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Svigals + Partners designs 34,000 s/f bldg. for Goodwin College's Early Childhood Magnet School

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Representing a new paradigm for pre-K schools and a turning point for the community it serves, a new building for Goodwin College's Early Childhood Magnet School (ECMS) opened this autumn on the higher-education institution's East Hartford, Connecticut campus. Architecture, art and advisory firm Svigals + Partners designed the 34,000 s/f building to serve 240 preschool and kindergarten students and a staff of educators and educators-in-training. The design addresses three major challenges for the school and the surrounding communities:

- * Layout and materials support the Reggio Emilia model for childhood education, helping to emphasize self-discovery, connection to larger community and the importance of nature.

Examples include colored floor tiles and ornamental patterns that guide children through the facility.

- * Sustainably designed, the school is part of an overall strategy employed by the college to remediate blighted, formerly industrial brownfield along the Connecticut River.

- * As an interdistrict magnet school, the facility supports an approach to community access that addresses longstanding racial inequities and de facto segregation. This has been required by law following a 1996 court decision, with education providers in the state competing to provide effective solutions, which ECMS successfully accomplishes. Notably, Goodwin College will eventually host three magnet schools total on its campus, the first higher-education institution to have that many.

The selection of Svigals + Partners as the architecture firm for ECMS largely arose from the firm's philosophy, one highly compatible with the Reggio Emilia approach. Both the design and the design process would be responsive to the needs of the nascent college and the magnet school's stated purpose. "True collaboration, the process of mutual learning and sharing, promotes creativity and harnesses passion within each individual," said Barry Svigals, FAIA, the firm's founding principal.

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