

# School Business Affairs

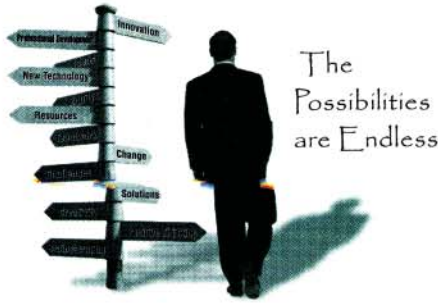
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The  
Possibilities are  
Endless



Critical Issues in School Governance, Finance, and Management .. See page 4



# Developing an Effective Crisis Management Plan: The Role of a Project Manager

By J. Michael Orifici

**N**o time has been as challenging and exciting as today in constructing new schools and rebuilding old ones. School administrators have an opportunity to provide facilities that will meet the needs of their students in this century and beyond.

Many school administrators are faced with the same challenges: aging facilities in need of renovation, increasing enrollment driving the demand for larger buildings, and a rapid pace of change in the methods by which our children are educated. To meet the task, school officials quickly determine that assistance is required. Defining what assistance is necessary to accomplish the task can mean success or failure in planning and implementation of a building project. The key to a successful project is to identify the individuals vital to the program and to establish the *project team*.

District personnel from the central office, parents and teacher representatives should be selected first. Next, the architectural and engineering firms should be chosen. Often times, schools neglect to include the individual necessary to solidify the team—the *project manager*.

Many private firms have in-house planning and facility management departments. While school districts may maintain a buildings and grounds department, diverting

attention from the day-to-day tasks can often create issues for the district. School business officials have the financial responsibility of an entire district under their direction. The additional responsibility of managing a school construction project can make the role of a business official more difficult. Despite this, in many instances, business officials who desire to preserve valuable funds for the project itself, recommend against hiring a qualified, experienced construction management firm.

Reasons why business officials advise against hiring a construction management firm vary. While sav-

ing money is cited as the foremost reason, in actuality, retaining a construction management firm can prove to be cost-effective. A competent project manager can save the school district money through value engineering, bid packaging, negotiating with low bidders and change order review. In many cases, hiring a construction management firm is not recommended because there is a misunderstanding of the role of the project manager. The project manager can be compared to the orchestra leader of a major symphony. All of the sections know their parts, but without the conductor to time them correctly and to communicate



to the individuals and the group effectively, the resulting composition would be noise.

A competent project manager becomes the right hand of the business official in all aspects of the project. This individual conducts the orchestra. He or she coordinates the trades, schedules the work, and "cues" the contractors to assure that no one misses a beat and that all the trades are working in concert with one another.

### Irvington Union Free School District

Sunday, March 26, 2000 at 1:30 p.m., a fire began in a dumpster outside the school cafeteria of the Dows Lane Elementary School in

the Irvington Union Free School District, Irvington, NY. Flames spread, heavily damaging the cafeteria, the kitchen, and the administrative offices. The most extensive damage was caused by smoke. Although fire damaged nine thousand square feet of space, an area of forty thousand square feet was damaged by smoke.

Dr. Vincent Beni, superintendent of schools, Irvington Union Free school district and Donald Marra, assistant superintendent for business, Irvington Union Free School District, did not, as one news reporter commented, let "smoke cloud their vision." They quickly made the determination that for school to reopen within a matter of days, the assistance of a profes-

sional management firm and experienced personnel was imperative.

A professional construction management firm was contacted on Sunday afternoon to begin the restoration and reopen the school within days. To accomplish this task, a well-orchestrated plan was developed and executed. Teams to handle pressing issues were immediately established. Issues that were addressed included:

- Dealing with the media
- Providing information to the public and most importantly to parents
- Negotiating an insurance settlement and securing the approval necessary to proceed
- Procurement needs
- Scope of work
- Debris collection
- Site safety
- Temporary space
- Central administration plan
- Communications checklist

By 10 o'clock Sunday night, an implementation plan was established. The goal was to have school open for students by Wednesday morning. The scope of work necessary to achieve this goal was extensive. Work assignments included:

- Demolition
- Temporary protection
- Asbestos abatement
- Cleaning and sanitizing walls, floors, ceilings, ductwork, and mechanical systems
- Providing temporary structures
- Providing fire alarm and PA systems
- Replacing ceilings and flooring
- Painting
- Restoring communication and technology systems

What transpired was nothing short of a miracle. By 7:00 a.m. Monday morning, the firm had mobilized an army of four hundred management and field personnel. As one newspaper reported, they "descended on the school." Demolition crews removed furniture, ceiling tile, and other debris. The thirty 40-yard dumpsters brought to the site were quickly filled.

Bookshelves and desks were emptied and computers were cleaned and covered with plastic.



Lighting fixtures were removed and thoroughly cleaned by a team of electricians. Cleaning crews from two companies followed the demolition, scrubbing the furniture, flooring, ceiling grids, concrete ceiling slabs, and walls that were blackened with soot. To quicken the pace, they joined forces washing and waxing floors and polishing furniture. Asbestos crews worked carefully in sealed zones to abate areas damaged by water.

Mechanical contractors scurried to clean and refurbish the mechanical systems damaged by the flames and smoke. The fire detection systems, phones, and computer wiring were replaced. Ventilation systems were cleaned. Teams of workers hanging ceiling grids quickly worked their way down each hallway. Teams of painters racing against the clock followed closely. As they covered the walls and trim in cream, burgundy and soft green, everything brightened, including spirits.

Two large trailers were delivered to the site to accommodate the administrative offices that had been displaced by the fire. White fencing was erected around the perimeter of precarious areas to protect the students both physically and emotionally from the sight of the devastation caused by the fire.



Finally, everyone from cleaning crews and contractors to construction managers manned brooms to rid the landscape of remnants of the reconstruction that had begun just 38 hours before. The seemingly impossible had been accomplished. Records were set. Classroom ceilings were hung in twelve minutes. Renovations were completed at a rate of one thousand square feet per hour.

Safety was not sacrificed for speed. A photo ID system was used to photograph all workers and pro-

vide them with photo ID badges that were required to be worn at all times while on site. To prevent any unauthorized personnel from entering the school, copies of all identification badges were recorded and kept on file by the project manager and all contractors were required to sign in.


Most importantly, sensitivity to the needs of the building's occupants—the children of Irvington—came first. Priority was given to salvaging personal articles such as the children's artwork and the teacher's educational items. Maps of each classroom were produced so classrooms could be returned to their original set-up after the renovations had been completed. School administrators, teachers, and staff members worked patiently and diligently to reconstruct the learning environments of their students.

This Herculean effort was the result of a well-orchestrated plan, an astounding project team and the masterful direction of a qualified, experienced project manager. □

*J. Michael Orifici is principal of JMOA Engineering, P. C. The firm has completed capital projects for over 70 educational clients consisting of over one billion dollars in total project costs from its offices in New York, Massachusetts and Ohio. Offices are planned to open in Florida and Colorado.*

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