

Maintaining and Developing a Plan for School Facilities

S E R V I C E A S S O C I A T E Q & A

Q. *Maintaining school facilities can be challenging. Why is it important for school districts to have a comprehensive capital maintenance plan in place?*

A. We have seen the challenges districts face with capital maintenance budgeting. Districts are rightfully focused on funding areas that directly impact students, but that often means the facilities that serve the students are not prioritized with appropriate funding. The performance of these facilities does have an impact on operational costs, occupant comfort, and the ability to deliver curriculum to students. This has an impact on student performance and staff morale.

Having a capital maintenance plan and an appropriate annual maintenance budget is critical to allowing educational facilities to serve the students and staff the way they are intended. If maintenance projects are deferred too long, the problems tend to snowball and become too much to maintain without a referendum. In addition, a 10-year capital maintenance plan is a requirement for districts to take advantage of the benefits offered by Fund 46 which increases the amount of aid provided by the state for capital projects.

Q. *Could you provide some tips districts should consider when developing a long-term facilities plan?*

A. It is important to first complete a facility assessment to identify current deficiencies. Along with annual maintenance plans for things like painting, roofing, etc., a facilities assessment can

be used to begin to create a prioritized list of capital maintenance projects.

It is also important to look at any capital maintenance plan as a 'living document' that should be updated regularly (annually, bi-annually) so that it is current. These capital maintenance plans are often done internally, but districts might find it worth the minimal investment to get input from industry partners such as a construction manager or subcontractors and suppliers the district is familiar with.

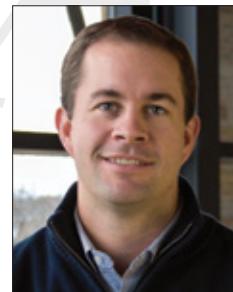
Q. *When renovating or building new, what steps can school districts take to protect the learning environment during complex construction projects?*

A. Construction projects are challenging, but the renovation of existing facilities that are occupied by students and staff offers a unique set of challenges. It is critical to have a design team and construction manager hired and collaborating with the district as early in the process as possible. With all team members on board and planning, the district can be assured the project will be completed to meet its goals while also maintaining a safe learning environment.

As a construction manager, we have found that early planning along with great communication and flexibility throughout construction is key to having a successful project while also allowing students to continue focusing on their work.

Q. *Is there anything new or exciting in school construction/design?*

A. Student learning opportunities that are being created in renovated



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or new schools is a trend we're seeing more of. As an example, in an intermediate school we recently completed, the design includes a geothermal pump room visible through glass walls that students pass by daily. Teachers can show students how energy is being used by viewing the pump room and monitoring energy use on a computer. In the same school, we installed a green roof and students can learn how it positively impacts storm water management. These are just two of several examples throughout the school. Not only are we able to share how buildings are being built, but also how they operate after construction. ■

Matt Breunig is a director of project management at Findorff and has 15 years of industry experience. Over the past six years, Matt has been a part of more than \$266 million in education projects that include facility assessments, capital maintenance planning, new construction, and referenda projects.

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