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Property of the Month: Patriquin Architects designs new 9,200 s/f Friends Center for Children in New Haven

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With six months under their belts, the administrators, teachers, parents and children of the new Friends Center for Children in New Haven have weighed in on their new facility. "We are especially proud of the design features that aid in the education, wellbeing and delight of the children that learn here everyday," said center executive director Allyx Schiavone.

"My daughter is thriving at the Friends Center, where the learning environment is safe, comfortable and stimulating," Arie Mobley, a parent and center board member reports. Studies over the past two decades have shown that architecture is an important element in improving the quality of a pre-school program.

While many educational designs embrace a school's mission and curriculum, the architecture of the Center plays an integral role in the process. The center's mission is inspired by the Friends' principles of community, equality, peace, simplicity and truth. "We worked with the center's director and building committee to find ways in which the building would serve as a teaching tool," said Karin Patriquin, AIA, principal of Patriquin Architects, who designed the project.

With the new 9,200 s/f facility, designed to U.S. Green Building Council LEED Silver equivalency, the school goes beyond the typical best practice standards based on curriculum, child-adult ratios, and staff training. The center provides a learning environment for children aged six months through five years.

Each naturally well-lit classroom opens out to the playground and has breathtaking views through large, floor-level windows to the parklands beyond. A wooden ramp winds through the forest to the upper level of the building and to the playground in the great beyond. The movement studio has exposed wood structures to encourage questions and lessons on design and construction, a children's roof garden, and a rain collection and water play area for kids to learn about the environment.

Other sustainable features encourage stewardship of the environment, such as the car charging station and bicycle racks in the parking lot; high-efficiency heating and cooling; sharing of the property to minimize new paving for parking and entry to the site; access to bus lines; and walkability for many of the families in the area.

Gov. Malloy, on hand at the groundbreaking ceremony in December 2012, commented on the need for additional capacity of high quality early childhood development as an important step to improving the state's high school graduation rates.

The new Friends Center boasts 52 additional prime, birth to preschool spots to meet New Haven's growing demand.