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Eliot Innovation School honored by Preservation Mass.

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Boston, MA Finegold Alexander Architects' design of the Eliot Innovation School at 39 North Bennet St. in the North End has been awarded Preservation Massachusetts' 2019 mayor Thomas Menino Legacy Award. The award recognizes projects that are transformative, catalytic, embrace the community, create partnerships and revitalize the best of the past to pave the way for the future. Finegold Alexander Architects served as the design architect for Boston Public Schools and the city's Public Facilities Department. The project was funded through mayor Martin Walsh's Capital Plan and the total cost was \$19.7 million. The Preservation Massachusetts Awards were presented at the Fairmont Copley Plaza.

"The Eliot Upper Innovation School is a success story that demonstrates what can happen when a community works together to solve problems," said Jim Alexander, senior principal, Finegold Alexander Architects. The original Eliot Innovation School has been located at 34 Charter St., since the 1930s, and the institution itself is believed to be Boston's oldest continuously run school.

The school has undergone a transformation since 2007, it went from an under-performing school at risk of closure into a Commendation School that is thriving and growing. Increased enrollments drove demand from parents to expand the school and the City of Boston's Public Facilities Department began the process of identifying potential buildings and sites to accommodate the growing school. Those studies that led to the identification of 39 N. Bennet Street as a location for expansion.

"We know that Boston Public School students deserve the best, and our investment in this school is a testament to how we value public education in Boston," said mayor Walsh. "This new space brings the Eliot School into the 21st century and creates the best learning environment for our students. I'm proud that as a city, we're making investments that will allow students to achieve their full potential."

The existing building at 39 North Bennet St., formerly occupied by the North Bennet St. School was a combination of three interconnected buildings. The floor plates were mis-matched across the three structures, and small sets of transition stairs wove the buildings together. "The challenge in repurposing the facility for a contemporary school was determining how to work with the three structures to create a unified environment, while meeting code and access requirements," said Alexander. "As a solution, Finegold Alexander Architects designed a new building within the existing walls."

“A school reflects the heart of a community, and we gave the building a heart,” said Alexander. “The central organizing space is a double height multi-purpose room. Classrooms ring this new heart which sits on the foundations of a former church (1832) that once occupied the site.” The design creates a dramatic welcoming entryway for students, parents and the community, and embraces the memory of the site.

When schools are at their best, they are hubs of connectivity for children, their parents, grandparents, and caregivers, and they provide an important community resource to foster partnerships and community education, among others. To date, the Eliot has partnerships with 30 different organizations. “We are so thankful that this school, as well as the building – will serve as a hub for education and collaborative learning opportunities while also contributing as an anchor of this community,” said Traci Walker-Griffith, principal of the Eliot Innovation School.

“The school today provides a total of 42,000 s/f of light-filled, well-organized educational spaces,” said Christopher Lane, senior associate, Finegold Alexander Architects. “In addition to the multi-purpose room, cafeteria and administrative offices, the new school provides 21 general purpose classrooms; specialty counseling spaces; two SPED classrooms for 10 students with dedicated computers; and two enrichment classrooms, one for visual arts and one for technology/robotics.” Two new stair towers, an expanded roof monitor, enlarged window openings, and restoration of the historic facades and roof dormers create a sensitive blend of old and new in the transformation of school. All new HVAC, electrical, plumbing, fire protection and life-safety systems were installed.

“The Eliot Innovation School building’s evolution truly brings preservation to life by activating the building with an expanded school use that was desperately needed, ensuring the building will be cared for in the present and well into the future,” said Lane. “The design team is fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with the Boston Public Schools to update, extend and re-envision its purpose.”

History of the Eliot School

The Eliot School is the oldest continuously running school in the United States and has been in the North End of Boston for its entire history. It has educated many famous Bostonians, including American Patriots Samuel Adams and Paul Revere. Boston Public Schools supported the efforts to radically transform student outcomes for the Eliot School which was underperforming and slated for closure. In three short years, the school earned recognition as a Commendation School in 2010, 2011, and 2012 for exceeding academic growth goals set for the school. In 2007, there were 130 students enrolled at the Eliot compared to today’s enrollment of 700, and a waitlist of approximately 1,000. This success – which was featured on NBC’s TODAY SHOW- drove administrators, families, and the community to campaign for its expansion.

To meet the needs of the school’s projected academic enrollment The Public Facilities Department acquired an additional building at 585 Commercial St. (1962). This building was utilized for swing space during 39 North Bennet’s building construction. Once 39 North Bennet was completed,

construction began for the transformation of the 585 Commercial St. building into a third facility for the school. It is slated to open for the start of school in September 2019 and it will complete the three-building ensemble for this thriving K-8 campus in the heart of the Boston.

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