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Concrete Masonry and Schools – An Excellent Match

One of the biggest challenges for school boards and administration today is housing an ever growing student population. From elementary to the secondary level and in our career and technology schools, new buildings are being constructed which are functional, economical to build and maintain and yet are appealing to the eye. Architects who design these facilities specify concrete masonry for interior and exterior applications for these and many other reasons. “The concrete masonry unit is inherently an exciting material to use because, unlike many other materials, it can be functional, beautiful and economical!” said Bob Hoffman, partner in the architectural firm Beers, Schillaci & Hoffman, LTD, located in Lancaster and Lebanon, Pennsylvania. “For an architect working in the public arena, it is an excellent material of choice.”

Among the variety of projects he has designed, Hoffman finds that in school buildings, the functional characteristics of a material are extremely important. The material used for the interior walls must be strong, durable, and easy to maintain to withstand the test of time and the “abuse“ it may take. “Maintenance requirements, other than periodic cleaning, are almost non-existent! Concrete masonry is virtually indestructible.” Hoffman explained. Keeping the transfer of noise between classrooms at a minimum is especially important considering the variety of teaching styles used today that involve student interaction. Concrete masonry is the champion of fire safety as well. “It’s great for noise reduction and doesn’t burn, contributing to a safe school environment.” Hoffman related.

The economy of concrete masonry makes it an excellent choice for those tight school budgets, too. Block is readily available and there is no shortage of craftsmen who excel in using it. Hoffman points out that “block provides low initial cost and is very economical in long-term maintenance requirements as well as energy efficiency.”

It has been said that what separates architecture from building is the inclusion of art. The aesthetic flexibility of concrete block, with its various colors, textures and sizes, makes it a wonderful material for an architect’s palate. “What I find most exciting is that it provides design flexibility!” said Hoffman. This flexibility allows sensitivity to the needs of the students in the district while keeping in mind other qualities that make a new school building appealing to everyone.

The concrete masonry advantage is clear. It is durable, fire resistant, aesthetically pleasing, maintenance free and cost effective. Concrete masonry and schools are an excellent match!

This article is provided by the Pennsylvania Concrete Masonry Association (PCMA). The organization is comprised of the companies that produce and market concrete block throughout the state. For more information, visit our website www.pacma.com or contact Executive Director, Jan Boyer, at 717-279-6346.