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HMFH Architects completes first phase of MET School expansion

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HMFH Architects completed a study of the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (MET) School expansion.

HMFH Archts. was selected in conjunction with Dr. Frank Locker, AIA to undertake a feasibility study (including site research, programming, and schematic design) for the newest branch of the MET School. The MET is a state-funded, public school serving over 700 high school students on six campuses. Dr. Locker is a Recognized Educational Facilities Planner (REFP) with an international consulting practice devoted to school planning.

The challenge to HMFH and Locker was to create facilities that will support this individualized, activity-based learning experience.

"MET students are fully engaged in their environment," said Laura Wernick, AIA, REFP, LEED AP, senior principal at HMFH. "Green design was a natural adjunct to this kind of experiential learning. As part of the study, our team examined the feasibility of a NetZero facility and considered wind or solar power for energy production and other green technologies such as the use of biomass and passive solar heating."

The school was interested in minimizing the carbon footprint of the construction through both high efficiency systems and controls and application of renewable energy systems. In addition, one of the sites being considered involved the reuse of portions of an existing community center, adding another level of complexity to the planning process.

After an intensive visioning and programming experience involving staff, students, and parents, a concept for their new home evolved. With small group learning spaces and offices scattered around the periphery, the heart of the new school will be a commons for eating, meeting, presentation, and performance and an adjacent Quantitative Reasoning Room (QR) for science, math, engineering, and art-based activities. With a garage door opening to the exterior, the QR will house projects ranging from engine repair to ceramics.

Charlie Plant, the head of school was appreciative of both the process and the outcome, saying, "The team of HMFH and Frank Locker were wonderful to work with."

The new school facility is being designed to meet the highest building performance standards, including the New England High Performance Standards (NE-CHPS). It is also expected to earn a LEED-Platinum rating from the U.S. Green Building Council.

Garcia, Galuska & DeSousa in Dartmouth, Mass. provided mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire protection engineering.