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# Top 10 Trends in School Facility Planning

By William S. DeJong

Schools are expensive to build and they are in use for decades. It's imperative we recognize changing attitudes and practices to better understand how they will impact the education environment. The debate over what constitutes an effective school facility will continue for the foreseeable future. However, one thing is certain: planning future public schools should be based upon identifying global, societal and education trends, such as the following:

- **Declining enrollment:** This phenomenon is well under way. We have experienced the baby boom, baby bust, echo boom and now the echo bust. The decline is currently working its way through elementary and middle schools and will move through high schools within the next 10 years. There is tough work ahead, including downsizing and right-sizing staff, budgets and facilities.

- **Life beyond No Child Left Behind:** The past decade has been dominated by testing and meeting adequate yearly progress guidelines, with a focus on augmenting English, math and science education. Unfortunately, the social sciences, arts and humanities have suffered. This does not mean testing and accountability aren't important. However, as we move into the future, we will realize our country's competitive edge in a global economy is creativity and innovation, which are derived, in part, from the arts.

- **Any-place, any-time learning:** With advances in technology, learning can

occur at any time. High-speed Internet access is available in the home, on the streets, in malls and even on school buses. Students have always learned outside of school buildings, and new technological possibilities will challenge traditional school facilities even further. New projections indicate that more than 50 percent or all course work at the high school level may be online within the next 15 years.

*Planning future public schools should be based upon identifying global, societal and education trends.*

School buildings are already becoming 24-hour environments because they are used for early morning and after school programs, by parks and recreation departments and by the community. New schools must be planned for these extended uses and not just "regular" education programs.

- **Flexible buildings:** We have a consensus; we agree we don't know what the future will be. Multiple forms of program delivery are evolving: self-contained, project based, teaming, schools within schools, magnet/thematic schools and many others. School facility designs must allow for pedagogical changes, which means the concept of flexible buildings is moving to totally new defini-

tions. With changing demographics, the advent of charter schools, an inability to make long-term decisions and uncertain futures, new forms of construction and planning must emerge that would allow a building the flexibility to be an elementary school, middle school or even a small high school.

- **Global focus:** Jobs that have gone offshore are not coming back. China is beginning to require schools to teach English. More than 10 percent of all of construction cranes in the world are in Dubai. Now fast forward 20 years; will the United States still be the center of the universe? Maybe, maybe not, it depends on how we address these challenges. We need to be globally focused.

- **Modernizing Democracy:** New forms of community involvement, collaboration and decision-making are evolving through Web-based questionnaires, blogs and online community forums. A wide variety of independent school boards and/or committees are being considered as more schools become thematic or charter-based. Facility planning is becoming increasingly transparent as a result of new technologies and increased access to data.

- **Green buildings and sustainability:** Green buildings are on the radar screen. Future school design will incorporate energy efficiency and a greater concern about the environment. New laws and standards are on the horizon too. For example, the LEED building rating system is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and opera-

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DeJong

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tion of high performance green buildings. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.

- **Geographical information systems:** GIS has evolved as the new software standard for facility planning and management. It provides new ways to visually display complex data so it is more understandable. GIS is increasingly used for demographic planning and for visualizing facility options, such as school closures or alternatives for redistricting.

- **Safety and security:** The tragedies at schools and universities remind us how vitally important safety and security are. There is no question that the way a building is laid out or how the program is organized has the biggest impact on safety and security. This is far more important than active security systems such as motion detectors or surveillance cameras.

- **Renovations, modernizations and replacements:** The school buildings built in the 1950s and '60s during the post-WWII baby boom era are aging. Unfortunately these were not our finest buildings. The process has begun to fully modernize or replace these facilities. This will continue for the next 15 years.



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