



# SCHOOL

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# Building Blueprints

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## At Your Service

CAFETERIAS, FOOD COURTS ARE FOR MORE THAN JUST MEALS

by GAYLAIRD CHRISTOPHER

**T**HE FUNCTIONALITY OF cafeteria/multipurpose rooms (MPR) is advancing. MPR facilities have become truly “multipurpose,” accommodating assemblies, athletic and educational activities in addition to daily meal service. Food is becoming less a commodity and more an opportunity, helping students to develop healthy lifestyles and to learn about nutrition. Many districts are moving away from serving pre-packaged entrees, choosing site-prepared meals that feature salad bars and serving station options for their students.

Culinary Arts is an increasingly popular choice as a career exploration field. Culinary classes can be effectively combined with a working kitchen, offering students

the chance to participate in day-to-day Food Services Program operations, while helping to prepare tastier and healthier foods for their peers.

### MULTIPURPOSE ROOMS

A common student complaint regarding food service concerns the long wait in serving lines — “wait time” that often leaves little remaining time to eat and socialize with friends. Providing multiple serving lines and serving stations will help to alleviate this problem. The food court concept is gaining in popularity on larger high school campuses. Students have the option to order a variety of foods at stations throughout the food court — a concept similar to that of a shopping mall, though on a smaller scale.

Design considerations for the food court include the provision of appropriate

electrical, data and utility connections at each station; these connections are necessary to accommodate cooking, serving and payment functions. The food court area often includes comfortable seating options, school spirit graphics, video displays and music.

Serving areas, too, are trending toward a less institutional look. Ceramic tile and stainless steel are still favorite materials; in combination with warm colors, graphics and video displays, the overall environment assumes a contemporary ambience.

Dining in the student commons instead of in the cafeteria can provide a pleasant setting; one that is also accessible to students before and after school for social activities, study and work groups. Seating in the student commons area is usually more informal, often including round tables and



a café-like setting. In some instances, these spaces include student culinary programs, where food is cooked-to-order for student diners; a student-run coffee bar that serves students and staff is another popular option.

When the weather is good, many schools permit students to eat outside, providing shade structures that offer protection from the elements. Students often prefer eating outdoors in an informal setting. The casual environment can be enhanced by providing smaller covered seating areas, similar to a sidewalk café. Special attention to the provision of adequate outside serving windows and line areas is necessary for the success of this concept.

**A well-designed multipurpose room/cafeteria can serve as an activity hub for the entire campus, enriching daily use experiences at meal time, while providing spatial flexibility and program support for the visual and performing arts.**

A principal challenge in designing a multifunctional facility that accommodates numerous activities — ensure it will support each activity effectively and specifically. A multipurpose room should never be known as a “multi-useless room!” Often, requirements for hard surfaces that withstand the wear and tear of physical athletic activities, along with the necessity for protected light fixtures, are project needs that seemingly conflict with best-use acoustic/aesthetic requirements for performances and large gatherings.

An outstanding material/building system to alleviate acoustic concerns, while delivering a high degree of durability, is acoustical steel deck. This material consists of a steel deck with flat steel panels welded to its surface and sound-absorbent insulation between the deck panels. The finished



**Activity Hubs.** One of the greatest challenges in designing multipurpose rooms is to make sure they can accommodate numerous activities. For example, in the top photo, the band class is held on the stage at Luiseno School in Lake Elsinore, Calif. Bottom left, the cafeteria at Herget Middle School in West Aurora, Ill., includes a stage and a beautiful view. In the bottom right photo, the PE class is held in the multipurpose room at Luiseno School.

surface is aesthetically pleasing, can be left in its galvanized form or painted and is effective in limiting reverberation when the space is used for performances, lectures or presentations.

Harder acoustically absorbent panels, such as Tectum, can also be used on the walls to provide a more acoustically pleasing environment. Typically, the materials are placed on the upper portions of the walls, away from foot traffic and student access. The conscientious designer will accommodate the need for athletic hard surfaces, choosing those that are acoustically absorbent, while selecting aesthetically pleasing materials/fixtures and equipping the facility with an adaptable sound system matched to spatial requirements. Flexible design innovations such as these will help to feature the MPR as a centrally important campus asset.

The MPR has assumed a key role in the overall educational program. As students participate in more hands-on learning activities and STEAM initiatives gain acceptance, the MPR becomes a place for capstone student presentations; a place where students celebrate and demonstrate their skills

through performances and exhibits.

The MPR provides an excellent venue for the display of student work and the expression of school spirit. Engaging displays/display cases in the entry lobby give hundreds of students and community members the chance to view student projects — an opportunity for participating students to earn appreciative recognition. The stage area is often designed as an acoustically separate space by providing an operable wall between the MPR and the stage, permitting it to act as a performing arts laboratory for classes in music, drama and dance.

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