

Building Scene

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School daze

High-tech surroundings aid in teaching of 3Rs

If it's been a while since you've set foot in a new school, you could get the idea — erroneous, educators and architects say — that the little red school house has evolved into a palace.

Carpeted classrooms and corridors. Separate outside entrances to each classroom. Theaters. Child development centers. Auxiliary rooms for counseling and individual tutoring.

Computer centers. Lavatories in every classroom. Audio-visual communication capabilities between the office and classrooms. Air conditioning.

Not necessarily all in the same building, mind you, but representative of what's going into new schools.

Palaces? Get real, said William Pearson, principal at Plymouth-Canton's Hoben Elementary School, which opened in 1988.

"An analogy to me is the medical profession. Forty years ago, we didn't know anything about polio. We didn't stop doing research.

"WE HAVE learned through research and experience that kids need hands-on manipulatives to learn. Some do well pushing pencil pencil across paper. Some need more visual, some need tactile manipulatives to learn."

That requires more storage space, more work stations and building areas with multiple uses such as a music room behind the stage at one end of a lunch room.

Listen to Alfred Goebel. His architectural firm, Hastings & Chivett, designed the new South Lyon High School now under construction.

"It's a palace mentality is ridiculous. It's a knee-jerk reaction. That's just an emotional statement. If people just understand what's provided, they would understand it's not a palace or Taj Mahal," Goebel said.

TEACHING METHODS have changed from line-up-and-tell-em-how-it-is to small group, hands-on instruction. So if form follows function, it's reasonable to expect that school buildings would change, too.

"You have 4- and 5-year-olds who have had a couple of years on a computer," said Kathryn Wilson, next year's principal at Deerfield Elementary under construction in the Avondale School District. "We just have a lot of high-tech parts to our lives."

Working in small groups, developing thinking skills, asking questions are key elements to cooperative learning, she said.

That leads to computer rooms built into media centers and smaller

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rooms within individual classrooms for directed activities.

THE DAYS when a school board gives an architect carte blanche on a school project are over.

"You're just not allowed to go through and selectively design a building and hope everyone likes it," said Thomas Kowalski, a project manager for TMP Associates, whose firm designed the new Deerfield Elementary.

Nowadays, committees of staff, administration and parents work with architects. Four hundred participated in the design and promotion of South Lyon High, Goebel said.

Some school administrators hire a construction manager even before an architect to get a better handle on costs and to smooth communications between themselves, architects and parents.

"IT'S NOT that architects are failing in their task or duty. It's just lay people haven't had exposure and opportunity to work with graphic tools," said Charles Opferman, director of design phase services for Barton Malow, a construction management/general contracting firm.

"We're trying to put together the best set of minds so we can anticipate problems down the road and solve them now rather than waiting to pop up later."

Perhaps the biggest change in school architecture in recent years is the realization that buildings are used beyond 3 p.m. by other than traditional students.

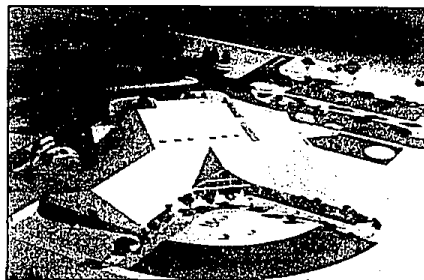
"I like the idea of a school being used day and night," said William Brubaker, vice chairman of Perkins & Will, which designed the new Troy High School.

That's why high schools have pools, theaters and gyms that can be used by community groups and students, he said.

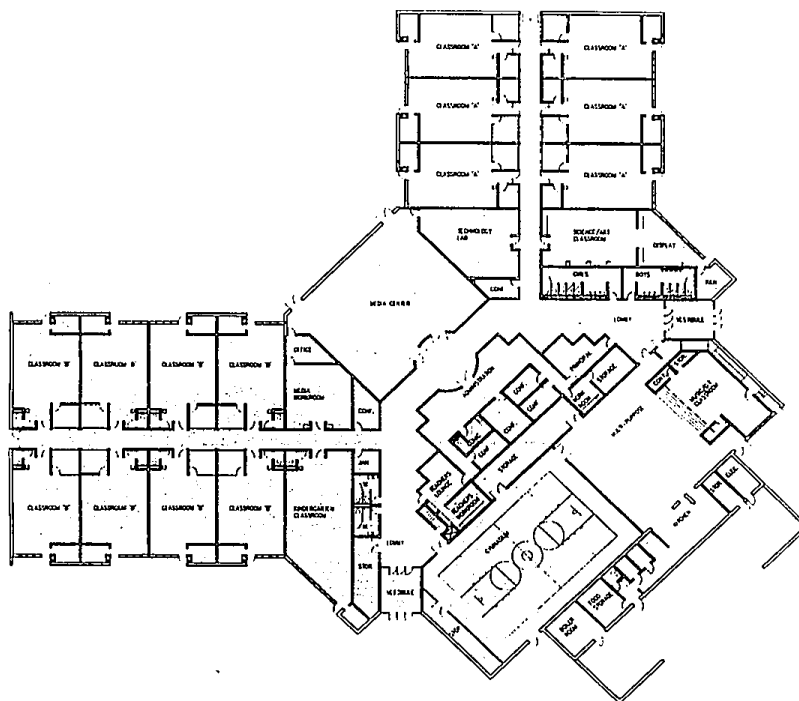
The new South Lyon High School will have a lounge and activity room specifically for senior citizens, plus a child-development center as part of the home economics wing.

"It (school design) acknowledges that not everyone in high school is between 15 and 18," Goebel said.

"We're trying to make this building have a real-world feel to it."



The floor plan and model of Deerfield Elementary School in Rochester Hills reflect architectural features that promote current philosophies in education.



Today's schools designed for all ages, all activities

Hoben Elementary School, built at a cost of \$4.4 million, consists of 22 classrooms, a gym, a separate cafeteria/stage with a music room behind the stage, an art/activity room, several small conference rooms and a media center with a connecting computer room.

Two pairs of classrooms in the Canton Township school have dividing walls that can be removed for team teaching. The hallways and classrooms are carpeted. Each classroom has its own lavatory, drinking fountain and exterior entrance.

Blackboards extend all the way to the floor to allow for more participation. Walls are magnetized for easier display of class work.

Everything was included for an educational reason, said William Pearson, principal.

Conference rooms? "We use them for social workers, psychologists, if they're working with kids, speech teachers," Pearson said. "They're very helpful because there's so much specialization."

Carpeting? "It's cheaper, looks nicer, it's softer, quieter," Pearson added.

LAVATORIES, drinking fountains and separate exterior entrances cut down on foot traffic in the corridors. Also, there's some sentiment that classrooms should reflect a friendlier, homelike environment to facilitate learning.

Kathryn Wilson will be principal of Deerfield Elementary when it opens in Rochester Hills next fall.

"We would never presume to replace the home," she said. "We try to make our environment relate to children . . . a responsiveness to the need for light, color, comfort."

Unique features of Deerfield, to be built and equipped at an estimated cost of \$5.1 million, include:

- A multipurpose room which can be divided by a movable wall into a gym and lunchroom. An area behind the stage of the lunchroom will be used as a music room and classroom for talented and gifted classes.
- A combination art/science room.
- A separate enclosed room within each classroom for small group projects or instruction.

DIVERSITY, shared uses, storage space all have become important when designing new schools.

Projected cost of a new Troy High School now under construction is \$33.5 million.

"Troy High School has been given a lot of attention to classrooms and labs," said William Brubaker, whose architectural firm designed the facility.

"Science labs will be state of the art. It will have a better music facility — more functional, more flexible, better acoustics," Brubaker said.

Then there's building use after regular class hours regardless of the size of the school.

"You keep finding greater expectations on the educational system," said Charles Opferman, who oversees school projects for a contracting/construction management company.

"Schools roles in society are continuing to change," he said. "We find demands on the building in that it's no longer a six-hour day building."

"WHAT IS forcing change is outside the curriculum itself, things like literacy programs, community use for athletics, meetings. Some Troy (elementary) schools operate as branches of the (city) library," Opferman said.

Taxpayers are getting better value for their dollars today with advances in building technology and energy conservation, architects say. Involving many segments of the community in the planning process also assures consensus on value.

"I'm a great believer in schools ought to respond to the unique nature of the community," Brubaker said.

"A high school is like a flagship," said Alfred Goebel, principal in an architectural firm. "It's a symbol of a community's highest aspirations."

"That's what education is all about — preparing for the next generation, the future," said Opferman. "Someone paid for us and it's our responsibility to care for the next generation."

A Note from Herman Frankel

After 39 years of building homes, I've learned that it is impossible to forecast when any particular home will sell, but I've seen many disappointed people who missed the home that they thought would be there when they were ready.

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