DO NOT PRINT
Think Long-Term Growth and Phases

Design Pattern 4.4: Think Long-Term Growth and Phases

Problem:
Establishing a charter school is a difficult process and its success requires patience, vision, and a long-term outlook. Many charter schools begin with a few grades and work up to their full chartered grades over the course of a few years. Just as the school works up to its full student body, it needs to work up to its full facility needs. Keeping this in mind when first choosing a location, is an important part of the long-term success of the school.

Many successful charter schools depend on a strong relationship with the community it serves. Choosing a location that will accommodate the future growth of the school or having a plan on how to deal with a location that does not accommodate for future growth, it is important to establish strong roots into the community. Locating in the community will help form a stable relationship with the community, which is as important as maintaining a stable administration and faculty.

Solution:
Imagine your school at its beginning and then think of the ways it will need to grow and change in the future. A school’s designers need more than technical expertise to allow this transformation, they need to invite the vision and imagination of educators who, with them, look beyond how teaching and learning has been, and imagine how it might be some day. Purchase or lease land, design a building’s systems, and allocate space in planning so that the school’s visionaries can adapt to these evolving needs. Teach those in the school how to allow these changes to occur when the time comes. Encourage all to brainstorm their own visions of what the longer-term growth possibilities of the school could be.

Best Practices

Charter School Organization
• Some charter schools are part of a larger organization whereas others are standalone entities. Charter schools with the backing of a larger organization may find it easier to find locations that will work for all their long-term needs when compared to standalone charter schools. This is because the organization will be able to provide more than financial resources, but also ways to evaluate potential locations.

• Four of the schools profiled in this book are a part of the Imagine organization. This organization is setup to help the charter schools to establish a facility and once established lets the schools operate as local needs require. The organization has a detailed way to evaluate a location by taking into account purchasing price, renovation costs, projected funding numbers, and operation costs, just to name a few factors. From that information the schools are able to choose suitable locations that will help the school succeed in both the short and long-term.

Imagine Master Academy
• The Imagine MASTer Academy took into account the growth potential of the K-8 facility. The size and layout of the facility makes it easy to grow overtime and can be incrementally adding classes and student size in phases as the school expands. They have purchased an sample sized site too that will them to add a High School making the learning environment K-12.

Galileo Charter School
• Galileo Charter School in Richmond, IN operates very differently. Galileo is a charter school without an outside management company. Its elementary school is currently housed in two separate facilities. The original location for Galileo is very important to the community of Richmond, but has less opportunity for the school to continue to grow. Rather than moving out of the facility, Galileo chose to have the added grades located at another facility. A strong and cohesive administration is required to keep watch over both facilities and to keep everything organized. The lease with an option to buy of the second facility, allows the school to try out this two location arrangement while they assess its effectiveness.
Gary Comer College Prep
Gary Comer community center and high school is another excellent example of the benefits of having a long term vision for growth. The community which also housed the southside drum corps was first home to the Gary Comer Charter high school. The school then moved to a new facility built for them and still connected to the community center so there is a joint use of both facilities.

Design Recommendations

- When evaluating a facility, look beyond the present needs and see how the facility will be able to accommodate the growth and changes of the school.

- Keep in mind the community connections, as they will be an important part of the school’s continued success.

- A facility may look great but remember to run the numbers and keep in mind renovations may need to be phased as the school continues to expand.

- Be visionary and imaginative as well as practical as you consider how teaching and learning might be in the future.

- Look at the building’s potential to be added on to as the school grows.

- In adaptive reuse or renovating projects, consider inhabiting a portion of the building with the option for expansion.

- Choose a site with ample room to building another facility if maximum growth is reached.