

SPRING 2020

LEARNING BY DESIGN

THE PREMIER SOURCE FOR EDUCATION DESIGN INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE

Architectural Awards Showcase

Issues in Education

The Topic: Learning Environments

The Expert: Michael Rachlin, AIA, LEED AP, Principal-in-Charge, Rachlin Partners

What is your background and your current role?

My work as Founding Partner and Principal-in-Charge of Design at Rachlin Partners has spanned a wide variety of project types, including education, healthcare and institutional facilities. Throughout my 40-year career, I have focused primarily on the design of learning environments and have worked on educational projects of all types from elementary, middle, and high schools to projects for colleges and universities.

My current role is to lead engagement with the owner, stakeholders, staff, and students throughout the design process. I facilitate communication between the owner and the design team to ensure the project is being developed the way the district and stakeholders have envisioned.

How has your knowledge of learning environments impacted the design of educational environments?

We create Learning Environments that empower faculty to teach students how to practically apply the skills they learn in the classroom.

The Bonita Center for the Arts was created as an important asset for the Bonita Unified School District and surrounding cities. The facility provides a Learning Environment for band, drama

and choir, as well as back-of-house operations. With a design that mirrors that of a professional venue, students learn what it is like to function in this type of setting as well as how to perform back-of-house duties, including lighting, sound, rigging, and set design. Students wishing to pursue the performing arts will be better prepared for a collegiate or professional level program.

Tell us about a significant contribution you've made to the industry?

We have established a "whole-project culture" of collaboration in which all stakeholders communicate openly and come together to make decisions in the best interest of the project. As a result, the process becomes more efficient, responsive and collaborative.

This approach provides leadership within a context of teamwork. The success of any project, from a large-scale multi-year program to a single project, requires a high level of performance by a group of individuals. There is no substitute for positive commitment toward shared goals, and this can only happen when leadership instills these elements from the beginning. This non-adversarial environment encourages productive, collegial relationships that will last for the duration of the project.



Michael Rachlin, AIA, LEED AP, Principal-in-Charge, Rachlin Partners

What would be your most valuable piece of advice when building or renovating educational space?

Throughout the course of our work, we have seen how classroom technologies change often and rapidly, in turn influencing how students learn. To address the challenge of current and hard-to-predict future technology needs, it is important to put in place flexible infrastructure that can grow and adapt to as-yet unknown technology.

We also believe that environmentally responsible solutions are an integral component of quality design.

Environmentally responsible buildings do not need to have a significant increase in initial construction costs and can lead to cost savings and performance optimization at the end of a project. The use of passive strategies such as optimal building orientation, thermal mass, natural ventilation in the summer and solar heat gain in the winter can deliver significant energy savings with virtually no additional cost.



View of the exterior of the Bonita Center for the Arts, a 700-seat performing arts center in San Dimas, California. Photo: Tom Bonner

www.rachlinpartners.com
310-204-3400