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Innovation in Education

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**Educational Architecture
on a Human Scale**

School Design

school design

How do we design schools so that all students can learn to use their minds well? Topics include: structures for space and time, teacher collaboration, and data collection and analysis.

classroom practice

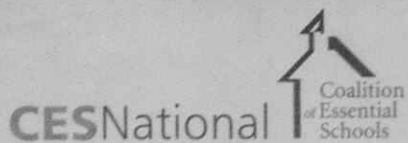
*How do we bring Coalition ideas like *less is more*, *teacher as coach*, and *demonstration of mastery to life* in the classroom? Topics include: curriculum and instruction, assessment, and classroom culture.*

leadership

What kinds of leadership are necessary to transform schools into more humane and intellectually rigorous environments? How can the change process be sustained? Topics include: governance, distributed leadership, and managing the change process.

community connections

How can schools most powerfully engage the community as advocates and partners in the education of its students? Topics include: parental involvement, service learning and internships, and using community members as resources.



1814 Franklin Street, Suite 700 Oakland, California 94612
phone 510.433.1451 fax 510.433.1455
www.essentialschools.org

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school design

*Educational Architecture
on a Human Scale*

Recently, some Coalition and other innovative schools have seized upon this opportunity for change, choosing and sometimes fighting to create facilities designed for teaching and learning on a human scale. Some have done away with classrooms and corridors and have created new, flexible spaces that support interwoven disciplines, projects and exhibitions, and intimate learning. Others pursue and achieve those goals within old school buildings that have been wrestled into the kind of shape that supports personalization, sustained inquiry, and the bedrock of solid community both within the school and beyond. All aim to create schools that communicate the real worth of education. As Heidi Early, science teacher at Noble High School in North Berwick, Maine, says, "Kids are used to being in the spaces that they think they deserve. What schools look like tells students what they're worth."

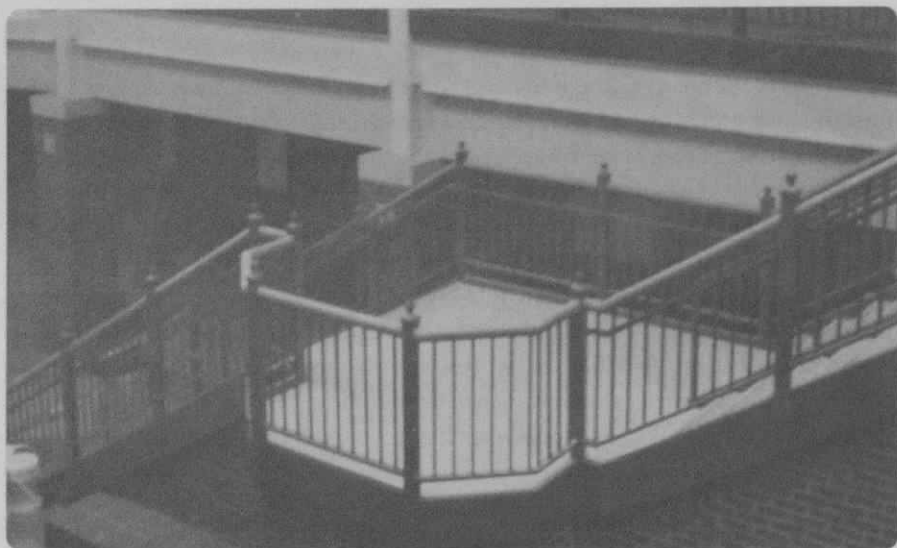
FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

Physical space reflects educational philosophy. Educators who reorient physical space to support essential learning agree: set clear pedagogical and social goals before you organize space. Ann Cook, Co-Director of Urban Academy, a small Manhattan high school that shares space in the Julia Richman Educational Complex with six other autonomous schools and three teacher/student service centers, advises, "Before you do anything, make a

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Noble High School main entrance ~ warm, inviting and functional



Noble High School - staircase designed to double as a practice space

commitment to small. Decide educationally that it's important to have small learning communities. Build the whole school culture. Then you can deal with how to support it architecturally, after you know what you're doing programmatically."

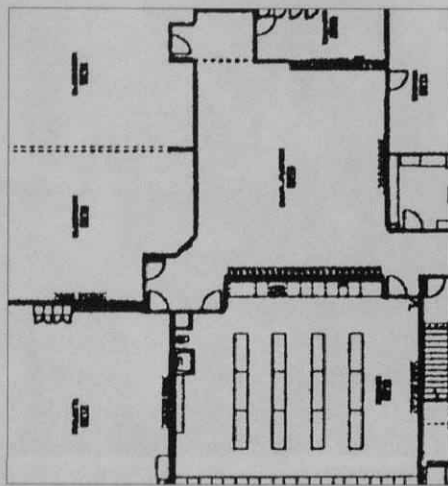
Starting in 1992, Chicago Vocational Career Academy remade its space to form ten separate academies. Its then principal, Dr. Betty Despenza-Green, now Director of the National High School Initiative at the Small Schools Workshop based at the University of Illinois at Chicago, reflects, "Everyone wants small but it doesn't mean anything if you won't do other work that goes along with it. You can have a bad small school as well as a bad large school. Instead of starting from the physical, you need to start with the program you know you need to have. Then you can see how your existing structure won't let you do that. And then you do the work of making physical changes."

Noble High School moves into a new school building this academic year. Heidi Brewer, social studies teacher, knows that over a decade of innovative Coalition practice prepared the community to plan space that would allow them to continue their mission. "We had the philosophy first. Can you imagine the nightmare if we tried to start all kinds of new things in our school after

we moved into a new building?" Pamela Fisher, former principal of Noble and catalyst of the new building project, agrees, asking the Noble planning team's fundamental question: What would the physical design of the learning environment look like to fulfill and to enhance the beliefs of the school?

HOMES FOR LEARNING COMMUNITIES

CES educators and students experience traditional school architecture—long hallways, enclosed, isolated classrooms—as linear and disconnected, evoking assembly-line ethics and forcing separation. To enable connection in Albuquerque, New Mexico, Cleveland Middle School created "families," teaching teams with small student groups looped together for the three-year school experience. In the beginning stages, confronted with the limits of a portable classroom, teacher Wayne Smith and his teaching partner took matters into their own hands. "In the second year that we had our family, we moved into a double portable divided by a wall. We were used to interdisciplinary work and we needed a huge area. We put in a work order to have the wall removed, but the district said no. So we went in with sledgehammers and pickups and took the wall out." Smith, now Cleveland's principal, laughs as he recalls his renovation project. The wall demolition began a push at Cleveland for more flexible space throughout to support the school-wide family groups.



*You have to build
flexibility into any
new building;
you're building schools
that you know
will change.*

One of fifteen Noble High School communities

principal, used a United States Department of Education Smaller Learning Communities Program grant to plan and build the Neighborhoods, which were constructed during Summer 2001 and are in use by all students this fall.

In planning its new building, Noble tackled the issue of how to create small, pedagogically autonomous groups in a new school by creating fifteen independent learning communities, each populated by four teachers and a hundred students. Each community contains storage areas, office space for teachers and support staff, a project room, classrooms with moveable walls, a science lab, and a central multi-purpose room, large enough to accommodate the learning community's students and staff. Each community is the central learning space and hangout for its students and teachers. Greg Bither, Noble's Assistant Principal, describes the new building: "The communities were designed with the idea that groups of students and teachers will take ownership of certain spaces."



"The corridor becomes the unifier of curriculum and ideas"—Debbie Meier