

Schools of Thought: DC's New Generation of School Buildings

November 12, 2019–January 9, 2020



Marie Reed Community Learning Center by Quinn Evans Architects – Photo by Joseph Romeo Photography

Over the last decade, the District of Columbia has made a substantial investment in modernizing its public school buildings, and the city's public charter schools and private schools have also made major investments in their facilities.

The design of these new and renovated schools has moved the architecture of learning spaces well beyond the basics of traditional school design. Like DC's widely praised new public library buildings, these modernized school buildings employ innovative architecture to better achieve their mission.

What prompted the District's school rebuilding effort? What difference does good school design make for student learning? And what design features do the city's new school buildings incorporate? This exhibition explores these questions by looking at 19 of the District's modernized public, public charter, and private schools.

Exhibition Topics

- Learning styles
- Standardized school design approaches
- Energy efficiency becomes a factor
- New design ideas emerge
- Design for school safety
- Education reform in the District
- City schools fall into disrepair
- Charter schools enter the picture
- The District relaunches a school rebuilding effort
- Design makes a difference
- 19 school projects in the District
- Observations about current school design and how it makes a difference

Related Events

Opening Reception

Wednesday, November 20, 6:30–8pm

Free. | Registration required via <https://www.aiadc.com/calendar>

Join us to celebrate the opening of this exhibition to discover what prompted the District’s school rebuilding effort, the difference that good school design can make for student learning, and which design features have been incorporated into the city’s new schools.

Hidden Foundations: The Unwritten Origin Story of the DC Public Schools Modernization Program

Tuesday, December 10, 6:30–8pm

Free for Students, Assoc. AIA, AIA, & DAC Members.

\$25 for Non-Members. | Registration required via <https://www.aiadc.com/calendar>

In the 1990s, the physical conditions at DC public schools had reached a low point. Capital funding ranged from low and undependable to nonexistent. The city had stopped enforcing the fire code in its schools, schools were frequently closed due to unsafe conditions, enrollment was dropping precipitately, and these alarming conditions were frequently headline news.

How did the District of Columbia transform from dangerous conditions to its current bright, inviting, and architecturally award-winning inventory of modernized schools worthy of the nation’s capital?

It started with a lawsuit and ended with a fully-funded modernization program. During the period from 1990 to 2007, a group of loosely-organized but highly-committed individuals and groups came together to fight for the District’s schools and build the foundation for what became the DCPS Modernization Program. The story behind this program’s launch has since gotten lost – but it is a necessary one to tell.

It is a story that is not only important for the District to understand, but also a larger and more profound lesson for other urban school systems on how to make change.

Join AIA|DC for a panel discussion of educators, architects, and parents to learn the story of how design helped turn around a school system in crisis.

Presented by:

- Iris Toyer, Regional Student Development Director, A+ Tutor U
- Marc Borbely, Founding Principal, D.C. Tenants' Rights Center (activist, attorney and former co-chair of the D.C. School Modernization campaign)
- Mary Filardo, Founder/Executive Director, 21st Century School Fund
- Janice Szymanski, AIA, Director, Facility Planning & Design at District of Columbia Public Schools

Moderated by:

- Sarah Woodhead, AIA, NCARB, K-12 Education Leader, DLR Group

Exhibition Credits

Schools of Thought is organized by AIA|DC for the SIGAL Gallery and Suman Sorg Gallery.

AIA|DC

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About the District Architecture Center

The District Architecture Center (DAC) is home to the Washington Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Washington Architectural Foundation. Located in the historic Penn Quarter neighborhood, we celebrate the built environment through exhibitions and related programs that engage architects, architectural enthusiasts, allied professionals, students, and the public.

Exhibitions at DAC spotlight excellence in architecture, design, and urbanism; explore and disseminate significant artistic and architectural ideas; and pique curiosities about the man-made world around us. These experiences offer a platform for dialogue on the nature of contemporary design practice, the role of architecture in our communities, and the many ways that design impacts people's lives.

General Information

Location

District Architecture Center
421 7th Street NW
Washington, DC 20004

Contact

202.347.9403

Connect

URL: aiadc.com

Twitter: @DCArchCenter

Instagram: @districtarchcenter / #DACgalleries

Facebook: @AIADC

Admission

Exhibitions are free and open to the public. Refer to related events for admission pricing.

Gallery Hours

Monday–Wednesday: 10am–7pm*

Thursday–Friday: 10am–5pm*

Saturday–Sunday: Closed

*Hours subject to change pending special events, holidays, or inclement weather. Consult our calendar or call ahead.

Membership

Become a DAC Member at <https://www.aiadc.com/membership> to receive member discounts.

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