

Eight Tips for a Successful Construction Project

These basics can help improve the construction process and the final outcome.

By Matt Malinowski, MPA, RSBA, PRSBA



Constructing or renovating a school is not a task that's easily accomplished. Both require clear communication, teamwork, and defined goals and objectives. From a practical standpoint, certain considerations and measures can improve not only the process, but the final outcome. Consider these eight tips to help improve the outcome of your construction project.

1. Establish the Priorities First, Then Design to Meet Them

School construction begins by solidifying your goals. For example, is the purpose to accommodate enrollment growth or is it to improve science

facilities? If the focus is on accommodating enrollment, does that lead to inequities in other buildings that must also be addressed?

School construction involves decisions that have an impact for many more years. Team design and oversight can help ensure that issues are not missed.

2. Don't Rush the Planning or the Project

The timeline for construction projects should be defined by the scope and needs of the project, not by ancillary reasons, such as the need to spend funding by a certain deadline.

The timeline should be established but should be flexible enough to accommodate needs to adjust and

adapt. For example, a renovation may have a planned course, but once renovation begins, it may make sense to sequence the work differently to limit dirt and noise that might disrupt student learning.

In addition, the timeline should consider all aspects of the project. For example, it may not be feasible for the mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and general contractors to be in the same space at the same time; this factor can push back the projected time for completion and slow down accomplishment of key milestones.

3. Promote Effective Communication

Establish a flow of communication that includes every stakeholder and supplier participating in the project. Make sure that they all know what's going on—both the good news and the bad news, the successes and the problems. Consider using an online collaborative work management tool to promote timely, accurate communication.

4. Expect the Unexpected

Although a goal should be to complete the project on time—or even ahead of time—school construction is not perfect. Unexpected issues will arise, and change orders will surface. Engaging the appropriate experienced professionals in advance will ensure quick troubleshooting,

so solutions can be determined and the project can move forward as quickly as possible.

Also, consider scheduling overtime or starting an aspect of the project before its formal start date if feasible—it may save you from rushing to complete the project in the week before the deadline.

5. Consider Your Options

Fully vet all your options for materials and don't cut corners or costs when doing so may compromise the outcome.

One district reviewed the flooring options of vinyl composition tile, quartz composition tile, or terrazzo. The design team clearly saw the value in the higher-cost products—a past decision to opt for the lowest-price flooring and poor preparation of the surface were a lesson learned. Although it was not financially feasible to use the best-quality material throughout the project, a middle-of-the-road product was selected for the corridors where durability mattered.

6. Ask Questions, Then Ask More Questions

It is almost impossible to be an expert on every aspect of school construction and renovation, so pay attention and learn from others. Ask questions. Do research. Ask more questions. The more you know, the better your decisions and the more successful the outcome.

7. Success or Failure Is Based on the Collaboration of All Parties

The multiple facets of school construction can be addressed only through a team approach. Architects, contractors, engineers, and the facilities staff need to work together but also seek the perspectives of teachers, community members, and other internal and external stakeholders.

Collaboration can slow down decision making at times, so it should focus on critical stages. Consider a variety of methods for seeking collaboration. In addition to meetings, collaboration can include focus groups and media outlets.

8. Celebrate Your Final Product

The completion of a facilities project is a milestone and a point of pride. The ability to showcase the project to the community is a great way to garner support for future projects. Recognizing those who made the project possible not only acknowledges effort but can be good publicity for the school and for the contractors who helped bring the project to fruition.

Matt Malinowski, MPA, RSBA, PRSBA, is the business manager/board secretary of the Upper Moreland School District in Willow Grove, Pennsylvania. He serves on ASBO International's Editorial Advisory Committee and as a content area leader for human resources and labor relations on ASBO's Annual Meeting Program Committee. Email: mmalinowski@umtsd.org

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