines your Educational Program.
- Educational philosophy.
- What is taught.
- Class size standards.
- Teaching methodologies.
- Can be a verification of the design.
- When the project is completed, the post occupancy reviews will be following the ed specs to ensure that the design does in fact meet the educational specifications outline.

- Ensures involvement from all stakeholders.
- From teachers to students, from the district administration to the community, there are several individuals and groups that should provide input into the educational specifications to capture the needs of all those who will use the facility.
- Confirms your budget.
- The desires of the design and realism of budget are at times difficult to connect. The Ed Spec can be used to help align the two using defined criteria.
- Develops your schedule.
- Understanding the educational needs and demographics of the district are a critical component of any project. What will you need and when. Your educational specification will bring these two pieces together in a conceptual schedule for the future school.

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