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War Stories from 10 Years of K-12 Facilities Consulting

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Warning!



- **Everything you are about to read and hear is absolutely true (we couldn't make this stuff up).**
- **To protect the misguided, the identity of individuals and school districts remains confidential.**



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At Loggerheads

A facilities master
planning tale

Prismatic Services At Loggerheads

Situation:

- In several southern states, school boards have no taxing authority. In Hardheaded County, for eight years the county commissioners refused to provide any upfront money for school facilities.
 - *“If something breaks, we’ll pay to fix it.”*
- We were hired to help break the logjam.
- At the first joint meeting, the county officials and school board members sat as far away as possible from each other.



Prismatic Services At Loggerheads

Action:

- We proposed:
 - A joint budgeting and planning process.
 - A five-year time horizon, but annual budgeting/planning.
 - Community involvement.
- We walked them through the first year, kicking and screaming.

Result:

- County and school board officials sat together at the last meeting.
- They're still using the process we designed.





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The Door Stop

How a school board learned planning instead of making a plan

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The Door Stop

Situation:

- When we ask districts for a copy of their facilities master plan, they answer:
 - *“It’s in the Superintendent’s office, but she won’t let us see it.”*
 - *“We had a ten year plan made in 1996. There should be a copy of it around here somewhere.”*
 - *“We submit the required forms to the state at the end of every fiscal year.”*
 - *“We made a big plan but there was no money for it.”*
 - *“I use my plan binder as a door stop. Here, take it.”*



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The Door Stop

Action:

- We developed a continuous, perpetual facilities master planning process and recommend it to all school boards, superintendents, and facilities directors.

Result:

- We don't know how many have followed this recommendation.
- We know Eisenhower had it right:
 - *“Plans mean nothing; planning is everything.”*





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The 3:00 am Call

The expletive the
superintendent did not
delete

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The 3:00 am Call

Situation:

- The superintendent of a large school district receives a call at 3:00 am.

“The gym roof of Dilapidated High School has collapsed!”

- The night custodian had left an hour earlier.
- The investigation begins:
 - Maintenance records showed no formal roof monitoring or maintenance in 10+ years, except some tar pouring.
 - The roof collapsed under its own weight, due to being water-logged.



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The 3:00 am Call

Action:

- Remove and rebuild.

Result:

- The new gym cost far more than roof monitoring and maintenance would have – on the order of 15-40x.
- Realization that it could have been much, much worse if collapse had happened during school hours (or a basketball game).
- However, no appreciable change in district's maintenance culture.





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Speaking (too?) Softly

Mistaken
mollycoddling and a
near boiler explosion

Prismatic Services Speaking (too?) Softly

Situation:

- In most states, the qualifications for election to local school boards are minimal:
 - “Must be willing to serve and reside in the district.”
- This results sometimes in the election of school board members who are not fully familiar with much of anything pertaining to K-12, much less K-12 facilities.
- A member of the Aquanot school board promised to rid the schools of waste, fraud, and abuse. In one of his first actions, he proposed no longer buying water softener salt. The board approved the action.



Prismatic Services Speaking (too?) Softly

Action:

- We wanted to know more. The response was:
 - *“Well, when I was in school we never had soft water and I turned out all right!”*
- What about the use of water softener salt to reduce calcium and other minerals from water in boilers, to prevent line clogs and even explosions?
 - *“Do you think that’s what they need the water softener salt for?”*

Result:

- The unaware can be made aware.
- The ignorant tend to remain so.





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Not to Decide is to Decide

Kicking the
administrative hovel
down the road

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Not to Decide is to Decide

Situation:

- The school administration building was appalling. It was comprised of several portable classroom buildings that looked they had collided 30 years ago.
 - The siding was falling off.
 - Mold discolored the exterior.
 - The superintendent called it the “administrative hovel.”
- The hovel shared the site with an attractive two-story brick mansion in colonial style.



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Not to Decide is to Decide

Action:

- We toured the brick mansion.
 - It was also in terrible shape. Carpenter ants had feasted. The roof leaked. The basement was filled with stagnant water. The brick walls kept it from collapse.
- A story emerged -- 30 years ago, the school board planned to convert the mansion into the district HQ. A temporary set of portables was erected on the grounds...

Result:

- We recommended condemnation of the mansion and conversion of an extra elementary school into the district HQ.



Finding a Good Flat Roof in a Leaky World

A chain of custody
narrative



A Good Flat Roof in a Leaky World

Situation:

- After hundreds of schools, our approach has become – if we see a flat roof, we ask where the leaks are. Flat roofs leak. Some even collapse.
- In Squared Away School District, we encountered yet another set of flat roofs, and they were building seven more schools every 12-14 months.
- We recommended conversion to standing seam metal sloped roofs at renovation/replacement time.
- The facilities director of Squared Away refused.



A Good Flat Roof in a Leaky World

Action:

- We asked why. The director pointed out that their roofs were actually leak-free. We verified. We probed.
- They had a chain-of-custody system:
 - A roofing specialist had designed all the details.
 - An onsite construction administrator made sure the contractor installed the roofs following directions.

Result:

- We learned that flat roofs can work, provided there is an adequate chain of custody.



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The New School with a Worn-Out Floor

How haste makes
waste



The New School with Worn-out Floor

Situation:

- We inspected a brand-new middle school the week before Halloween. After a planned opening with the beginning of the school year, it opened instead in early October.
- Three weeks after opening, the Vinyl Composition Tile (VCT) flooring in some corridors was worn down to the concrete substrate.



The New School with Worn-out Floor

Action:

- We asked why. We heard:
 - *“Can’t believe our schools buy such low quality stuff!”*
 - *“The contractor was still in here and wanted to polish the floors. We threw him out.”*
- We figured out the truth – the contractor was prevented from laying on the necessary protective wax layers.

Result:

- Pressure to open the school caused thousands of dollars in damage.
- We recommended removal of the VCT – we were ignored.





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The Lying Prodigal School District

How the taxpayers
bought the story hook,
line, and sinker, for
awhile

The Lying Prodigal School District

Situation:

- The Forgotten Way School District performed only minimal maintenance “to save taxpayers money.”
- Once large amounts of deferred maintenance had accumulated, Forgotten Way asked taxpayers to approve special bond issues to reduce it, usually ~\$25M of a \$50-\$80M bond.



The Lying Prodigal School District

Action:

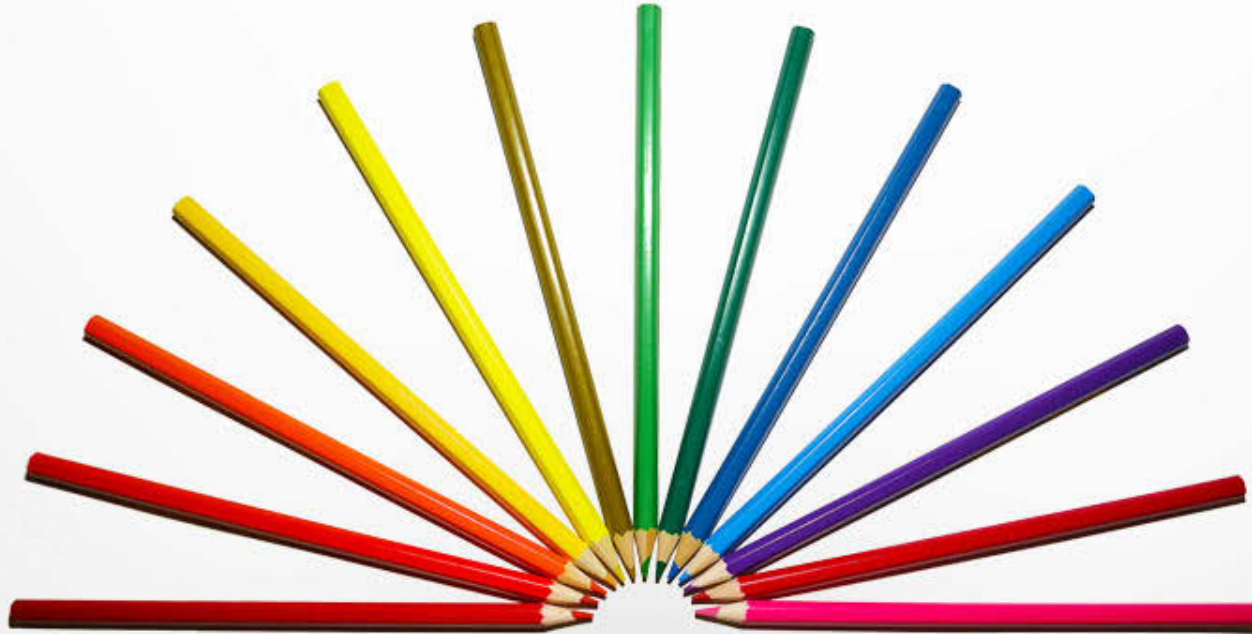
- We called them to account, explaining that fixing the damage of deferred maintenance can cost much, much more than the original preventive maintenance.
 - If you don't change the oil in the car, eventually you'll be changing the engine.

Result:

- Taxpayers saw the light – they approved an increase in school taxes for preventive maintenance.
- Then they approved one last special assessment to be rid of remaining deferred maintenance.



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Questions?



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