

# VIP FOCUS

## The foundation of safe school buildings begins with finding a responsible contractor

With major health, environmental and safety concerns facing schools today, the importance of finding a responsible mechanical contractor is more vital than ever. The Mechanical Contractors Association of Detroit wants to help ensure that the contractor you hire is professional, has a full understanding of these issues and is one you can trust.

Before you sign a contract, use these guidelines:

- **Experience**—Institutional building projects are expected to last 50-75 years. Therefore school board members should review the experience of all construction professionals to ensure they have pertinent experience on similar institutional projects.
- **References**—Check references. Take the time to call those who have used the contractors in the past and ask if they were happy with the work and would use them again.
- **Financial Condition**—School boards must obtain information concerning a bidder's financial capability, any outstanding claims against them and bank references. A poor financial condition can affect the quality of materials, equipment and workers used on the project, which can result in project delays and unsafe schools.
- **Safety & Accidents**—Construction professionals with a good safety and EMR record will be more productive.
- **Insurance & Surety Bonding**—Ask for proof of Workers' Compensation and General Liability insurance. If the contractor is not insured, you may be liable for construction related injuries that happen on the premises.

- **Prevailing Wage**—Use of prevailing wage requirements helps school boards secure qualified skilled craft workers to perform work on their projects. Consider both advantages and disadvantages of using prevailing wage.
- **Licensing**—Make sure you are dealing with a licensed contractor. Most areas require licenses to make sure local building codes are maintained.
- **Training**—Ask about the training of their employees. How many hours of classroom instruction have they had? Does the contractor require continuing education to maintain the highest skill levels? Remember, the better trained the technicians, the higher quality of work you will receive and the less chance of problems in the future.
- **OSHA Training**—Ask about OSHA training. Each technician should have had at least 10 hours of OSHA training, ensuring that safety issues are understood and implemented consistently.

The mechanical systems are the heart of any building. The assurance that the contractor in charge has experience with these issues and employs a highly skilled workforce goes a long way towards easing the minds of school board members who are making these decisions.

*This message brought to you by the Mechanical Contractors Association of Detroit. For more information on finding a qualified mechanical contractor, contact 313.341.7661 or [www.mcadetroit.org](http://www.mcadetroit.org).*

### 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 new publication will bring you valuable information on what matters to your district— from your VIPs.

# Your constituents are online

## What are you doing to reach them?

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Internet usage among Americans continues to rise each year further emphasizing the importance of this medium for fast, effective communication. Here are some recent statistics\*:

- In 2005, 78.6 percent of Americans were accessing the Internet.
- Americans are online an average of 13.3 hours per week.
- E-mail is the most popular Internet activity among Americans.
- The strongest area of growth is among low-income Americans. Of families with incomes less than \$30,000, 61 percent have access.

Here are a few ways you can take advantage of the rapid rise in Internet usage:

### 1. Evaluate your current methods of communication

Consider what you're providing in "hard-copy" format (newsletters, student handbooks, forms, etc.) and determine if you can provide online access saving time and money. Then evaluate your online content and information. Is it up-to-date and professional? Is it relevant for your constituents? Is it easy to navigate? Is it making a good first impression?

### 2. Interact with your audience

Online communication is more than just a Web site. There are many ways you can use the Internet to interact with your readers. Here are just a few:

- Set up multiple e-mail listservs for various groups i.e. high school parents, PTA, and push information to them via e-mail. Provide "teaser" information that links them back to your Web site.
- Provide automated e-mail reminders and changed-event alerts regarding upcoming school activities.
- Conduct online polls and surveys to gauge community interest in school issues.
- Give your community members the opportunity to post feedback comments on stories and issues.

### 3. Ensure parents and community members receive what they want

Online surveys or focus group sessions are good

methods to determine the communication needs of your constituents. In the meantime, here's what we found from our research:

- Parents want online access to teacher e-mail addresses, homework assignments, calendars, grades and lunch menus. They also want online forms (permission slips, registration and order forms, etc.) and "shopping cart" technology to pay for school-related items.
- Students want the ability to complete homework assignments and register for classes online. They also want "teacher Web pages" that provide homework assignments and class-related information.
- Community members want basic facts about your district (contact information, enrollment information, basic achievement data, student demographics and graduation and dropout rates). They also want information from you—not the media—about school-related issues.

Providing information online can also improve communication with district staff, board members, local media, alumni and prospective students and parents. In today's climate of financial constraints, No Child Left Behind, competitive enrollment and other strong issues, public and community communications has never been more important to ensure your school or district maintains the highest support from your constituents.

**Where do you go from here?** You don't have to hire an outside Web development agency or pay a staff member to spend several years building an online communication system to suit the information expectations of your constituents. Many of today's Web tools are affordable and easy to use including content management systems, Web hosting services and listserv capabilities.

***This message brought to you by the Foundation for Educational Services. To learn more, contact Karen Mullins, educational services manager, at 800.850.8397, ext. 6851. \*Source: The Digital Future Project study of the Internet.***

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## TMP Associates, Inc. receives award

Roy Rocco Romano, AIA, earned the prestigious Robert Hastings Award from the American Institute of Architects Michigan. Romano worked tirelessly to produce *Architecture: It's Elementary*.

This Web-based guidebook for teachers includes

10 lesson plans for each K-5 school year. The curriculum introduces children to architecture and the built environment, encompassing art, social studies, language arts, history, science and math. Romano is a principal with TMP Associates, Inc. in Bloomfield Hills.

# The time is now to “go green”

## Case Study: West Ottawa Public Schools

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No matter what your school colors may be, start thinking “green.” Green represents the future in the construction of high performance and sustainable educational facilities.

As a greater understanding of environmental issues becomes intertwined in everyday life and as more consumers demand buildings that are nicer to live, learn and work in, less expensive to heat and cool, and more earth-friendly, the time for high performance, sustainable buildings has come.

Research shows that a high performance school building is healthy and productive, cost effective and sustainable, and proactively supports a school’s mission by delivering at least seven key benefits: better student performance (15 percent increase in productivity/up to 40 percent increase in test scores); increased average daily attendance; increased teacher satisfaction and retention; reduced operating costs; reduced liability exposure; a positive influence on the environment; and increased opportunities for using the facility itself as a teaching tool.

Many of the features of sustainable school buildings can be wonderful hands-on laboratories for teaching art, science, math, environmental citizenship and energy consciousness. The improved aesthetics, comfort and performance translate into higher community value and lower operating costs.

A design and project implementation process using the “whole systems” approach can yield a more valuable, high performance school building that usually costs the same amount to construct (based on scientific studies) and then much less to operate and maintain over its life cycle. A 30 percent reduction in energy use is relatively easy to achieve and 40+ percent reductions are possible with good, integrated design.

Due to the environmental, productivity, economic and quality of work life benefits that can result, construction of high performance, sustainable school buildings is becoming a widely accepted practice.

West Ottawa Public Schools (WOPS) is an excellent example of a school district that has made the strategic decision to build a school that proactively supports the core mission in a very cost effective manner. West Ottawa is a community best described as a “rural-suburban,” which is why the planning committee for the new West Ottawa High School wanted to give the residents a state-of-the-art facility that is harmonious with the surrounding environment.

Partnering with The Christman Company, recently recognized in the *Grand Rapids Business Journal* as the top area LEED®-staffed construction services firm, and project architect Design +, Inc., the district built a new 335,000 sq.ft., \$49 million high school that embraces the green construction trend. The new school houses grades 9-12 and serves 1,600 students.

According to Rosemary Ervine, superintendent of WOPS, “In building the new high school, incorporating green initiatives just sounded like a good building practice and something that we should be doing.”

- Some of the high school’s green aspects include:
- Minimized energy costs with computer-monitored, high efficiency heating, cooling and ventilation;
  - Sensors that adjust the lighting and temperature automatically in each room depending on the amount of light available;
  - Carefully metered water usage;
  - All of the steel in the building (1,251,557 pounds) has been smelted down and refashioned from recycled steel;
  - The 440,000 blocks used in the school are pressed from concrete that was recycled from other masonry projects;
  - An extensive, on-site recycling program was employed for masonry, wood, cardboard, metal and trash—76 percent of all construction debris was recycled; and
  - A commitment to build the school while preserving the mature trees that surround it.

In spite of the unique features and construction challenges with this school, the project gained approval for occupancy on July 6—16 days ahead of schedule and \$3 million under budget.

“The Christman Company, Design +, and the district worked carefully to maximize funds and create a building that will serve the community for many years. With the construction project completed, the district is pleased to report a balance of construction funds of \$3 million, which will be returned to taxpayers by applying the balance towards repayment of our bond debt,” said Ervine. “Who would have imagined that our decision to take on LEED® Certification would lead to such dramatic successes.”

***This message brought to you by The Christman Company. To learn more, contact Bonnie Hook at 517.482.1488, ext. 6851.***

## 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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Honeywell announced that seven Michigan school districts are or will be using Honeywell Instant Alert™ for Schools to keep parents and guardians informed in routine and emergency situations. The school districts include: Bloomingdale Public School District; Boyne City Public Schools; Mason County Central Schools; Mendon Community School District; Roseville Community Schools; South Haven Public Schools; and White Pigeon Community Schools.

Instant Alert is a Web-based notification service that replaces phone trees and enables school districts to deliver messages to parents and guardians within minutes via phone, cell phone, pager, e-mail and PDA. To use the service, a designated school representative sends a message online or by phone that is broadcast instantly to all the contact points parents provide.

With Honeywell's help, South Haven received a grant from the Emergency Response and Crisis Management Discretionary Grant Program from the U.S. Department of Education, to improve and strengthen their emergency response plans. The other districts in Michigan plan to use Instant Alert primarily to inform parents of weather- and transportation-related delays.

In addition to broadcasting news to all parents, Instant Alert allows schools to develop an unlimited number of subgroups—including sports teams, clubs, parent organizations—and send customized messages. Teachers and administrators can also send alerts to individual parents, which can help combat truancy.

**Learn more about Honeywell Instant Alert for Schools at [www.honeywell.com/instantalert](http://www.honeywell.com/instantalert).**