

VIP Focus



Educational partnership proven successful

A shared vision with the school and community brought new school to life

For their most recent venture of constructing a New Elementary School, the Fitzgerald Public Schools Board of Education assembled a diverse group of volunteers for input. This group consisted of community members, teaching and support staff, students, board members as well as district administrators. These individuals provided welcomed and insightful thoughts on the idea of a new elementary school and helped to identify what was important to each of them as well as the community.

The architect—PARTNERS in Architecture, PLC—formed an “educational partnership” with this group and embraced their thoughts, wishes and desires in defining the shared vision of the new facility. This shared vision included:

- Provide a learning community that offers opportunities that were not previously possible.
- Provide a learning environment suitable to meet today's needs while being adaptable to future demands.
- Provide a warm, welcoming and diverse environment that promotes socialization, exploration and interaction.
- Provide a learning environment in which kids will want to be there.
- Provide opportunities for community involvement.
- Incorporate sustainable design principles and technologies.
- Provide a facility with plenty of natural lighting.
- Provide a facility that will be easy to navigate for young students, contain simple wayfinding measures and also provides for small scale learning communities.
- Provide a facility which will instill a sense of place in the community and be a focal point for revitalization for the neighborhood and district.
- Provide a facility that will be unique and complement and

enhance the surrounding residential properties.

- Incorporate the latest technology into the classroom environment.
- Utilize the facilities' design to foster creativity and use the building as a learning tool.

The New Westview Elementary School is approximately 98,500 sq. ft., which accommodates 200 Pre-K and Kindergarten students as well as 600 students of grade levels 1–5. The facility is organized around a central entrance lobby and main corridor spine. The circulation spaces were made wider and brighter to ease congestion and to enhance comfort and security. The early childhood (Pre-K) and kindergarten classrooms are combined into a single area, with their own secure entry, check-in area and play area. The two-story academic wing houses grade levels 1–5 as well as the media center, computer lab and the art and science rooms. This new facility replaces an old '50s building which contained educational spaces that were inflexible, small and not easily adaptable to today's educational demands.

The site is bound by residential streets on the south and east sides and multi-family residential on the north and west sides. The existing school was situated at the south end of the 17.9 acre site, which allowed the new facility to be constructed to the north, while school remained in session. A few major site design objectives were: to establish safe site circulation (separating bus, parent and visitor traffic), to not encroach upon or negatively impact the surrounding residential properties, to create outdoor educational opportunities and to design the building to not have a backside.

Westview Elementary was designed to support exploration

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What's in focus...

Doing business with MASB's VIPs is good business.

Your Very Important Partners help bring quality professional development and urban conference scholarships to you. This publication will bring you valuable information on what matters to your district—from your VIPs.

Passage of Public Act 106 opens door to new opportunities

Michigan schools can benefit from new health insurance flexibility and choices

Public Act 106, the Public Employees Health Benefit Act, was signed into law Oct. 1, 2007. Its passage empowers districts to create a shift in how health insurance benefits are provided and consumed. The Act gives school districts more flexibility and choices when purchasing health care plans and provides the potential for significant cost savings. Districts can purchase such plans via one of four methods: form self-funded pools composed of a selected group of school districts; form fully insured pools composed of a selected group of school districts; self-fund individual district health care plans; or continue purchasing fully insured health care plans for an individual district.

School Employers Trust, School Employers Group (SET SEG) helped draft the legislation and is committed to informing school districts about the details of this new law. Three main concerns have been voiced among school administrators:

- When does my district have to bid insurance plans?
- How does my district obtain its claims experience?
- How does my district develop a Request For Proposal (RFP) for its health insurance plan?

Bidding health insurance

A school district must bid its health, dental and/or vision plans whenever a new plan is established, or every three years if it continues the same plan. Any plan modification, such as changing co-pays, initiates the bidding requirements because a new plan is established. As a result of these stipulations, all districts must bid their insurance plans by Oct. 1, 2010.

Getting claims data

By law, a district with more than 100 employees enrolled in a health care plan is permitted to obtain its claims data. However, a group must contain at least 250 enrolled participants to form an insurance pool. Smaller districts can request claims data from their insurance carrier(s) if they partner with other districts to create a group of more than 100 enrolled employees. Districts can obtain claims data by writing a Letter of Intent. The law requires that all insurance carriers and administrators compile claims data beginning 60 days from Oct. 1, 2007. To date, some of the carriers aren't making claims data available. This will compromise a district's ability to develop an RFP.

Developing a Request For Proposal

Preparing an RFP can be a complex process. It must be carefully assembled so the resulting bids are based on comparable programs and can be evaluated. Public Act 106 requires districts to obtain four competitive bids for insurance plans having the same specifications. Because an extensive amount of time must be invested in this process, using

a consultative service to develop an RFP is recommended. Districts can seek four different methods for obtaining consultative services.

♦ **A fee-for-service consultant:**

- Is paid by the district for work on its behalf;
- Develops the RFP and recommends purchases from the bids received;
- May or may not receive commissions from insurance companies selected; and
- The agent assigned the business receives a commission and provides service to the district.

♦ **An agent representing many companies:**

- Is not paid by the school district;
- Prepares quotes for companies he or she represents and recommends purchases based on the quotes;
- Receives commissions from the insurance companies with which coverage is placed; and
- Provides service to the school.

♦ **An employee of the school district:**

- Develops the RFP;
- Researches potential insurance companies and issues the RFP;
- Analyzes bids and recommends purchases; and
- After the district places the insurance, an agent receives commission for making the sale and servicing the district.

♦ **SET consultative services (most similar to an agent):**

- Consults with the district to determine what kind of health care options the district wishes to pursue;
- Develops the RFP and submits it to a wide variety of carriers;
- Presents all options to the district and recommends purchases;
- The district makes the final purchasing decision after receiving a summary of all bids; and
- SET receives a commission from the insurance carrier for servicing the district, as would any agent through whom coverage is placed.

Make sure your school district receives an unbiased selection of health insurance quotes. Be sure you understand how the consultant or agent will be compensated for his or her services before assigning that person to develop your district's RFP.

This message is brought to you by SET SEG School Insurance Specialists. To learn more about SET SEG and its consultative services, contact an account executive by calling 800.292.5421, or visit www.setseg.org.

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tion, discovery and team-based learning. The layout of the facility encourages visual interaction between spaces and provides additional opportunities for socialization and learning. Each grade level is organized into individualized learning communities, each with their own identity and separate resource area. These resource areas provide opportunities for both small and large group instruction, distance learning and individualized instruction. These resource areas have become the most popular areas in the building due to their flexibility, access and layout.

A few key features of the new facility include an outdoor classroom, a student art gallery and an outdoor learning plaza. The outdoor classroom provides an educational environment for hands-on life sciences learning. This focal point of the facility is centrally located and strategically placed near the main entrance lobby. All visitors are exposed to this dynamic learning arena which offers a pond, teaching platforms, built-in seating/lecture area, butterfly and hummingbird gardens as well as an abundance of vegetation.

The student art gallery was thoughtfully located at the intersection of two corridors and is adjacent to the media center entrance. All of the wall surfaces in this area are tackable and will be used for changeable student art displays. Two large display cases are also available for three-dimensional art. Some student artwork has been permanently incorporated into a laminated glass installation, which is the focal point for this area. The small seating area, large enough for a single class, can be used for a brief presentation, discussion or charette. All grade levels 1–5 will experience the art gallery on a daily basis.

The learning plaza is shared between the media center, the

art room and the science room, which all have direct access. The learning plaza incorporates a hardscape area with tiered amphitheatre seating surrounded by landscaping which provides opportunities for outdoor art and science projects as well as student activities, performances and educational delivery.

A closed loop geothermal ground source heat pump system will provide heating and cooling for the entire building. A series of 147 vertical wells were drilled approximately 350 ft. deep to service the heating and cooling demands of the facility. This mechanical system, in conjunction with a building wide energy management system, will result in substantial energy savings for years to come.

In addition to the sustainable approach to heating and cooling the building, other sustainable elements have been incorporated into the building design.

Many materials were chosen for their durability and impact on the environment. They are either natural products, contain recycled content or have little to no noxious fumes or off gasses. Brick veneer, burnish masonry block, terrazzo tile, linoleum, metal panels, metal roofing, low VOC paints and adhesives and low VOC carpets were used, to name a few. Due to the proximity of the construction to occupied facilities, a cold-applied (low-odor) built-up roof system was used in lieu of a hot-applied system to reduce the harmful and disturbing fumes.

Overall, the new Westview Elementary school is truly a 21st century school which has redefined “school” for the



Westview community and is a successful example of an educational partnership between the school district, community and design team.

This message brought to you by PARTNERS in Architecture, PLC, a full service architecture, planning and interior design firm that specializes in the creation of educational space. For more information, contact Michael A. Malone at 586.469.3600.



Walled Lake Outdoor Education Center

Walled Lake Consolidated School District's new and improved Outdoor Education Center (WLOEC) opens for a second year to eager students. The center is used for enrichment programs focused on elementary students, but is available for any level of student that needs the benefit of an outdoor environment for projects. TMP Associates, Inc. completed an addition and renovation to the center, providing new classrooms, interior finishes and updated heating/air conditioning. The WLOEC is the perfect place for school camps, or as a conference retreat center for corporate groups. The center is situated on 11 acres of school property adjacent to the Proud Lake Michigan Recreation Area. Hiking trails, fishing, canoeing and cross-country ski trails are all easily accessed from the center.

Many school districts might consider a facility devoted to environmental education as a luxury in Michigan's current economic climate. This is far from the case in Walled Lake. The WLOEC provides a location for sharing important resources (lab spaces, equipment, outdoor natural areas, overnight accommodations) that would otherwise have to be duplicated among several elementary schools, or would be completely unavailable. Offering the science and environmental curriculum to students from across the district in a unified setting focuses funding for maximum benefit. Also, the facility can be used on a rental basis by non-school organizations, supporting the facility and providing a nearly self-sustaining status.

TMP designers ensured that the simple and rustic architectural image of the facility was retained by the addition so that the building continues to fit into its natural setting. The enhanced facility has allowed the WLOEC to align all of its classes with district/state science and social studies standards. District administrators agree that facilities like the WLOEC can fill a spot in the community educational arena that serves the entire community: public and private, student and adult, young and old.

This message brought to you by TMP Associates, Inc. For more information, contact Dawn Lyman, 248.338.4561, dlyman@tmp-architecture.com.

MASB Mission Statement

To provide quality educational leadership services for all Michigan boards of education, and to advocate for student achievement and public education.

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Deborah L. Keys, CEM
517.327.5904 • dkeys@masb.org

Contact MASB

1001 Centennial Way, Suite 400
Lansing, MI 48917-8249
800.968.4627 • www.masb.org

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