

Planning the High School for Tomorrow's Curriculum

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How can the architect assist high schools in preparing to meet the tremendous increase in pupil population now on its way through the elementary schools? Lawrence B. Perkins, A.I.A., of the firm of Perkins and Will, Chicago 6, Illinois, states that the architect's main function "is in surveying existing plant in terms of future curriculum, and relating future building programs to the educational program."

COMPLETING A YEAR'S SURVEY of public school buildings in the United States, an overseas architect recently commented that he had seen five school buildings he considered noteworthy. None were high schools.

Our visiting commentator was impressed particularly by the apparent concern of American educators and architects with the emotional needs of children. His five "noteworthy" elementary schools all possessed certain common characteristics.

❧ *A sense of space, both real and artificial.* Real space was provided in large, flexible classrooms, or adjoining workrooms, for the learning by doing projects essential to contemporary educational concepts, and for attention to individuals and small groups. Apparent space was created by large window walls, unifying the classrooms with the world outdoors, and adding the natural colors of sky, foliage and snow to the interior decor.

❧ *An informal, home-like atmosphere.* Gay colors, child-scaled ceilings and furniture, understandable

natural materials, and the organization of the buildings into small, easily grasped elements, that in effect give each age group their own school. All five approached, at least psychologically, the campus or cottage school concept.

❧ *Self-sufficiency.* Playrooms, visual aid rooms, libraries, cafeterias, administrative facilities were scaled to the requirements of each school system's curriculum, yet provision was made for serving the community as a whole after hours. Classrooms themselves were generally self-contained.

These common characteristics are generally accepted as goals in the planning of elementary schools today. Unfortunately their application to high school architecture has been rare.

Some remarkable elementary school buildings planned from 25 to 50 years ago by pioneering architects of the modern "Chicago" school, revealed evidence of an understanding of these principles. Full exploitation of them was hindered, however, by limitations of traditional building materials, and

by an evident desire of both school administrators and architects to frost their buildings with an old world style.

A renaissance of these principles was brought to the attention of educators in the Crow Island School, Winnetka, Illinois, completed in 1940. The architects, Eliel Saarinen, Eero Saarinen, and Perkins, Wheeler and Will, have received far more than their just due as pioneers of this contemporary type of school. None of the appropriate architectural elements of this building, or its successors, could have been created without a controlling educational philosophy, the bones around which the architects moulded the ultimate form.

School Design: Result of Democratic Planning

Crow Island was no accident. The building merely expressed in brick and wood the imaginative and democratic educational philosophies that Winnetka had practiced for years. In fact, many of Crow Island's ideals had been incorporated in Winnetka's Skokie and Hubbard Woods schools, built 20 years earlier, by the late Dwight Heald Perkins, under the same school administration, that of Carleton Washburne.

Crow Island's most important innovations in plan and design actually originated from the democratic planning of teachers, caretakers, parents, school board members, and above all, children. These innovations have stood the test of the school's first dozen years because they were grounded solidly on the experience of both school and community in shaping their own curriculum and activities around the needs of children.

Scores of elementary schools planned since World War II have achieved appropriate solutions to children's needs independently through the same processes. Many communities, particularly younger suburban and rural villages, have produced distinguished, livable school structures. They have been aided by nearly half a century of devoted study by educational psychology, and practical testing of progressive ideas in daily teaching practice. Often teachers, administrators and school board members in these young growing villages have been young in fact as well as spirit. They enjoyed the benefit of progressive ideas in their own educational background. The testing of time has made possible a general agreement on elementary school curriculum and administration, which has led to sound solutions of school building problems.

The very nature of elementary school buildings has been governed to some degree by the nature of the communities which they serve. School building in larger, built up cities has gone forward at a proportionately slower pace. The villages have been built up rapidly, with scores of small, single-family homes, housing young veterans and their postwar babies. The time and distance economics of transportation, by foot, bicycle and bus, and soaring construction costs, have contributed to the contemporary school building pattern—smaller, child-scaled schools, spread over adequate school and park sites.

High School Plants Must Expand

The rising tide of war babies has not yet hit the high schools. It will, with thunderous impact, in the next

five years. And, because high school districts are organized, generally, to serve the populations of half a dozen, or more, elementary districts, high schools will probably serve populations double or more those for which they were built.

The problem of expanding high school plants must be solved at a time when the very concept of secondary education is in a state of flux. Administrators face serious decisions in planning the proportionate spaces to be devoted to academic, industrial arts, physical education and community services. More often than not, their decisions must be based on practical administrative problems and maximum utilization of space, rather than on solutions to the problems of adolescent youth. As high school populations double, many high school plants can easily become Frankensteins with administrative problems so enormous that they will overshadow those concerning the welfare of the students themselves.

In addition to housing the maximum number of students at minimum cost, tomorrow's high school must equip each student as fully as possible for the problems he will face in the next step in his career. Thus the high school must resolve the conflicting ideas of general education and specialized education. Should the college preparatory student focus entirely on the academic fields that he will pursue in the university? Should the vocational student acquire technical skills to the exclusion of social studies, the arts, and other subjects that will contribute to his equipment as a citizen? The solutions to these questions, reached in each

school system, will largely determine the types of space to be built, and the proportion to be given to each.

Two Trends Are Emerging

Because attitudes on these questions are changing so rapidly, the solutions cannot be reached by administrators, board members and architects alone. They must receive the fullest, thoughtful study from teachers, pupils and parents, who working together democratically, can evolve the curriculum that fulfills most closely the needs of their community and their children.

We believe that two important trends will emerge in high school planning. The first is *flexibility*. Spaces will be planned for double and triple use in the crowded years ahead, and for adaptability to changing ideas of curriculum as the maturing concept of the high school's role emerges from the present state of flux.

The second is a *reversal of the trend to huge, central high school plants serving oversized districts*. High school plants may be held to workable size by re-districting in line with population shifts.

Some districts will avoid unwieldy giants by assigning an increasingly important "safety-valve" role to the junior high school, which can shift readily from a 6-2-4 to a 6-3-3 pattern as the birth tide progresses upward. Still others will turn to the junior college to round out curriculum needs of various special groups of students.

The trend to large sites for new high schools opens an interesting possibility. This is the breaking up of the single high school plant into a number of smaller, more easily managed build-

ing groups, offering students easy identity in more self-contained schools and departments. Thus the necessarily large high school will achieve a workable scale for its components, much as does the university with its specialized graduate and undergraduate schools.

Each high school district has its own peculiar governing circumstances. No single solution, no single building pattern will serve all. All can, however, arrive at the best solution, educationally and economically, by serious study of their problems . . . study shared democratically by board and administrator, by teacher and caretaker, by parent and student.

The architect's role in shaping the high school of the future is to contribute his experience in translating the physical requirements of *each educational solution* into a tentative work-

ing budget. Once the school system has evolved its ideal programs for the years ahead, the architect can show how each program can be fitted to existing plant economically, without sacrificing flexibility and functional utility.

His most important function is not necessarily the planning and designing of the ultimate buildings. It is in surveying existing plant in terms of future curriculum, and relating future building programs to the educational program.

The high schools that will solve their expansion problems most soundly are those that begin early to work out their changing educational programs, democratically, and update them continually. The building programs will then become appropriate to their educational functions, and the buildings noteworthy in their architecture.

Television Has a Part in Modern Education

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Radio and television are not merely aids to learning, states the author of this article, they are direct avenues of information and example through which a child learns facts or fiction, truths or half-truths, attitudes good or bad. Madeline S. Long is consultant in radio-television, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota.

TELEVISION is a tremendously powerful medium for education, mis-education, propaganda and entertainment. Still, it appears that a great many educators are ignoring or are unaware of the current impact and the potential influence of television, just as many school systems have ig-

nored the educational possibilities of radio. At the same time, many parents and teachers deplore the amount of time children spend before the television screen. But we do not stop a waterfall—we harness it for power!

Do educators have responsibilities with regard to the use and content of

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