



Jane Eisner
American Rhythms

A caveat on teaching 'good' history

When the Philadelphia School District recently became the first in the nation to require that all students complete a yearlong course in Africa and African American history, it did so for two reasons.

One is, in my view, unassailable. The national neglect of African American history has left everyone, of any race, the poorer. We cannot appreciate the glory of our democracy, nor wrestle with its flaws, without a critical understanding of the role that race played from the arrival of blacks long before revolutionary times until today.

No other ethnic or religious group in our country has played quite the same role, nor has it challenged the evolving notions of citizenship and the common good in the way African American people have.

Immigration is a fine and important subject to teach, but if we really want all our young people to grapple with what it means to be an American citizen, then and now, the history and consequences of slavery, segregation, and civil rights have to be understood.

District officials obviously feel that the existing curriculum gives short shrift to this subject. If it were up to me, I'd weave it into a longer history requirement instead of breaking it apart, so central is it to our national story. Whatever the format, there are sound civic reasons to pay more attention to the subject.

It's the second justification for this bold and controversial move that is problematic. In a district where two-thirds of the students are African American, so the argument goes, greater awareness of their history will build self-esteem and lead to improved academic performance.

Sure sounds persuasive. The assumption that self-esteem and outcome are linked has shaped much of the way we think today about raising and educating children. Feel good and you'll do well, we tell them, while blaming poor performance on negative self-image and doubt.

Unfortunately, there's little to no proof that any of this is really true. On the other hand, there's plenty to suggest that an inflated view of his or her capabilities may short-circuit a student's drive to learn more. One example is found in the result of a recent international

See **JANE EISNER** on C5



Brighter school days

Civic leaders sketch a blueprint for schools and community.

A recent workshop brought more than 20 top design professionals from the Philadelphia region together with students, teachers and other citizens to brainstorm ideas on how to design the schools of the future.

The workshop, called a "charrette," was cosponsored by The Inquirer Editorial Board. The volunteers worked in three teams to generate ideas for three potential school sites being considered by the School District of Philadelphia.

The drawing above, by architect Bob Keppel of Cope Linder architects in Philadelphia,

summarizes one team's ideas for a science-themed high school at 22d and Arch Streets in Center City. The district is considering putting such a school in an existing building there. The rooftop windmill and garden are part of a concept that turns the whole building into a laboratory for learning.

Below, architect Cameron Mactavish of Voith and Mactavish vividly presents his team's vision for how a new high school could become the centerpiece for revitalization of the "sinking homes" tract in North Philadelphia's Logan section. The school and fields would go on the most damaged part of the site; housing, retail,

churches and offices would be reserved for the more stable section.

The city and Logan residents are working on other ideas for that tract; this drawing simply presents one possible vision.

This charrette was part of the Franklin Conference on School Design, a months-long project in civic engagement, which the Editorial Board conducted in partnership with the University of Pennsylvania's Institute for Urban Research. For a full report on the fruits of this marriage of expert knowledge and citizen input, see **C6** and **C7**.

Chris Satullo
Editorial page editor



U.S. has chance, not plan, for ending control in Syria

DAMASCUS — Anwar al-Bunni works in a low-ceilinged, wood-paneled apartment office, in a middle-class district of the Syrian capital, trying to free political prisoners. He's been doing it for years, during which his brothers, sister, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law served a cumulative 60 years in prison for opposing the Baath party regime.

For most of that time, the rest of the world ignored him. But since President Bush's democracy campaign, Damascus' small, brave group of human-rights advocates and lawyers, former political prisoners, and opposition intellectuals have become hot media items. They are sought out by U.S. and European visitors, and Arab and Western press, almost like a packaged Arab democracy tour.



Trudy Rubin
Worldview

They deserve the attention, but as Bunni is the first to tell you, they don't add up to any kind of an organized opposition. They are small in number, their open supporters are few, and demonstrations are extremely rare. Organized Islamist opposition groups are banned.

"For decades we have had no political life," Bunni says. "All civil society and political movements have been killed." He is describing a country where the Assad family

See **TRUDY RUBIN** on C5

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Pop Quiz: Famous — and infamous — concerts.

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The United States needs to do more to help Africa solve its many problems.

Faith Life, C4

The Rev. Rick Warren, the popular Christian author, says God has told him to serve the downtrodden of the world, especially those in Africa.

New Neighbors designed to bring readers together

Amanda Bennett
is editor of The Inquirer

Reporting news is just one of the things newspapers do. We dig out information that citizens should know. We try to surprise and delight by keeping readers abreast of interesting trends and entertainment. And we build community.

It's a duty that newspapers are ideally suited to perform. In this era of media proliferation, we're the last of a community's shared media experiences. Television has fragmented into hundreds of options. The Internet provides millions of places to roam, so people stray to millions of sites for their information. Newspapers alone still are shared by a majority of people in a community. On Saturday, for example, about 903,000 adults in

the Philadelphia region read The Inquirer. On Sunday, the number will increase to more than 1,792,000.

That's why this Sunday, for most readers, we are introducing a new Neighbors publication. Each of the counties surrounding Philadelphia (Chester, Montgomery, Bucks, Delaware, Gloucester, Camden and Burlington) and the Main Line community will have its own section. It will be in a tabloid form because groups of readers we showed it to before publication told us they liked that size. Look for it in Section L, right behind the Arts & Entertainment section. (We hope to add a section for Philadelphia down the road.)

The old Neighbors sections were full of listings of things to see. See **AMANDA BENNETT** on C3

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Tell us what you think!

The Inquirer wants to hear your views. We offer several ways to do that. Letters to the Editor are published daily on the Editorial Page and on three zoned Commentary Pages in the local section. "Community Voices" essays are published Sunday in the Neighbors sections.

Letters to the Editor:

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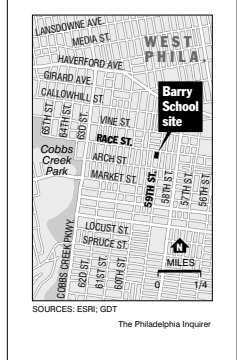
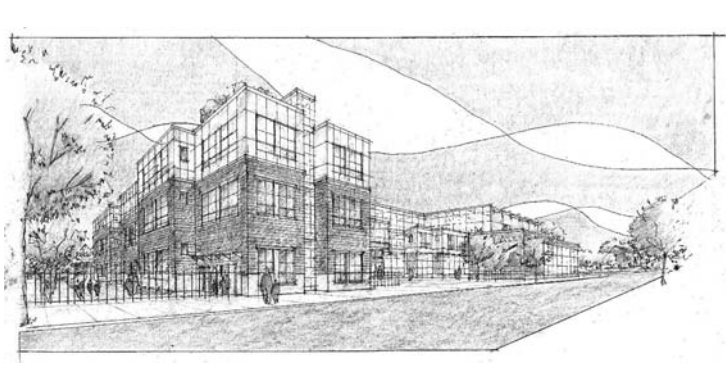
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Visions for better schools

Civic spirit has many faces. Here's what it looked like on a recent sunny Saturday: Architects sprawled across the floor, sketching with colored pencils a plan to give urban schoolkids the green play area they've never had. Middle-aged design professionals listened intently as a dreadlocked high school student spoke about how teenagers really react to the cues sent by school buildings. A team of experts from different design firms, egos checked at the door, collaborated excitedly on a vision for how a new high school could heal a wounded tract of land and inspire a community. Such were the scenes on June 11 when more than 20 architects, landscape architects and planners, all volunteering their time, teamed up with students, teachers and other citizens to conduct a daylong "charrette" workshop for the

Franklin Conference on School Design. The conference, a joint project of The Inquirer Editorial Board and the University of Pennsylvania's Institute of Urban Research, has brought more than 300 citizens of the region together throughout the spring to learn about best practices in school design. The participants drafted a set of guidelines for the Philadelphia School District to consider as it pursues an ambitious \$1.6 billion program of school renovation and construction. A brief version of these Franklin Principles for School Design is on the facing page. A charrette is a type of workshop architects use to brainstorm ideas. The school district suggested three potential school sites, each presenting different issues. Three teams of volunteers, ably assembled by architect George Clafien, worked through the day on ideas for See **SCHOOLS** on C7

COMMODORE BARRY SCHOOL SITE



This architect's drawing shows what a new K-8 school for 550 students could look like, compared to the old, closed Commodore Barry School (upper right). Given the small site, the team suggested buying a nearby tract for parking and a play area.

Small, bright and functional

The primary theme of our decisionmaking was the interrelationship of the school with its West Philadelphia neighborhood.

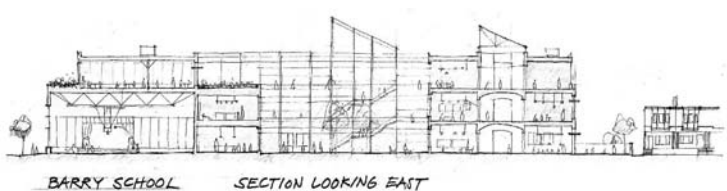
The most basic decision was whether it was realistic to fit onto this one-acre site a K-8, 850-student school, with four classes per grade, as the district had outlined.

It was clear the existing building's limitations made renovation impossible. We also concluded that a school of that size could not be built on a site this small in a way that served students or the neighborhood well.

Rather than doing a plan based on demolishing part of the adjacent rowhouse neighborhood, we decided to design a smaller school for 550 students that fits well on the site.

We chose that route for the following reasons: (1) Many Philadelphia schools sit on similarly constrained sites. (2) Perhaps more important, smaller schools have been shown to provide a more nurturing, better academic environment. The district's own preference is for smaller schools.

Even with a scaled-down school, the site is not large enough to accommodate active play space, teacher parking, or outdoor learning. To meet the school's outdoor space



This cross-section drawing shows how a central glass atrium with staircase divides the school's two halves, with large spaces such as gym and cafeteria on one side, and classrooms on the other. The design creates separate areas for younger and older students.

needs, we looked at the community. An apparently underused site sits on Market Street, two blocks south of the school next to the 60th Street El station. We propose renovating it to include a playing field, teacher and commuter parking for school staff, community gardens, and an educational rain garden. This site would be linked to the school with new trees and sidewalks along the connecting street.

In the new school building, we located spaces that could be shared with the community: gymnasium/auditorium, library/media center, computer lab, art and music rooms, and cafeteria — at the north end of the site, along Race Street, in a wing that can be secured independently. We oriented the classroom wing of the building so that every classroom would get maximum daylight, as would the top-floor cafeteria in the other wing. The classroom wing would put pre-K and kindergarten students on the ground floor, opening onto a play yard only for them. Grades 1 through 4 would be on the second floor, and 5 through 8 on the third. The community

and classroom wings would be linked by a glass connector with an open staircase overlooking landscaped courtyards, with separate entrances for older and younger students. Team Barry was led by architect Mary Holland of CICADA Architecture/Planning Inc. Other design professionals on the team were Michael Spain, Rachel Schade, Jim Winkler, Jane Rath, Leesa Conley, Peta Raabe and Anna Forester. Other team members were Ibtayo Ojomo, Cynthia Kwan, Kaz Moriata, Heather Ring and Jean Gavin.

22 D AND ARCH SCHOOL SITE

A plan to convert some old offices

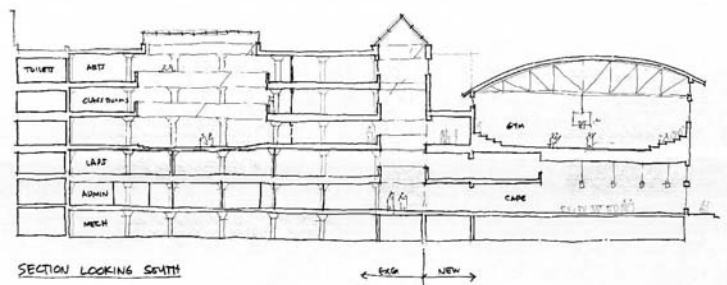
Our challenge was to adapt an existing loft building at 22d and Arch Streets in Center City into a science and technology high school for 400 students, affiliated with the nearby Franklin Institute and offering facilities for use by the community.

The site features a handsome, five-story loft building — now leased as office space by tenants that include the school district — plus a single building to the east, and two buildings to the west near the corner of 22d and Arch.

Our proposal is to make use of the existing loft building, but to demolish the two buildings to the west, replacing them with an addition to house many of the larger spaces open to the community.

The aesthetics of joining the old and new buildings are an apt metaphor for city life.

The loft building is supported by an interior grid of massive columns, which we adapt for classroom use. Larger spaces incompatible with that grid are housed in the new structure. Electrical, data and mechanical services are housed in specified walls, leaving other walls easily reconfigured. In this plan, we use student activity to enliven the street facade. A



This cross section of the proposed science high school design, done during the charrette, shows how classrooms would fit inside an existing building (left half), while public spaces would be put in a new addition. Each wing would have an atrium.

non-secured, glass-walled student eating area wraps around the corner, with activity visible to pedestrians and motorists. The model is Cosi or Panera, not the school cafeteria of the past. Good interior design and imaginative scheduling can keep this

area busy for most of the school day. Taking advice from a Charter High School for Architecture and Design student who was on our team, we make the school entrance off of Arch Street hip and businesslike. This entrance does not treat these high

schoolers like little kids. An open area leaves the massive columns exposed and provides a place to chill out after the hectic trip to school. This space invites interactions and provides a showcase for student art. See **ARCH** on C7

SCHOOLS from C6 bringing the principles to life on their assigned site. The results of their efforts are presented here, and on C1.

To be clear, none of what you see here constitutes a fully realized school design; none has been approved by the district. These are ideas, suggestions, visions.

What's more, each site has a different place on the district's project timeline.

The old Commodore Barry School in West Philadelphia will soon be demolished and replaced by a K-8 school. At 22d and Arch Streets in Center City, the district is considering a new science high school where it now leases some office space.

The land in North Philadelphia's Logan section presents a different situation. The city and members of the Logan community have been discussing many options for this notorious "sinking homes" tract. Other plans might well take precedence over the school

district's notion of a new high school. But the Logan community is welcome to add into its discussions the charrette team's bold vision for how a school could serve as a centerpiece for neighborhood revitalization.

The charrette produced more ideas and images than could fit on these pages. If your interest is piqued, you're invited to attend an event from 7 to 9:30 p.m. tomorrow at The Inquirer building, 400 N. Broad St., Philadelphia. A reception begins at 6 p.m. The event will include a presentation by the charrette teams and a session with schools CEO Paul Vallias. A light dinner and free parking will be provided. To register, call 215-573-8720 or e-mail school@design.upenn.edu.

ONLINE EXTRA
For more on the project, go to <http://www.upenn.edu/pennur/civic/franklin/>

The Franklin Principles

- A Welcoming Place**
School design should convey a sense of welcome — to students, faculty and the community.
- It's a School, Not a Prison**
Achieve safety and security mostly through smart design, rather than prison-like measures of control such as locked gates and metal detectors.
- Interact, Interact, Interact**
Design should enable, not hamper, a series of vital interactions: student to student; faculty to student; community to school.
- Plan on Change**
Build flexible, adaptable spaces.
- Healthy Buildings, Healthier Children**
Stress natural light and air.
- Provide facilities for healthy food and exercise.
- Smart and Green**
Site schools to promote "smart growth." Build them to conserve energy.
- They're Called "Public Schools" for a Reason**
Base design on genuine public process. That builds support for schools.
- A longer version of the principles appeared in last Sunday's Inquirer.

LOGAN TRIANGLE SITE

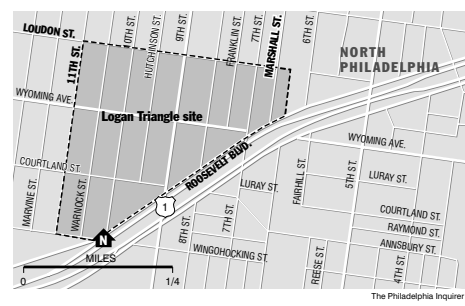
A school to heal the land, lift a community

The Logan triangle, a 35-acre, largely vacant tract, starkly illustrates decades of unsound environmental and development practices.

Since 1986, the City of Philadelphia has demolished 933 rowhouses in Logan, leaving a tremendous gap in the community fabric. Built in the 1920s on 10 feet to 48 feet of fill that was placed over the piped and buried Wingohocking Creek, the "sinking homes of Logan" subsided as water dissolved the unstable mixture of ash and cinders. Despite this sad history, the site now affords a remarkable opportunity to re-envision and transform the neighborhood.



This view across the Logan tract today shows how the demolition of hundreds of sinking houses has left a gap in the urban fabric.



Our analysis of the site drove our suggestions for the form, siting and layout of the school and adjacent development. To create a town center, the plan concentrates development along West Wyoming Avenue, a major gateway to Logan from Roosevelt Boulevard. The school and its fields occupy areas of relatively shallow fill, roughly 10 feet. We felt the private sector was less likely to want to invest in the remedial steps needed to develop those areas.

Challenged to create a landmark that would be welcoming, visible and compatible with the scale of existing row homes, the design proposes a water feature adjacent to the boulevard. An attractive foreground for the school, the lake and grounds preserve the site's open character, handle stormwater runoff and become a living laboratory.

The district asked us to think in terms of a high school for 1,000 students, with a gym, auditorium/theater, library and cafeteria. Our team added athletic fields, chronically lacking at many city schools. A proposed pedestrian bridge across the boulevard links the site to Hunting Park. Taking advantage of the north-south grade change, the plan locates parking beneath the building, resulting in terraced decks with views to the athletic fields and beyond.

The bustle of a school entrance at Wyoming and Ninth Streets would animate this new town center. The building's orientation and transparency seek to unify school, street and community rather than create barriers. The school's form, a series of cubes, respects the scale of nearby rowhouses.

The building plan anticipates frequent use of facilities by the community. It places entrances to the theater, gym and cafeteria at either end of an interior "street" of school build-

ings. This affords views to the south and access to a greenroof deck. This common corridor becomes an "academic marketplace" where students can meet, exchange ideas, and exhibit their work.

To the north, three classroom pods flank this vibrant spine. Recognizing the importance of students' first high school year, the plan houses a core academy for the ninth grade in a separate pavilion. Classroom pods are configured so that their function can change over time. Additional blocks can be added.

Embracing the principles of a healthy, sustainable environment, the design restores — if only symbolically — natural water processes on this disturbed site. Intercepting building runoff rather than directing it to problematic soils below, the "stream" diverts the flow to fill the site's landmark lake.

Lively discussions during the charrette brought stakeholders and design professionals together to generate some exciting ideas. Whether these ideas represent what's best for Logan or for students would need to be tested through continuing dialogue. The prospect is a welcome one.



This conceptual plan shows how a school, its sports fields and a park (center left in sketch) might fit on the site's least stable land near Roosevelt Boulevard (diagonal), with new houses, stores, churches etc. sketched in at top and far left.

Team Logan was led by landscape architect Jose Alminana of Andropogon Associates. Other design professionals on the team were Muscoe Martin, Cameron Mactavish, Richard King, Jirair Youssefian, Doug Steele, Janice Woodcock and Beverly Briggs. Other team members were Sonya Byrant, Ian Baldwin, Deanda Wilson and Sean Canty.

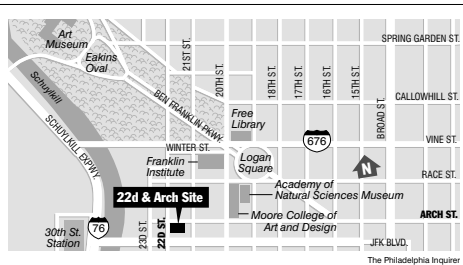
22D AND ARCH SCHOOL SITE

... into a center for science and community



ARCH from C6 Beyond the student cafe and the chill-out area, the rest of the school is well-secured, with a single monitored entry next to the administrative offices. Glass interior walls keep visual

connections with the rest of the first floor. This building's signature would be to use energy and materials creatively, making it a teaching tool for responsible science and technology. Energy use is metered



The buildings at 22d and Arch Streets that the Philadelphia School District is eyeing for a new high school are now leased as office space.

in a visible location. A windmill atop the building makes use of the otherwise negative wind tunnel created along the railroad viaduct. Solar panels provide hot water. Daylight is used throughout the building, with one atrium in the

new construction, and another cut into the existing building. Glass areas are oriented to use shade from nearby buildings to lessen heat gain. A rooftop garden could provide an opportunity for science experiments.

The Franklin Institute, the Academy of Natural Sciences and the Schuylkill are all within three blocks of the school — providing opportunities for programs, exhibit exchanges and experiments.

The plan includes ample bike storage to encourage bicycle commuting. Fitness equipment and the gym are available to the community, accessed from a separate, secured entrance on 22d Street. The activity and lighting from that entrance would make the threatening viaduct underpass feel safer.

Here's an idea on how to bring the community into the building on a regular basis: Set up on the first floor a student-run recycling program for items not currently recycled by the city, such as plastics and cardboard. This could help fund student activities.

Team Arch was led by architect Michael Schade of Atkin Olshin Lawson-Bell. Other design professionals on the team were Kiki Bolender, Bob Keppel, Tony Tsiantonas, Matthew Conti, Kate Stevens, Michael Naim and Ferdinand Addo. Other team members were Jennifer Vander Veer, Quincy Ellis, Arta Benjamin and Erica Young.