

Cost of Portable Classrooms

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Although this article was written in 2000, it still may be of value, assuming one is willing to update the numbers based on inflation and other economic factors that have emerged since 2000.

The main reason that government schools must resort to trailers for instructional space is "Lack of Long Range Planning." Usually, state funding policy can be found among the culprits that force schools into the trailer business. Lack of value engineering is another factor. Apparently trade off costs such as aesthetics, and behavioral and affective learning (even cognitive learning) are discarded as unimportant in decisions that favor slum architecture such as trailers. The notion that trailers are slum architecture comes from the classic work published by Ackerman (1969) entitled "Listening to Architecture."

I have yet to find sound research that supports the use of trailers as classrooms - Procrastination is not a sound reason for a government school to erect a trailer. As facility planner, I cannot point to any single factor as a reason to keep erecting trailers as classrooms (other than lack of sound planning). The sad reality is that most of these structures become permanent. It is clear that in many cases, the intention was not to erect a temporary building. Unfortunately, I have seen landscaped units on one site for 10 years or more.

Below are some recent facts from one Georgia school district forced to purchase trailers because of obsolete 'state funding of school construction' policy. The initial cost of a trailer in the Atlanta area is \$9,006.00. Add rental, interest, and maintenance for 10 years from the data below and the monetary cost is \$46,000.00 for one unit. Compare this to the 40 + years that a \$100.00 per square foot school structure will last. Consider keeping one mobile unit in place for 40 years and the replacement cost is prohibitive (\$186,424.00 of your money for one classroom for 40 years without inflation added).

Today, in the South East, the cost per square foot for a school building is approaching \$100.00. ([Click on Prototype Schools for More Cost Information](#)). The current cost of a 900 square foot classroom is \$100.00 x 900 square feet or \$90,000.00. Add just about any cost that you may dream up to the traditional school house maintenance and operation over a 40 year period and the financial facts against the mobile unit are clear. The dollar cost is prohibitive. Even if the dollar costs were the same, we must consider the students' affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning in a trailer. To me, the conclusion is obvious, but the educational and architectural community need some sound research in the area of comprehensive cost analysis for portable classrooms matched with controlled studies of the effects of trailers on affective, behavioral, and cognitive learning.

Ackerman, J. S. (1969). Listening to Architecture. Harvard Educational Review. Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 4-11.

PORTABLE CLASSROOMS

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The following is an outline of costs associated with the procurement and set-up of portable classrooms under the current lease agreement with *****. This is a current example from a Georgia School District.

I) Set-Up and Rent (1 Yr.) Per Unit:

- a) Delivery and Set-up
\$ 1,669.00
- b) One (1) Year Rental @ \$230/Mo.
\$ 2,760.00
- c) Install Fire Extinguisher
\$ 27.00
- d) Build/Install Steps
\$ 550.00
- e) Build/Install Ramps
\$ 1,500.00
- f) Misc. (Electrical, Intercom, Furniture)
\$ 2,500.00 (estimate)
- Total Cost Per Unit**
\$ 9,006.00

NOTE: A total of 44 new units are scheduled for installation this summer (May - June)

II) Total Set-up and Rent (1 Yr.) Per 44 Units:

- a) Delivery & Set-up (44 ea. x \$1,669.00)
\$ 73,436.00
- b) First Yr. Rental (44 ea. x \$230.00/Mo.)
\$ 121,440.00
- Total**
\$ 194,876.00

III) Total Cost Per 44 Units for First Year

(Incl. Set-Up and Lease) (\$9,006/Unit x 44)
\$ 396,264.00

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Portable Classroom Average Costs

Portable classroom trailers are far less expensive than modular buildings. They can be leased for anywhere from **\$100 to \$500 per month** and purchased from **\$15,000 to \$45,000**. Keep in mind that you'll have to pay several thousand upfront for delivery and setup. With a lease, plan on spending **\$10,000** or more the first year and **\$1,500 to \$6,000** every year thereafter.

Portable trailers for schools tend to cost more than trailers that are used in private industry because they have to be equipped with certain features to meet state and federal regulations. You'll need fire extinguishers, bathrooms, a handicapped accessible ramp, and proper heating and air conditioning systems. Don't be surprised if the price that you're quoted falls on the high end of the ranges above.

Modular building prices are more difficult to predict because there are more options when it comes to size and features. Modular portable classrooms are customized in the factory to meet your space requirements and/or match the look and feel of your permanent structures.

Modular portable classroom can also be leased or purchased, although purchasing is more economical for long-term use. They sell for **\$40 to \$200 per square foot**, depending largely on size and the amount of customization you require. Total costs range from **\$50,000 to \$200,000**.

<http://www.costowl.com/b2b/office-trailers-portable-classroom-cost.html>