

BIDDING/BUILDING CONSTRUCTION/ORDERING FURINTURE AND EQUIPMENT

Bidding the Project

When the County Council appropriates construction funds for the estimated cost of the project, formal bids are solicited from qualified contractors. The bidding process is governed by state law. Requests for bids are placed in a local newspaper of record and sent to other information clearinghouses that are likely to generate responsible, qualified bidders.

The construction documents are the sole basis on which the contractors base their bids. Generally, the project is bid as a “base bid” and the “alternates”.

The construction bids are opened and read publicly at a specific pre-announced time and place. The lowest responsible bidder, which means the bidder whose base bid and accepted alternates is the lowest number, gets the contract subject to BOE approval.

The Board has virtually no options at this point. If the low bidder can jump through the required legal hoops for contract award, we have to take them home. It doesn't matter what others may have said, or not said, about their previous work. All we can do is monitor them closely.

Since a contractor's reputation depends on the quality of his or her work, it's reasonable to expect competent work. And it has been our experience that this occurs the majority of the time, especially since our inspectors watch them closely and make them redo work that is not in accordance with the requirements of the contract documents.

We'd like to stress that the Division of Construction staff will be with you throughout the project.

Building Construction

Construction begins after the Board of Education formally approves the contract with the lowest responsible bidder and a legally binding contract is executed between the Board and the successful bidder. At this point in the process, responsibility for the project transitions to the program inspection section in the Division of Construction.

Your project will be assigned a construction inspector who is responsible for quality control of the contractor's work. The construction inspector and the program inspection supervisory team will assist you with the activities that require the principal's involvement during construction. The design project manager will continue to be involved; however, his/her participation will be limited to design issues that come up during construction.

The construction contract contains all the requirements to complete the building and incorporates the plans and specifications that formed the basis of the bidding. Anything not in the contract at this time will either cost extra, if it is additional work, or yield a credit, if it is subtracted from the required work. For obvious reasons, everyone on the side that's paying, i.e., MCPS, tries to minimize additions, and everyone on the side that's getting paid, i.e., the contractor and subcontractors, tries to generate reasons for additions. It's good to keep this in mind as construction progresses.

Your role during construction will be to act as a conduit for information to the community and to participate in those activities that require the informed input of a principal. Specifically, your help will be required in selecting how rooms should be identified on signs, how the rooms should be numbered, how the building should be keyed, and aesthetic considerations such as the color scheme for paint, carpeting, and tile. The architect and Division of Construction staff will work with you on these details.

Ordering Furniture and Equipment

Another important part of the principal's role during construction will be purchasing furniture and equipment (F/E) and planning your move-in. Principals are contacted early in the construction phase by the Department of Materials Management with detailed instructions and specific information on purchasing furniture and equipment and moving into the completed facility. You will also be given your funding allocation for F/E at this time. Included at the end of this section is a sample of the furniture and equipment checklist that you will receive from the Department of Materials Management as a guide to purchasing furniture and equipment. They also provide principals with budget information and assist with selecting and ordering individual and bulk items.

Job Progress

Although the temptation will be to get directly involved in the daily management of the project since it's occurring at "your" school, fight it, especially if you're susceptible to ulcers. There will be problems, but others will solve them; it's their job. No matter what anyone may have told you, the responsibility is really elsewhere. When the project begins, control of the site is legally turned over to the contractor. **You will be kept informed of the general progress and be involved in any decision during construction that affects the building design.**

Construction Progress Meetings

A construction progress meeting for your project generally will occur bi-weekly. Attendees usually include representatives of the architects and engineers who designed the facility, management and inspectors from the Division of Construction who legally represent the owner, which is MCPS, and the contractor and their subcontractors. The progress meetings are intended to review progress, address quality of workmanship

issues, work out coordination, and, at times, resolve conflicts of items that were missed by the drawings. You should plan to attend these meetings. However, if you are unable to attend, the project manager or construction inspector will let you know what occurred as well as ensure a copy of the meeting minutes is forwarded to the school. You will also be given advance warning of issues that require the principal's input so your time can be used effectively. The Division of Construction staff will work closely with you to schedule activities such as keying, color selections, and other issues needing the principal's review for progress meetings that are convenient for you to attend. If it is inconvenient for you to attend progress meetings when these decisions need to be made, a separate meeting will be arranged. Any potential changes which involve the facility design will be reviewed with the principal prior to implementing.

While most contractors are only interested in doing a good job for the client, there are times during progress meetings when appearances can be deceiving: there's a whole lot of posturing going on, because money is involved. Extra revenue for them, extra costs for us. Any change or delay involves either extra money that MCPS must pay or a credit that the contractor must give back. Since problems occur during the actual work that even the most competent, dedicated people can't anticipate in advance, it's a delicate dance to arrive at equitable solutions.

The Construction Progress Report

After the Board of Education has awarded a contract to build your project, it will be included on the Construction Project Report published monthly by the Department of Facilities Management. This report is a public document submitted to the Board that summarizes significant information about project progress; i.e., when the contract was awarded, when construction should start, the anticipated date when construction will be completed, and the percentage of the project that is completed as of the date of the report. Since the construction process involved hundreds of workers and material suppliers working for numerous companies, as well as being subjected to weather, things often don't go as planned. As time progresses, the report also shows slippage in the original plan dates. A comments column provides relevant explanations of the reasons for slippage and anticipated strategies for correcting problems.

HOW TO TELL IF CONSTRUCTION IS PROGRESSING

Progress, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. Like any other complex repetitive process, it is helpful to have experience in at least on complete construction cycle to be able to judge when things are going well and when they're not. Chances are you haven't had the pleasure. Not to worry, we have. We will work with you to ensure any concerns you have are addressed.

A construction progress report that summarizes that status of all active MCPS construction projects is published monthly and, as mentioned previously, regularly scheduled construction progress meetings are held bi-weekly.

It is important to recognize that the general contractor is responsible for building the facility in accordance with the plans and for scheduling the work of their subcontractors so it is completed on schedule. While MCPS can demand that work performed be corrected or redone because it does not comply with the plans, we have very little control over how the contractor schedules their work. While we monitor the schedule closely and make suggestions routinely to improve the work progress, the only legal measure we can enforce regarding the schedule is the final completion date.

HELPFUL HINTS:

- During the later stages of the construction, arrange to take the school support staff through the building.
- Try to arrange for your building service manager to attend the progress meetings.
- Arrange for a display board at the holding school of photos of the construction work during various stages for the community or staff.