



Construction Delivery Methods: Which is the Right Approach for Your School District?

There are a number of options to consider when constructing a school facility. Which option is the right approach depends on a variety of variables. This executive brief discusses the pros and cons for each option, so you can make an informed decision as to which construction delivery method is the best fit for your school district.



Construction Delivery Methods

Design/Bid/Build

This is typically called the “traditional bid approach.” An architect is hired to design a school project, and the drawings are used to bid the project to general contractors. Contracts are based solely on the bidding documents, which are the drawings and specifications developed by the architect. The lowest bidding contractor is generally awarded the work. The architect will assist the school district during construction to ensure the contractor is building the project in compliance with the plans and specifications.

The advantages of design/bid/build are that costs are thought to be lower due to competitive bidding and the school district receives a single lump sum contract number. The disadvantages are the absence of a construction fast track option, greater potential for costly change orders, cost savings revert only to the contractor and the school district may be placed in the middle of disputes with the contractor.

Construction Manager

Recently, this form of construction contracting has become increasingly popular in the school market. A construction manager is hired to provide management services before and during the construction phase of a project. Typically, an architect is initially hired to design the school, and the construction manager is brought on board to provide input on cost and constructability issues during the design process. The construction manager acts as the owner’s agent throughout the construction phase.

There are some variations to the construction manager delivery method. A construction manager “at risk” involves the construction manager self-performing certain work categories on the project. The school district can allow the construction

manager to self-perform with or without a bid on certain sections of work. Under this approach, the construction manager holds the contracts of all subcontractors. An “agency” construction manager performs no work on the project, and the school district holds the contracts for each subcontractor. Additionally, the construction manager can also provide a guaranteed maximum price (GMP) during the design phase or work on a cost-plus-fee basis.

The advantages of utilizing a construction manager approach include: less district administration required during construction, construction manager cost input during the design process, allowance for phased or fast track construction and use of more local subcontractors by the district, while still maintaining competitive bidding. The disadvantages are the potential need for higher contingencies, the school district assumes more risk and the possibility of less project control versus a general contractor approach.

Design/Build

This form of delivery has the school district contracting with one design/build firm for both design and construction services. Typically, an architect works for the contractor, providing one source of responsibility for the school district. There is a legal concern to the design/build approach. Wisconsin state law requires competitive bidding on all public work. There is no way to compare competitive bids equally from two different design/bid contractors, since there are no plans and specifications to bid from.

The biggest advantage to a design/build construction method is the one-point responsibility. The disadvantage to the school district is that there is no third party to turn to when pricing, quality or construction techniques used may be questionable.



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