



On Time. On Budget. That's the best your CM can do?

The Top Three Ways to Evaluate Your Construction Manager

Construction Managers will emphasize their “on time and on budget” project completion history as a critical evaluative component of their skills and accomplishments to a prospective School District. Shouldn't that be a given, though? That's what they're paid to do. So, what are the true differentiators to evaluate when vetting a construction manager for your upcoming capital improvement project? This question can best be answered through lessons learned on a recently completed construction project:

Cicero School District 99 recently welcomed students into their newly-finished 3.5 story, 75,000 square foot facility, Warren Park K-6 Elementary School. The new construction Warren Park was completed in mid-July in time for the start of the 2016-2017 school year.

The dust and emotions have settled and members of the project team sat down to discuss the most important takeaways from

this significant construction project. District 99 Leadership also weighed in on the significance of a true construction management partner and identified three primary differentiators:

1. Maximizing Curricular Improvement

Cicero School District 99 installed a new Superintendent of Schools, Rodolfo Hernandez, after the Warren Park project was fully designed, bid, trade contracts were awarded and construction was substantially underway. Mr. Hernandez then approached ICI with his plans for improving the curricular functionality of the learning environment. The changes were vital to the expanded vision for curricular improvement within the District. The key members of ICI's team have a curriculum-based approach to construction that has been developed in-part through School Board service within their own Districts. Therefore, the changes were not seen as a setback to the current delivery. Rather, the team recognized that the alterations would ultimately advance the curriculum of the District and identified a path to implement the upgrades.





Take-Away: When picking your CM, consider if they can empathize with the responsibilities of School Board Members and District Administration to improve curriculum within the available resources. Can they participate and understand the curricular program? Will they take into account your curricular priorities and needs? Are they capable of making adjustments during construction based on necessary changes?

2. Possessing an Understanding of Educational Space

It has long been accepted that architects plan and design; builders build and there isn't overlap between the two. That isn't the case anymore in K-12 construction. When evaluating your construction manager, envision yourself sitting in a programming or design meeting. Naturally, your design team will lead the meeting as they know the questions to ask in order to fully grasp the functionality of the future learning environment. Members of your construction management team should also be present and have the ability to weigh-in on the educational space based on their past experiences. For example, School District 99 needed to integrate more light, flexibility, technology changes and storage into their classrooms. ICI implemented these enhancements without having a final design and maintained the original delivery schedule due to the team members' ability to envision the changes without all the details.

Don't settle for a CM that just wants to build per the plans. In this age of integrated design and construction, you should expect more from your construction partner. An experienced K-12

CM must be able to participate and understand the impending curricular needs and designs before they are final. A CM needs to grasp the importance of the learning environment to the learner and incorporate District goals. Can your CM understand the educational dialog?

3. The Impact of Material Selection

When undertaking a capital improvement project, every District desires to make a long-term positive impact on their learning environment. Material selections are among the most crucial decisions when you are trying to balance between budget and durability.

Maintenance costs can be reduced with newer flooring products such as quartz and luxury vinyl tile. However, each product carries a higher upfront price tag.

The CM must be able to discuss the long-term maintenance savings of material selection with the District in deference to the initial material cost. The underlying quality of materials should not be reduced without a discussion on the long-term impact to maintenance costs. Listen for ways to "include" versus "eliminate." Elimination is always the easiest action.

Take-Away: Select a CM firm that will serve as your trusted advisor and resource during the planning stages by offering experienced insight on materials that they have seen succeed or fail within other Districts.

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