



Issue Brief

The American Institute of Architects • Government Advocacy • Current Issue Position and Analysis

Key Points:

- Using stock plans results in little to no savings. The construction cost often rises due to changes required to adapt the plans to unique site conditions.
- Stock school plans will often result in hiring a site-specific architect to modify the plans so the site and structure will function properly in terms of traffic flow, stormwater control, energy efficiency, etc.
- Stock school plans create inadequate schools that do not take into consideration specific needs such as curriculum and vocational priorities.
- 25 states have used standardized plans for school buildings. All 25 states abandoned the idea.

Stock Plans: Bad for Schools

AIA Position

The AIA believes the school building is a partner in student learning. Twenty-first century learning environments must incorporate sustainable building strategies, current pedagogy and state-of-the-art technology to enhance learning. An economical school design must be viewed in the context of the building's life-cycle costs. Architects minimize costs by designing energy efficient schools with classrooms designs based on academic priorities and constantly changing technology. Stock school plans undermine the effectiveness of the learning environment, fail to incorporate individual communities' educational needs, quickly become technologically obsolete, are not green buildings and do not save money.

Action Sought

The AIA urges state legislatures and local government authorities to reject the use of standardized or stock plans. It is most cost effective for state and local governments to invest in well-designed schools that meet specific requirements of the school site and curriculum and enhance student achievement.

Explanation and Justification

A total of 25 states have used standardized plans for school buildings. All 25 states abandoned the idea of using standardized plans when the school districts realized there were no cost savings and that the plans became quickly obsolete and compromised educational effectiveness.

The life-cycle cost savings of site-specific design far outweighs the first-cost savings of using stock plans. Every school construction has unique topography, geology, solar orientation, wind exposure, and water drainage. If the full professional services of an architect are leveraged, a school can be designed most efficiently on the unique site and save millions of dollars in energy costs over the life of the building. A stock plan will not achieve these savings.

Time is another unsolvable problem for stock school plans. Ever-changing pedagogy, technology, material cost fluctuations and building code upgrades make stock schools quickly obsolete. Research has proven that daylight filled classrooms with views, natural ventilation, and proper acoustics enhance learning. Because stock schools are not designed to a customized site orientation, the learning environment is not designed to maximize learning potential.

Liability becomes complicated when a stock plan drawn up by one architect is modified by another architect. In many states it is illegal for an architect to sign or stamp construction documents that he or she did not personally prepare or directly supervise. An architect hired to use existing documents would essentially need to disassemble the plans and recalculate each element to be assured they are designed to his or her standard. The costs and time involved in such a task are considerable, and could easily outweigh the perceived benefits of using stock school plans. Insurance companies contend that using stock plans may result in poorly adapted designs resulting in an increase in litigation and higher insurance premiums.