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Eliot Innovation Upper School opens; designed by Finegold Alexander

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Eliot Innovation Upper School, 39 North Bennet Street - Boston, MA

Boston, MA Finegold Alexander Architects completed an \$18.7 million renovation of the Eliot Innovation Upper School at 39 North Bennet St., in the North End. Finegold Alexander served as the designer and architect.

The project is the second phase of the Eliot Innovation School's "One School, Three Buildings" concept which includes renovations at 585 Commercial St. as well as 16 Charter St. The complexity of the project was compounded by its origins and location. "The project involved the complex reconstruction of three connected historic buildings on North Bennet St. to provide a total of 42,000 s/f of education space for grades 4-8," said Christopher Lane, senior associate, Finegold Alexander, who served as project manager. "The neighborhood density was also a factor in routing materials and deliveries throughout the project."

The project team includes: Finegold Alexander Architects, architect; Colantonio Inc, general contractor; Boston Building Consultants, civil and structural engineer; R.W. Sullivan, MEP/FP engineer; Bryant Associates, civil engineer; Kalin Associates, Specifications; Assa Abloy, Hardware; Crabtree McGrath Associates, Food Service; Vermeulens, Code consultant; Fuss & O'Neill, Hazardous Materials; McPhail Associates, geotechnical engineer; and R.F. Freel Associates, structural engineer for temporary shoring.

"In addition, although it formerly served as the North Bennet Street School, a renowned vocational school serving adult learners, the building was very difficult to navigate through with multiple levels and maze-like corridors, and lacked a sense of identity," said Tony Hsiao, principal and director of design, Finegold Alexander. "Through our design, we created a whole out of parts, a sense of arrival, and bright and airy classrooms throughout with clearly defined circulation using color and transparency. The central organizing principal was to reuse and transform the original building in the center of the site - which was a former church dating back to 1823 - into a double height multi-purpose room, cafeteria, and dedicated large classrooms and toilet cores which are shared by the entire school."

The design incorporates a welcoming and transparent first floor, to reflect the school's place in the center of the North End community. The entry point in the lobby is defined with porcelain tile and bold colors. It connects to a media/library room that can be closed off from the rest of the school and used in the afternoons and evenings as a community meeting space.

"A school reflects the heart of a community, and we gave the building a heart," said Hsiao. Two new stair towers, expanded roof monitor, enlarged window openings, and restoration of the historic facades and roof dormers were a sensitive blend of old and new in the transformation of Eliot Innovation School.

In addition to the multi-purpose room, cafeteria and administrative offices, the new school houses 20 general purpose classrooms for 15-20 students each; 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. A multi-purpose media room (library) is located at the heart of the building, as well as a warming kitchen. All new HVAC, electrical, plumbing, fire protection and life-safety systems are provided.

The rapid success and growth of the Eliot K-8 Innovation School spurred the need to expand the school through acquisition and renovation. The Upper School was designed for grades 4-8 and while the 585 Commercial St. location is under construction, grades 3-8 will be starting at the 39 N. Bennet St. location this month.

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