



Schooldesigner, LLC - Monthly eNewsletter

July 2010

The Haves and Have Nots...and Have It Alls

By Joel Sims, AIA

A common dilemma I see when touring schools is that some are touted as being exceptional, yet the building design does little to contribute to the success of the learning environment. In fact, what is exceptional about the school is the curriculum, faculty and students. So, before I go discuss specific buildings, let me clearly state that I loved visiting each of the three schools represented in this article. The students and staff who led the tours were enthusiastic, polite and knowledgeable.

There was no doubt that something different is going on in each school and each is successful in its own unique ways. I saw students who were in the hallways with laptops collaborating with each other. Students even spent their lunch time on projects in order to advance their education.

Yet, not all the building designs supported the students and faculty and, as an architect, that is what I was hoping to see. The biggest issue I saw was the difference between the "haves" and "have nots." In order not to embarrass anyone, I have retitled the schools.

HaveNot High is an urban school in a big city. Haveit School is a public school (early childhood center) in the suburbs. Haveitall School is a private school in the suburbs with multiple buildings on the campus. Walk with me on a quick tour of the schools that represent the Havenots, the Haveits and the Haveitalls.

Field trips have always been fun. I still recall my children's excitement as they anticipated an upcoming school trip (i.e. adventure). Sure, there was learning, but there were new environments, lots of friends and new areas to explore. Well, I still like field trips. Last month, I had the opportunity to attend the Northeast Regional CEFPI conference in Philadelphia. My favorite day of the conference was the day we took a field trip to visit some schools. This month you will hear about the schools.

Joel K. Sims
President
Schooldesigner, LLC.

JOEL
SIMS, AIA

Display Areas

Sure, it's a minor issue, and that's my point. How hard is it to add display areas in a school? Obviously harder than one might think. HaveNot High: papers falling off the wall. Havelt School: really nice display areas. At HaveltAll School, there is a nice display area at the art room. On the corridor side, there is a display area. The display case is accessed from the art room side. In addition, there is tackboard surface on the doors that acts as a display area on the art room side.

HaveNot High



Havelt School

HaveltAll School



Seating

"Students love sitting on the floor," I heard someone say as we were touring HaveNot High. I don't believe it. Students prefer comfortable seating. There is nothing appealing about a hard floor. HaveNot High: lots of uncomfortable floor space and some enlarged dark hallways with bad seating. Havelt School: comfortable seating options including movable padded benches and really nice window seating areas. At HaveltAll, there were wooden chairs and tables in the cafeteria and leather seats in the alumni center.



HaveNot High

Havelt School



HaveltAll School

Product Sponsor

Green Modular Classrooms



The SmartSpace Premier Classroom design transforms LEED® principles into building practices. Eco-friendly, healthy and energy efficient, this relocatable classroom can be ready to occupy as much as 50%

sooner than conventional construction. Flexible, innovative and customized to suit your architectural needs and construction specifications, SmartSpace engages a philosophy that results in a better building envelope with improved thermal performance, all steel construction, better indoor air quality, and according to an independent energy study completed for the Carroll School- all at an energy cost savings of over 50%.

Mechanical Systems

We should have thrown out the unit ventilator when we threw out typewriters. Oh well. HaveNot High has unit ventilators - an antiquated HVAC system by today's standards. In addition, the mainframe room had to have the door propped open with a fan inserted in the opening to keep the equipment from overheating. Havelt School has a geothermal system that is energy efficient and demonstrates to the students the district's commitment to conserving natural resources. At the HaveltAll campus, there were too many other exciting things to see than mechanical spaces (sorry engineers). Yes, after 25 years of designing K-12 schools, I finally saw a high school crew training area.

HaveNot High



Havelt School

HaveltAll School



Theater

HaveNot High has creative and inspiring students in an uninspiring room. They took out some ceiling tiles to make the most of the space. Hey, there is a reason spaces like this typically have exposed ceilings. Since the Havelt School was an early childhood center, it did not have a theater area. However, it had a really nice meeting area that was an extension of the corridor. Everyone met to hear a brief introduction of the project while some of the maverick architects initiated a self-guided tour. HaveltAll School has a workshop for making props, a "black box" and a beautiful auditorium. The wood working shop area is enough to make any one involved in prop making drool down both sides of his mouth.

HaveNot High



Havelt School

HaveltAll School



Product Sponsor

Playground Surfacing



Outdoor play is an integral part of a child's education. It provides time for physical activity and allows the students to release energy, helping them focus on their studies. On the other hand, as many as 75 percent of playground

injuries are a result of a fall. Appropriate treatment of the playground surface can minimize injuries while maintaining a surface that is durable and slip resistant. From the use of engineered wood fiber to manufactured rubber bases and interlocking rubber pavers, there are many options to consider when determining the appropriate surface for your outdoor play area.

Exterior

Well, I understand that, in an urban environment, exterior space goes for a premium and will not be the same as a suburban environment. However, it's a shame that one of the only outdoor spaces at HaveNot High looked like a prison. The HaveNot students sat on the exit stair area to enjoy the sunshine. The Havelt students have plenty of outdoor areas, including access to a green roof and their own tree house. HaveltAll Students have a luscious campus that is beautifully landscaped. Students gathered on the lawn or sat on rock retaining walls to chat.

HaveNot High



Havelt School

HaveltAll School



Break-out Areas

In any school, it is important to have areas to go to beyond the classroom. Whether they are expanded areas off corridors or lobbies, or small group instruction areas, they make a school unique and foster learning. At HaveNot High, at least they had a space, as not all schools do. However, the black floor tile and drab walls made it look more like the students were being punished than encouraged to pursue academic excellence. The Havelt school had a bright, cheerful lobby with a seating area above and below. The well-lit areas were inviting and relaxing. At the HaveltAll school, one of my favorite places was the squash court area. Although I question how much studying I would get done, the large skylight above produced a bright magnificent space.

HaveNot High



Havelt School

HaveltAll School



Product Sponsor

Multipurpose, Urithane and Rubber Flooring



Abacus is a 20 year old national contractor specializing in multipurpose & sports flooring. Their products are not only green (sustainable) they are recycled - there is a difference. The rubber, otherwise heading for the landfill is given a second life and qualifies for LEED credits. Their clients include hundreds of Schools, Universities, Churches, Vet Clinics and Animal Training Facilities. Gym floors for basketball, volleyball & other multi-directional sports, weight rooms and running tracks are their forte.

Fitness Areas

Well, as you can tell from our tour so far, I had to throw in a few fitness areas from the HavelAll school just to give you a glimpse of the commitment to athletic excellence that was evident at the school. Whether you play lacrosse, are on the crew team, play squash or just work out in the weight/fitness center, there is something for everyone. When we toured the fitness room at HaveNot High, I was saddened by how little equipment they had, especially compared to the HavelAll fitness center. At the Havel School there were the typical playground areas and an inviting walkway that resembled a friendly snake.

HaveNot High



Havel School

HavelAll School

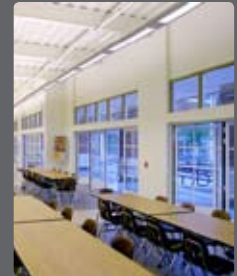


When we wrapped up the tour, I began to think about all that I had learned. Sure, money helps and politics can hurt. Students are resilient and can learn in ugly buildings. Students can also become failures even though their parents shell out \$25,000 a year to send them to a private school. Yet, for those of us concerned about improving school design for all, there is more to do. Do what is right. Avoid doing what is wrong. If you are not sure the difference, ask.

Product Sponsor

Large Opening Glass Walls

NanaWall®



The NanaWall, a large opening glass wall system, can be installed anywhere a traditional wall would stand. The panels of the NanaWall can easily open and fold away out of sight, blurring the line between the indoors and outdoors. When closed, the NanaWall provides optimum security and superior protection from outdoor elements. Unrivaled in the industry, the NanaWall meets more industry standards for air infiltration, water penetration, structural performance, and forced entry. NanaWall SL72 aluminum folding system has passed hurricane testing performed by Miami/Dade County and has been declared Hurricane Certified.