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Designed by HMFH Architects, 3 Concord elementary schools open: Abbott-Downing, Christa McAuliffe and Mill Brook

September 20, 2012 - Construction Design & Engineering

Three new elementary schools designed by HMFH Architects for the city's school district opened in time for the school year.

All three projects were constructed with recycled and locally produced materials and will be Northeast Collaborative for High Performance Schools (NE-CHPS) certified as green school buildings, meeting strict sustainability standards.

Harvey Construction Corp. served as the project contractor.

The recently completed Abbott-Downing Elementary School, Christa McAuliffe Elementary School, and Mill Brook Primary School will now house most of Concord's K-5 students. A grand opening ceremony was held on August 26 at each of the schools. Although organized around the same Learning Corridor concept, each school is unique.

The Abbott-Downing Elementary School is located adjacent to the former Conant School site and echoes design elements from the original school building including the reuse of its signature cupola. Named to honor the Concord teacher and astronaut, the Christa McAuliffe Elementary School acknowledges its history by incorporating the granite entryway from the former Kimball School, and continues a legacy of public school structures that have occupied that site since 1887.

The Mill Brook Primary School uses a block design to distinguish it from the adjacent Broken Ground Elementary School.

"The Concord school district's forward-looking vision for its new schools challenged us to rethink the standards for elementary school facilities," said Laura Wernick, AIA, REFP, LEED AP, senior principal at HMFH Archts. "These projects create a new paradigm for K-5 academic environments. It is a model that provides a range of collaborative and personalized spaces for a wide variety of learning styles and activities while assuring advanced access to technology and flexibility for changing needs. The Learning Corridor ushers students and faculty into the next generation of education."

"After witnessing the public tour our new schools, I was overwhelmed with pride at all the positive reactions to the design," said Matt Cashman, director of facilities and planning for the Concord School District, in reference to the response to the schools' opening events. "I am honored to have worked with such a high caliber team of designers and professionals. HMFH has raised the bar in New Hampshire."

Initiated by the system's superintendent, Christine Rath, and based upon current understanding of brain-based research, planning for the new schools probed the very nature of K-12 learning. Input from the faculty, administration and local community played integral parts in the design process, which centered around three visionary ideas:

1. Spaces should support collaborative learning;

2. These collaborative spaces should be easily accessible by faculty and students to fully integrate them into the day-to-day learning experience; and
3. These spaces need to provide a variety of flexible environments to support a range of learning activities.

The resulting program features a two-story, 30-foot-wide Learning Corridor in place of a traditional library room with a variety of highly visible and easily accessible educational environments to encourage project-based learning and collaboration, and to support a range of learning styles and curriculum delivery methods.

The Learning Corridor includes spaces for:

- Group discussion
- Wet/messy projects
- Multimedia
- Amphitheater
- Story-telling
- Book room similar to a traditional library space
- Small project room
- A "reading nook" for quiet individual learning.

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