

ANSI Announces New School Standards

During the summer of 2002, the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) published new acoustical standards for schools and places of learning. The acoustical needs of performance and public meeting spaces have long been recognized by architects and designers. The new standard, Acoustical Performance Criteria, Design Requirements, and Guidelines for Schools (S12.60-2002), applies to all facilities and spaces where learning takes place including every classroom, music room, gymnasium, pool, conference room, office, speech clinic, and health care room. In addition, these standards not only apply to primary and secondary education, but also to colleges and universities, business and professional education, and adult education facilities.

These standards were developed in response to a parent petition for equal access to learning under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Although compliance with the standards is voluntary at this stage, all design professionals involved with schools and places of learning will need to exercise caution. Should one of your clients be sued for failure to provide an appropriate acoustical environment for learning under the ADA, at issue will be why these new national standards were not followed.

The new standards address exterior noise ingress, such as traffic, aircraft, industrial noise, schoolyard noise, and ground maintenance noise. They also address interior noise issues such as mechanical systems and the ability of walls, floors, and ceilings to appropriately handle sound within the room and to insulate the room from other source of noise and vibration. Primary criteria considered included background noise, reverberation time, noise isolation between adjacent spaces, and impact isolation between floors.

These standards not only apply to the design phase, but also include site visits and post-construction conformance testing. While the entire standard and its implications should be understood by design professionals, Annex E of the standard specifically provides guidance on "good architectural practices" and procedures to verify conformance to the standard.

The new standards are effective immediately for new design and construction and for major renovation to existing facilities. Many design professionals will have education projects that are currently in the design or construction process or ones that are pending. If this is the case for you, you should inform your clients of the new standards and the need to comply with them.