

# *A Community Plans Its School Buildings*

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Creative, cooperative leadership is paying dividends in the state of Washington in the shape of school buildings well located and designed and equipped to serve effectively the educational needs. Cleve O. Westby, director, School Building Facilities in the State Department of Public Instruction, Olympia, Washington, attributes this construction program and improvement of school buildings to leadership ability in getting people to work together toward this goal.

BETTER SCHOOL PLANTS are being built in the state of Washington than at any time in its history. The buildings are better structurally. The lighting, natural and artificial, is better. Heating, ventilating, and sanitary facilities are vastly improved. The buildings are more attractive inside and out. More important than all of these is the fact that these buildings are better functionally. They serve the purpose of education to a degree impossible to achieve in our older buildings.

Good school buildings, such as are provided now, are the result of planning that represents the cooperative effort of many individuals and groups. Getting people to work together effectively in the development of the design for a modern school building, to make them feel a deep sense of responsibility for the success of the project, to coordinate their thinking, and to build up a community understanding of what makes good schools calls for good leadership.

Let's look in on a school system where good leadership has been responsible for the solution of a critical school

building problem. Due to the impact of recent defense activities, the expansion of local industry and trade, and an increased birth rate, the community is experiencing considerable growth in population. Consequent increases in the school enrollment, a changing concept of the educational aims and philosophy of the school community, and the obsolescence of part of the school plant combined to make the present facilities entirely inadequate.

The superintendent and board of directors recognized that the need for new facilities presented many problems:

- ▶ Just what are the objectives and educational philosophy?
- ▶ In what way do these influence the needs?
- ▶ How many children at each grade level will need housing?
- ▶ How many will be enrolled for different courses at the high school level?
- ▶ Are existing sites adequate for expansion of existing buildings?
- ▶ If new sites are needed can enough land, suitably located, be acquired?
- ▶ What will the building program cost?
- ▶ How much money can be raised locally?

► How much state financial assistance can be obtained?

► What is the best way to plan for our needs?

It was realized that here was a program profoundly affecting the future of the people of the entire community. It would be necessary to have community and school-wide participation and expert assistance in the exact definition of the needs, the planning of the new facilities, and the campaign for funds.

### **Join School and Community Forces**

For the school and the community to work most effectively, it was decided to organize a coordinating council whose membership represented every organization in the community that conceivably might be interested in the program. Thus there was a representative from each PTA, service club, lodge, labor union, newspaper, radio station, the woman's club, the chamber of commerce, and the grange. In addition, school principals, selected teachers, and student leaders became members of the council.

The group was organized with the usual officers and meetings set for once each month, but more often if required. It was also decided just what part the council was to play. Care was taken to point out that it was to act in an advisory capacity. The board of directors, since it was legally responsible for its acts, would continue to exercise the right of final action on decisions. But the board made it plain that it would consider all recommendations of the council and that any matter of major importance would be referred to the

council for its opinion before action was taken.

It was further agreed that the council members were to keep their respective organizations informed on council activities and to bring back to the council reactions to any council action. This activation of two-way channels of communication between the school and the public was to prove to be one of the most valuable functions of the council.

### **Take the Problems to the People**

Members of the board of directors and the superintendents, at this first council meeting, described the needs of the schools as they saw them and made some suggestions for their solution. It was pointed out that the elementary enrollment had increased to the point where, despite the use of several temporary classrooms, it was necessary to place several rooms on a two-shift basis. The high school building, planned for a student load of about 400, had 750 junior and senior high school students enrolled. All classes were badly crowded and several activities had been curtailed or eliminated because of a lack of space.

There was a definite need for extension of the high school program to the thirteenth and fourteenth years to provide college and vocational training for young men and women in this section of the state. Any extension of the program was impossible under the existing conditions. Site needs, costs, and financing were discussed.

### **Don't Under-Estimate Lay Potential**

The council members didn't merely sit back and take in what the superintendent and board members gave out.

Most of them were aware of these needs and had ideas about meeting them. Some of them did not fully appreciate the problem in its entirety at this time, but it was gratifying to find that this group was more than a mere sounding board of public opinion and a disseminator of information. These men and women were leaders in their own groups with the capacity to analyze problems and to contribute suggestions of inestimable value.

### **Enlist Expert Assistance**

It was realized that many of the problems could not be satisfactorily solved without expert assistance and that some of the proposals would require state approval if the projects were to be eligible for state assistance in financing. A suggestion that a request be made to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction for assistance in making a survey of the school building needs in the district was approved by the group.

### **A SURVEY OF BUILDING NEEDS**

The survey was made on a cooperative basis. It was requested that certain data necessary for the survey be prepared locally and in advance of the arrival of the representatives from the State Department of Public Instruction. These included a spot map showing the residence in each attendance area of each pupil by grade and of each pre-school child; charts indicating the enrollment in each grade in each building for the last ten years; and a rating of each building on a standard score card. The spot maps were prepared by a committee of principals and staff members who were able to get the information from enrollment cards.

Since the school had no records for pre-school children, a census was made by PTA groups in each attendance area. A committee of three staff members, including the business manager who has charge of plant maintenance, acquainted itself with the method of using the building score cards and evaluated all of the buildings.

In asking that local people prepare the above information, the state representatives had a double purpose. First, this placed the survey on a definitely cooperative basis and it provided these people with an experience that would make it possible for them to evaluate their needs from time to time with little or no outside assistance. The second reason was that the state office does not have enough staff to do much of the preliminary work of a survey.

The state survey group made a careful analysis of these data and an inspection of all buildings and proposed sites. Working with the superintendent, board members, and representatives from the coordinating council, the survey group got as complete an understanding of all of the problems involved as possible.

Its recommendations were then presented to a joint meeting of the board of directors and the coordinating council. Among other things the recommendations included the construction of an addition to one of the existing elementary schools, a first unit of a new elementary school on a new site, and the first unit of a new building to house the senior high school and the thirteenth and fourteenth grades on a new site. The state committee also recommended a sequence for the building program such as to care for the most critical needs and a financing plan involving

local and state funds geared to the building program.

### **Expect Questions and Objections**

As may be expected, there were many questions asked and opinions expressed by both council and board members. The area of the recommended sites seemed unnecessarily large to some. Others felt that the new schools should be located differently; and some could not see why the present, already too small, high school site would not be large enough for the proposed new unit.

All objections and questions were carefully answered. The spot maps were used to indicate the desirability of the new sites from an attendance area standpoint and the projected enrollment to show why certain facilities would be needed. State requirements and the method of state financing of school building projects were explained.

### **Adopt a Definite Plan**

The report of the survey committee was at last approved with the recommendation that it be adopted by the board. This was done in due course, and the first big step had been taken. Through the council members the proposed program and the evaluation of the existing facilities was carried back to the organizations represented. The radio and newspapers carried a full account of the proceedings to the general public.

### **Inform the Public Fully, Accurately**

The planning of the new facilities and the organization of the publicity campaign for the bond issue and special tax levy for financing the proposed

projects were also worked out cooperatively. Certain lay people made radio addresses. Council members carried the appeal to the groups they represented. Special committees of council and PTA members undertook a house-to-house campaign to acquaint the public fully with the schools' needs. Having been associated with the program from the beginning, they were well informed and their story carried conviction. Needless to say, the bond issue and special tax levy carried by a gratifying majority.

### **STAFF AND LAY COOPERATION FOR BETTER PLANNING**

In the meantime, the planning of the new facilities had been undertaken. Since the addition to one of the elementary schools was to be constructed first, it had priority in the planning. It was decided that a committee of teachers, principals, and lay people should prepare a document outlining what they believed should be incorporated in the new building and that this be given to the architect as a part of his instructions from the board.

Some of the committee members visited new elementary schools in nearby cities to get ideas. Others met with the elementary staff to secure their suggestions and reactions to various proposals. Virtually everything connected with the building was touched upon; but principal attention was given to such details as cabinets, work benches, kinds and sizes of drawers, wardrobes, furniture, tack board, color of walls, ceilings, woodwork, floors and furniture, kind and amount of blackboard, display space, bookshelves, sinks, and other items in the classroom.

The staff was particularly anxious that the new addition provide for a work room and a teachers' rest room. The lay representatives were concerned about space that might be used for community gatherings. It was decided that in addition to the combination gymnasium-auditorium, which could be used for large meetings, there might well be a smaller room with a stage that would serve for many community groups as well as for school activities.

#### **Be Prepared to Compromise**

The superintendent warned that it might not be possible to get, with the available funds, everything suggested, and the planning group should be prepared to compromise if the architect's estimates indicated the necessity of reducing the size of the project.

The architect, acting upon instructions from the board, prepared a preliminary sketch of the new addition. This was submitted to the planning committee for review. Some members were dismayed to find that all they had suggested was not included in the plan. Some items appeared differently in the plan than they had in the minds of the committee. The architect was willing to make changes, though he enumerated some things which were limited for structural reasons or because of cost. He also emphasized that it was important for the group to be sure this was the plan they wanted as changes after the building got underway are expensive.

Play areas, room arrangement, lighting, heating, ventilation, provisions for pupil safety, and other features were reviewed with representatives from the office of the State Superintendent to get suggestions and to insure including im-

portant details. By this time the preliminary plans had advanced to the stage where they were approved by the building division of the office of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the architect was authorized to prepare final plans and specifications.

#### **Include the Students**

Planning for the first units of the new elementary and new high school building was also underway. Similar committees assisted with the planning. The high school planning committee included a boy and a girl representative from each high school class. Student reaction to the proposed plan and suggestions proved valuable. They, too, realized that they were playing a useful role.

#### **CREATIVE LEADERSHIP PAYS DIVIDENDS**

The addition to one elementary school has been constructed and is now occupied. The other units are still on the drawing board but will be under construction next year when state funds become available for matching local funds. All those involved in the projects are soon to see the fruits of their efforts in the shape of school buildings well located and designed to meet effectively the educational needs of the community, but they do so realizing that the provision of proper facilities for the children and adults of a growing community is far from complete.

The type of leadership which has included many individuals as coworkers, and not merely as a propaganda device, has demonstrated to the community that it pays dividends in every phase of the educational program—and all concerned are eager to see it continued.

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