preface

school facilities: new solutions to new challenges

During the period from about 1950 to 1970, major questions relating to elementary and secondary school capital improvement planning revolved to a considerable extent around issues of expansion. Questions such as the number of new buildings needed to accommodate increasing student populations and the most appropriate designs for new facilities to be constructed to best meet the needs of a specific curriculum represented the focus of attention in school facility planning. As we moved into the decade of the 1970's, facility planning concerns and priorities have shifted dramatically, primarily in response to decreasing enrollments at the elementary and secondary school levels, and also in response to emerging environmental and energy concerns. The issue of modernization versus replacement of existing facilities is also an item of more serious concern than ever before. Additionally, issues relating to school construction, modification, and capital improvement budgeting which were often not addressed in a systematic fashion especially by smaller school systems are now, because of economic and constituency pressures, having to be responded to in detail by school leaders—often in the arena of public forum. An adequate understanding of new approaches to new challenges in educational facility planning is not a luxury on the part of school managers; it is a necessity.

Demographers are warning that enrollments will continue to ease downward each year into the foreseeable future. The reality of enrollment reductions results in empty classrooms every year in many school districts. Yet, most of these rooms are located in the wrong place within the district. This requires attendance boundary changes, imaginative use of vacated space, and even in some situations abandonment of whole school buildings.

In the realm of energy conservation, we are warned now more vigorously than ever before that energy simply must be conserved. Yet, many old school buildings are replete with energy-robbing inefficiencies, and a great number of those schools constructed in the 1960's reflect little or no attention to conservation of energy. Energy-conscious planning has thus become a guiding theme in constructing new and maintaining existing school buildings.

The cost of construction is continuing to increase—as much as 12 per cent annually—which is auguring against continued effort for construction of new facilities to replace outmoded buildings. This is causing increased attention to the feasibility, both educationally and economically, of modernizing existing facilities.

The rapidity of change in curricular design and instructional methodology is occurring at a rate faster than buildings can be modified to facilitate these changes. The building then, too often, is retarding effective response to important curricular and instructional innovation and change.

Finally, citizens and patrons of the schools are clamoring for more involvement and greater input into educational decision-making relative to school buildings not only at the policy level but at the resultant spending level as well.

In meeting these kinds of facility challenges in the 1970's and in looking toward the 1980's, educational leaders and school executives are being called upon to gain greater technical skill in planning, and also to seek imaginative solutions to facility planning and utilization. Each of the articles presented in this special edition of **Educational Considerations** is responsive to these new orientations and needs in school facility planning.

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