

CHAPTER



EXTERIOR DESIGNS

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What do people see when they approach your school?

When approaching your school, what are the first branding/design elements and landmarks your stakeholders see? It's important to capitalize on your maximum appeal through your exterior buildings and grounds. Signage, buildings, landscaping, maintenance, and future upkeep are all critical components in supporting the ethos of your school. Your exterior spaces ultimately convey your school's culture. Being warm, interesting, clear, and inviting enhances everyone's experiences daily.

Exterior design improvements likely fall in your Game Plan's "Secondary and Future Phases." The team assessing your real estate may discover and expand flexible outdoor "informal learning" and common spaces for the school, events, and the community. Transforming the outside of your facility will be a beacon of positive energy for students, staff, and your community neighbors.

Exterior Signage

Exterior signage is an extension of your brand. One of the first impressions your stakeholders have of your school brand is its exterior signage. It is vital to reinforce your brand "face" and mission by incorporating visual elements. Therefore, signage needs to be instantly recognizable. It should not be complicated and can be affordable. Signage should complement the aesthetics of your buildings and campus. Don't make this signage an afterthought. Signage provides the public with important first impressions and recognition.

There are three categories of Exterior Signage:

- 1** Identity (Branding)
- 2** Wayfinding
- 3** Information/Announcements

Signage must comply with zoning ordinances, regulations, and ADA (Americans with Disabilities) requirements.

"Design an engaging (school) environment children and adults want to attend every day."

—John Oderda, Education by Design

1 IDENTITY SIGNAGE (BRANDING)

Successful signage needs to consider not only design, but size, illumination, and placement. How can you develop captivating and effective signage that will help your school stand out? How does your identity differ from other schools? Developing and building on one's exterior branding will set a tone that speaks to your stakeholders. Your school should be a place where people feel comfortable, welcomed, and celebrated daily.

Be proud of your buildings and your campus, and above all, be a good neighbor. A unifying theme throughout your campus will reinforce and support the messaging while encouraging further connections with the overall school community. Finding creative ways to upgrade existing signage strengthens these connections and open doors to positive ways of interpreting staid and outdated messaging.

The CIC worked with one high school to establish new signage that incorporated their new brand identity. Old plastic letters were replaced with custom-designed stainless-steel letters. The new signage was a bold change for the school and sent a strong message to all. It was upgraded in a way that the school's signage became relevant while adding much more warmth and interest to the building and campus.



Testing new design font for exterior signage.



New school lettering on chimney.

TRANSFORMING THE OUTSIDE OF YOUR FACILITY WILL BE A BEACON OF POSITIVE ENERGY

2 WAYFINDING SIGNAGE

Road and street signage needs to be immediately instructional to the public. Wayfinding must help navigate vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians safely to the buildings and through the grounds. Find a balance between messaging and creativity in your signage. Wayfinding signage doesn't have to be restrictive in its design. Remember, this is a design opportunity to promote your branding, mission, and values.

3 INFORMATION

AND ANNOUNCEMENT SIGNAGE

Most schools have “message center” signage located in prominent locations. Your options depend on what your budget allows. Signs can range from LED to sandwich boards and handmade banners. The messaging is the same; to inform the public of upcoming events, announcements, birthdays, etc. All signage should be instantly readable and catch the public’s eye.

Exterior Lighting

Exterior light for schools needs to support the safety and wellbeing of its stakeholders. At the same time, well planned lighting should positively add to the overall design and to the school’s brand and ethos. Lighting will dramatically improve your school’s environment and campus. Become knowledgeable about cost effective, daylight based, and energy saving lighting opportunities.

How are your buildings and campus used in the evenings and off hours? Does the school and community use your facilities for evening events such as sporting events, plays, adult education classes, community meetings, etc.? How will you keep your stakeholders safe? What messages do you want to communicate to people who see your school and campus at nighttime?

Your outdoor landscape looks very different in the evenings and at night. Your wayfinding and security concerns will change depending on the time of day. Be practical with your outdoor lighting applications. Safety and security are most important throughout your campus. Parking lots, walkways, curbs, etc., all need to be well lit for wayfinding and for providing security. Exterior lighting will also help deter vandalism and loitering while creating a positive environment. Consistent exterior lighting design will provide an increased sense of safety, calmness, and support.

Your design team needs to do their research. Ever developing lighting technologies continually change and improve. There are products such as LED solutions that reduce maintenance. There is technology that controls light levels based on the



Another example of new font: Gym Sign.

time of day and night. Strive to reduce your energy use. Look to be cost effective and aesthetically pleasing while providing safety and well-designed illumination.

A note on LED: “Light Emitting Diode” technology is a highly visible and effective messaging tool, but LED signage needs to be a good neighbor: understand what impact LED lights have on the neighborhood. “Light pollution” is a sensitive issue for many communities. Some public surveys indicate information displayed on electronic message boards are often too fast to read. Thus, the information/announcement is not clear. Have the ability to regulate the pacing and timing of the messaging. Once again, the team needs to educate themselves with zoning ordinances and regulations.

Informal Learning and Common Spaces

There are likely hidden areas in your school that can be transformed into informal learning and common spaces. Geographic locations directly impact the opportunity to utilize your school’s campus. Study the traffic flow, foot traffic, and general patterns of daily activity. This data is necessary to understand the movements and interactions of your stakeholders. This information will provide further clues as to how best to develop and work with your real estate more effectively.

Urban, suburban, and rural schools all have different opportunities and challenges. School location and population density may influence your outdoor options. Cold weather climates provide different

outdoor offerings than warm weather climates. Igloos may provide unique learning spaces in the north country but won't last too long in the hot southern sun! Having the ability to create outdoor classroom spaces additionally supports alternative methods to teach, learn, and collaborate. Designing exterior informal learning spaces will add great depth visually and experientially, while effectively strengthening bonds and ownership for everyone.



Exterior common sitting space and garden. The new fence shields mechanical elements.

Common Spaces

Consider incorporating benches, walkways, fencing, gardens, picnic tables, and sculptural work in your makeover plans. All add great value to undeveloped and underutilized exterior spaces. Every school has unseemly areas... locations for dumpsters, disposal facilities, mechanical infrastructure, and general maintenance equipment. Sometimes, this unsightly, yet necessary equipment is often located in high traffic and visually important areas. This scenario reflects poorly on the school. Having these unsightly functional elements in full view is not welcoming and sends a negative message to its stakeholders and community. Makeover design solutions can be achieved by being creative. Fencing, gardens, sculptural pieces, can all be used to shade and cover unseemly yet necessary infrastructure.

Fencing

Fences can support the needs of your school. Do they help facilitate traffic directions and wayfinding? Do they help keep the stray soccer, basketball, and softballs from drifting too far afield? Do they blend

with gardens to distinguish property boundaries? Do they keep people in or out? Are they good neighbors?

Attractive upgrades do not need to be expensive or time consuming. One CIC project involved installing a section of panel fencing in a high traffic area where large ventilation fans and dumpster units were located. By not only concealing these infrastructure units, but the fence also created a warm and interesting backdrop for further work (gardens, bench, sculpture) to be incorporated on the grounds.

Remember: Don't be afraid to reach out to community members and organizations for funding and support. They may be very helpful with your efforts to revitalize outdoor spaces. Local vendors and businesses are often willing to donate their time and help defray costs. The public should recognize the importance of its schools. Schools are valuable public institutions and anchors of communities.

One example of incorporating fencing in a larger makeover project took place at an entrance to a school's campus. Shorter sections of split rail fencing were installed on the corners of a central green space. The fencing defined and supported wayfinding and traffic flow and brought warmth to the exterior campus. The split rail design was selected to discourage loitering and sitting. This fencing brought focus to these areas and created new opportunities. Small flower gardens in front of the fencing sections transformed the campus. The flower bulbs and the fencing were both provided at a discounted rate by local businesses and national chain stores.



Fences and gardens improve the school's campus.

Gardens and Grounds

It's important to work with people who have knowledge and an overall understanding of gardening and landscape design. Long-range planning and budgeting are vital. Well intentioned volunteers are important; however, someone with detailed knowledge of plants and horticulture is key. Gardens need care and maintenance on a continual basis. It is great to make these changes and the effects will be instantly recognizable, but at the same time, it is important to understand that there will be upkeep on an annual basis to these new additions and upgrades. An overall plan to maintain and manage these areas on a regular basis is key to keeping these additions in good shape for years to come.

The CIC worked with a school where businesses and artisans collaborated to reinvigorate a downtrodden exterior space at their school. Brick walkways and sitting areas were created with the help of a local building salvage yard that donated reclaimed bricks, a local masonry outfit that donated sand and guidance, a local artisan who donated design time and supervision with the work, and the school maintenance department who provided manpower and assistance.

The garden installation included students, classes (math, art, homeroom/advisory, and special ed.) and qualified staff throughout the entire process. They formulated long-range plans, approached potential donors, cleaned, and painted bricks, calculated the quantity of material for the areas, and were involved with the manual labor for the gardens. The end results transformed the school's landscape and grounds into a positive and energizing experience for all who frequent the campus.

Exterior Furniture

Exterior furniture, like signage, communicates your mission, values, and goals. Incorporate benches, seating areas, picnic tables, and trash bins in your master landscape design plan. Furniture is integral in supporting your exterior informal learning spaces. Be creative in including exterior furniture throughout your campus. Your exterior furniture options may be limited based on your



Classes using outdoor learning spaces.

school's location, but it is still important to have this conversation with your makeover team. Is there an opportunity to incorporate outdoor furniture? What purpose will this serve? Will benches encourage loitering? As opportunities allow, furniture should be engaging, aesthetically warm and inviting, functional, and fun!

Your exterior campus should be viewed as a blank canvas, like the interior of your facility. View the overall landscape as a way to support and define the overall ethos and mission of your programs. Adding interesting and informative signage, warm and inviting landscape design, creating functional and aesthetically pleasing common areas for socializing, teaching, and celebrating, will all go a long way to transforming your school and community center.

Remember, you do not need to address every outside concern all at one time. Identify your priorities and little by little, create a plan and a task force to upgrade and develop certain areas. You will begin to transform your overall campus one brick, one bench, one fence post, one bulb, one garden at a time!

