

DREAM CHARTER SCHOOL

JAMES D. MACCONNELL AWARD SUBMISSION | 2016





**DREAM Charter School** is a community-based public charter school serving grades K-8. Its institutional partner is Harlem RBI, a community-based organization with a 24-year history providing year-round sports, education, and enrichment activities for youth in the East Harlem and South Bronx neighborhoods. While the program has experienced much success—including a high school graduation rate of 96% and college acceptance rate of 93%—the organization recognized the need for a building that would support their high expectations, strong culture of care, and vision of student success.

The first DREAM Charter School opened in 2008 in a public school building. But with its continued growth, DREAM was literally limited by the space available to provide these resources. When property in an increasingly active and developing section of East Harlem became available through

New York City Housing Authority, the school—through an innovative partnership with a housing developer—realized its goal to build anew. It would be the first public school building to be built in East Harlem in nearly 50 years.

The resulting mixed-use complex, the East Harlem Center for Living and Learning, includes DREAM Charter School, environmentally friendly affordable-housing units (Yomo Toro Apartments), office space for Harlem RBI, community center, and revitalized park at the school's front door. Sited within the George Washington Houses complex in East Harlem, the new building reenergizes the streetscape. By orienting light-filled, open spaces toward the street, reviving the local park, opening up the facility for use by the community, and making the school's ideals visible and identifiable to passersby, the new building is an amenity for both the students and the community.

A group of people, including students and staff, are working on a rooftop garden. They are gathered around several raised wooden planters filled with soil and small plants. Some are kneeling and working with the soil, while others are standing and talking. The background shows a modern brick building with large windows. The scene is outdoors and appears to be a community or educational activity.

**SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET**

**IN WHAT WAYS CAN YOU BEST CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR COMMUNITY?**

**HAVE YOU TRIED YOUR ABSOLUTE BEST TODAY?**

## SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

### SIZE

SCHOOL: 58,000 sf  
RESIDENTIAL: 88,700 sf  
NON-PROFIT: 5,000 sf  
PARK: 20,000 sf

### STUDENTS: 450

### FLOORS

SCHOOL: 4  
RESIDENTIAL: 11  
NON-PROFIT: 1

### COMPLETED: 2015

### TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COST:

\$24,125,000 (school only; exterior and interior)



K-8 CHARTER SCHOOL



NON-PROFIT OFFICE SPACE



AFFORDABLE HOUSING



REVITALIZED PARK





# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

HOW CAN YOU ADVOCATE FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR COMMUNITY?

WHAT CHOICES CAN YOU MAKE FOR IMPROVEMENT?



**“WE APPRECIATE YOUR CONTINUED INVOLVEMENT WITH THE RESIDENTS OF WASHINGTON HOUSES TO ADDRESS ALL OF THEIR CONCERNS WITH THE ANTICIPATED CHANGES. A BROAD APPROACH IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO BRING IN THE RESIDENTS AND IS NECESSARY TO MAKE CERTAIN THEY BENEFIT MOST FROM THE OPPORTUNITIES CREATED BY THIS PROJECT—YOU HAVE DONE A GREAT JOB TO MAKE SURE HAS BEEN THE CASE SO FAR AND WE APPLAUD YOU.”**

—Matthew S. Washington, Chairman, Community Board 11

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The East Harlem Center for Living and Learning, of which DREAM is a part, creates a new model of community for East Harlem by transforming an under-utilized parking lot and trash compactor area on New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) Washington Houses campus into a vibrant mix of open space, affordable housing, non-profit office space, and a charter school for grades K-8. Since it is located on property purchased from NYCHA and received public funding, the success of the project depended upon the partnership and support of a number of public agencies. The City and NYCHA have been actively exploring ways to integrate new development within underutilized space on NYCHA campuses; this project is an embodiment of that partnership combined with the vision and dedication of the unique community organization Harlem RBI.

To ensure the design team could best accommodate the combined functions of three different user groups into one mixed-use building, meetings and workshops with stakeholders were held over the course of an initial feasibility study and then project development to discuss program needs and to review massing and adjacency options for the proposed facilities. The design team also developed design principles and project goals to prioritize the multitude of community-minded demands on the future building. In order to better understand the operations of each group, the design team toured and the existing facilities of HRBI and DREAM with members of both user groups. This helped establish priorities regarding range of room sizes, program adjacencies, circulation strategies, and schedule of use.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

- Support all user groups as a multi-use facility
- Inspire a new generation of learners and citizens
- Improve existing and increase overall public-use spaces
- Reflect a welcoming spirit without compromising safety
- Respond to the immediate needs of the local population
- Make the “ideals” visible on the exterior and identifiable to passersby
- Design economically, efficiently and sustainably
- Utilize controlled interaction between user groups

Three distinct “test-fit” options were developed, each of which illustrated unique planning strategies for arranging program spaces on the site. The three options attempted to incorporate as many of these principles as possible while each explored a different approach that addressed various site constraints and opportunities. By highlighting the range of possible site strategies, the full potential of the site development could be realized while meeting the project requirements and end user needs.

The design team met with the current administration, teachers, and students of DREAM Charter School and representatives from Harlem RBI to fully understand their needs. These meetings occurred biweekly as we worked through each program element, size, and adjacency requirements., where discussed in detail the model for the DREAM curriculum and how the new building could enhance this.

OPTION A



OPTION B



OPTION C



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

At the same time we had project meetings with the larger team to understand the relationship between the residential and the school; although this would be one building we understood that the two programs needed to be completely separate with no access from one part of the building to the other, including separate entrances, stairs, and elevators. The only shared elements would be the main utility rooms located on the ground floor. The decision was also made to separate the structure of each building: the residential tower would be more economical built out of concrete, but the school with its long spans needed to be built out of steel. This pulled the planning to an L-shaped design with the residential tower on the north end of the site; shared utilities and community room at the base; the second floor housing the HRBI offices; and a four-story L-shaped school adjacent to the tower.

We also met with the larger community, prominently including residents of Washington Houses, residents of East Harlem, and residents of Union Settlement to engage them in the process and garner their input about the community spaces, and especially the park. As a public park we wanted to make certain that the new design would meet the needs of the community, not just the school.

“Before we broke ground on the new home for Harlem RBI and DREAM Charter School, our first priority was to be a good neighbor,” says Johnny Rivera, Director of Government and Community Affairs. “On the advice of New York City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito, we formed a Community Advisory Board (CAB) to regularly give us feedback about the construction site and its effects on the neighborhood.”

Involving the community—residents of Washington Houses, members of Community Board 11, Harlem RBI, and DREAM families, elected officials, and local non-profit partners—made the design and construction process more inclusive and thoughtful. “Harlem RBI built trust with the community through the CAB,” says Speaker Mark-Viverito. “Because the people of East Harlem were included every step of the way, this new building truly belongs to everyone.”

**THE PROJECT'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING TOWER PROUDLY MAKES ITS HOMAGE TO NEIGHBORHOOD MUSICAL LEGEND YOMO TORO VISIBLE**

**It's all in a name:**

**DIVERSITY  
RESPECT  
EFFORT AND ENTHUSIASM  
ACHIEVEMENT  
MINDFULNESS**

**All within a team, whether family, friends,  
school, community, or neighborhood.**



## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The design team met with three different groups to discuss the programming of the new facility.

### Workshop #1

#### HRBI Programs' Staff

We spoke at length with the participants about the types of programs that each group runs with the students and the space requirements that these entail.

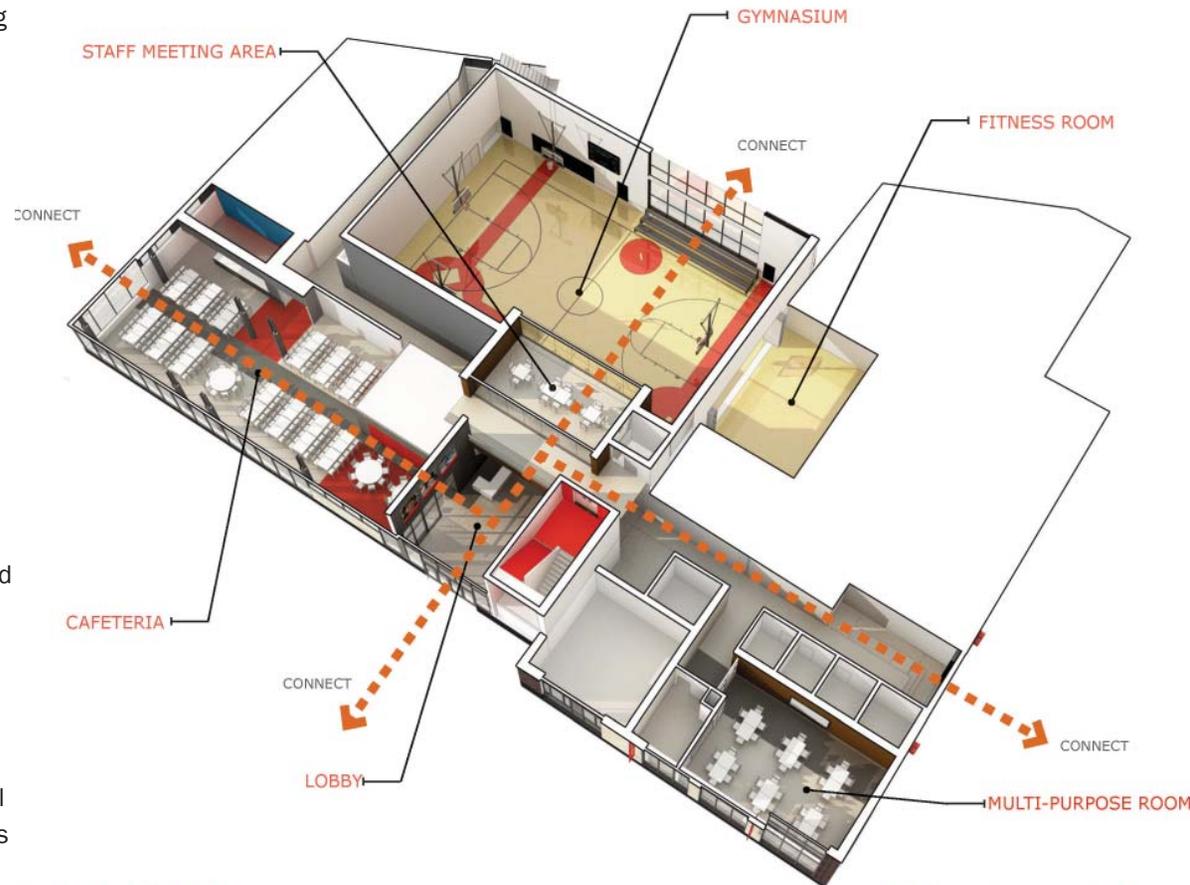
- Real Kids: 2nd-5th grade
- Teambuilders: 6th-8th grade
- Teamworks/Dreamworks: 9th-11th grade
- Baseball/Softball
- Real Kids: Baseball/Softball, 6th-12th grade

In conversations about office space within the new facility, all parties believed that space was needed for coordinators and staff to prepare for after-school programs, but that this could be swing space with their permanent desks located at a remote location. Open office space was added to the program to accommodate this along with storage. For the social workers, additional desks would be located with DREAM so that they would have a place to sit while working at the school. Among other spaces, offices for DREAM Physical Education staff was also prioritized to accommodate space for HRBI coaches or baseball/softball coordinators.

### Workshop #2

#### HRBI Administration

We spoke about the needs of the different administration groups and the types of staff spaces that would be needed. The group agreed that there should be one lobby that everyone enters the building into. Within this lobby would be a receptionist (with the security officer) who could direct visitors to the DREAM School administration, HRBI administration, or other area of the building. It was key for HRBI offices to have a presence on the ground floor, especially for parents who are looking for more information on programs and services as well as for the first line for registering their child.



The actual HRBI offices were organized with a receptionist and waiting area upfront. The office area itself would ideally have some visible connection to the front and the office would be an open plan with small private meeting areas within. Larger meeting areas that could all be grouped together to create a very large meeting room would be located in close proximity to these offices. These meeting rooms would also be used by Dream Administration and HRBI programs.

A clear preference was voiced to have all the HRBI administrative departments located together on site (with the exception of Programs) and even

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

within the same area in the building. The proximity to each other is crucial to the way the organization runs and to their philosophy.

Within the office area:

- Bullpen type of arrangement with meeting areas
- Development suite will need 12 desks and some small meeting rooms
- Operations and Finance will need 15 desks
- A break room is needed, could be shared with all staff depending on location

The shape of the gym was a particular topic of conversation, as it would need to accommodate indoor baseball in addition to basketball. A “skybox” allows for visibility and a dynamic meeting space that underscores HRBI’s and DREAM’s roots in physical education and wellness.

### Workshop #3

#### DREAM School

We spoke with the DREAM Administrators about the plan for arrival at the school; one entrance with a receptionist to guide visitors to their destination.

Additional staff space would be distributed throughout the school. Head of School would have a suite with a meeting room and assistant. Offices would then be needed for Elementary school principal, middle school principal, and two assistant principals. They expressed the preference to have this office program located in the same space on each floor (in a vertical school arrangement) for recognition and ease of supervision.

A teacher/staff workroom would provide after-hours use or when their classrooms are occupied by HRBI. This space would also function as a meeting / break room for the staff during the day. The family coordinator would be located adjacent to the Parent Resource Center (with some visual connection).

For the social workers; an open office for five social workers (three DREAM and two HRBI) with three counseling rooms would fill a critical programmatic need. Student support services (OT/PT, speech, reading) would provide desks arranged in an open office layout with eight small group rooms for meeting with the students.



NYCHA HOUSING

EXTERIOR GARDEN

GYMNASIUM

SCHOOL / HRBI ACTIVITY

LOBBY

BLAKE HOBBS PARK

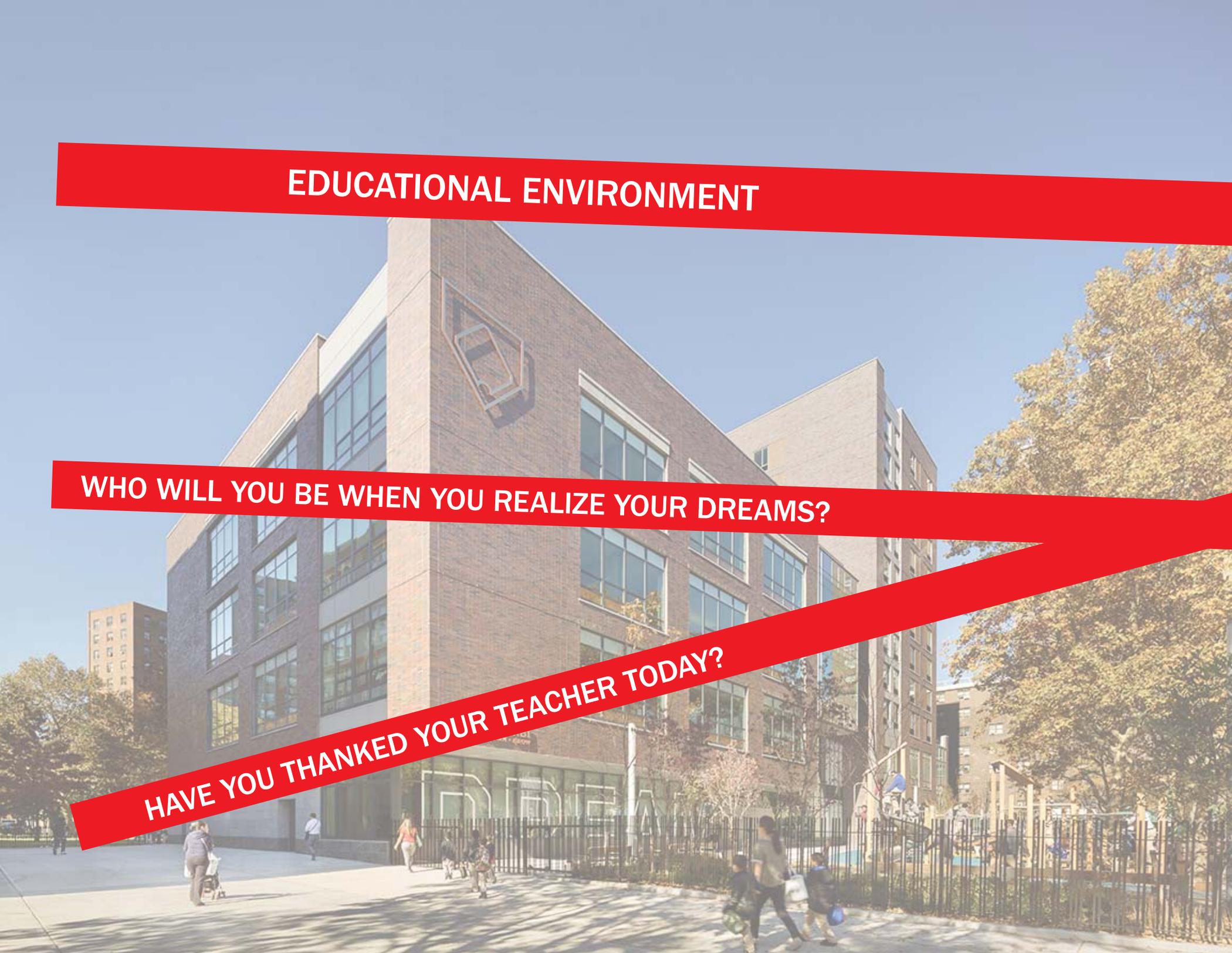
VISUAL CONNECTIONS

**“I UNDERSTAND THE EXHAUSTIVE WORK THAT WENT INTO NOT JUST DESIGNING A WINNING PROJECT, BUT ONE THAT RECEIVES WIDE-RANGING SUPPORT AND TRANSFORMS THE LIVES OF NOT JUST THE DREAM STUDENTS, BUT ALSO THE LIVES OF ITS NEIGHBORING CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND JOB SEEKERS.**

**I AM DULY IMPRESSED THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION NOT ONLY ENCOURAGES ITS STUDENTS TO THINK AND DREAM BIG, BUT THAT YOUR ORGANIZATION ITSELF DREAMS AND PLANS BIG—AND IS WILLING AND ABLE TO MAKE SUCH AN APPRECIABLE INVESTMENT IN THE LIVES OF ITS STUDENTS AND IN OUR COMMUNITY.**

**FURTHER, IT IS RARE THAN AN ORGANIZATION THAT NEEDS NO COMMUNITY SUPPORT DISREGARDS THAT POLITICAL SHORTCUT AND INSTEAD ENTRENCHES ITSELF IN A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS. I BELIEVE THAT YOUR CAB [COMMUNITY ADVISORY BOARD] IS AN EXCELLENT IDEA, BUT ACKNOWLEDGE GRATEFULLY THAT THE COLLABORATIVE PROCESS BEGAN LONG BEFORE THE CAB WAS FORMED.”**

**—ROBERT J. RODRIGUEZ, ASSEMBLYMEMBER, 68TH DISTRICT**

A large, modern brick school building with multiple stories and large windows. A playground with a black metal fence is in the foreground. There are trees with autumn foliage on the right side. The sky is clear and blue.

**EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

**WHO WILL YOU BE WHEN YOU REALIZE YOUR DREAMS?**

**HAVE YOU THANKED YOUR TEACHER TODAY?**

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

DREAM believes that it is the school's responsibility to provide a comprehensive liberal arts education that prepares students for active, engaged citizenship. DREAM's curriculum ensures rigorous instruction that teaches children to think critically and imaginatively. This curricula is designed to maximize opportunities for students to grapple with big ideas in literature through rich content. It also develops cognitive flexibility and critical thinking through problem solving. All literacy units are integrated with meaningful social studies or science content and a variety of texts. DREAM's math program centers on a critical-thinking and problem-solving method called Cognitively Guided Instruction. This innovative approach encourages students to develop strategies for solving problems and scaffolds the development of sophistication, efficiency, and accuracy in problem-solving. To best deliver this model DREAM classrooms work within a workshop format where teachers plan lessons based on assessments of each student. Each classroom also has two teachers; the co-teaching model allows for a small student to teacher ratio and more individual attention. Finally, DREAM utilizes an extended day and extended year to ensure students have more opportunity to learn and grow.

The team discussed multiple options for the teaching spaces to incorporate this model including paired classrooms, clustered classrooms, L-shaped classrooms, and small group rooms or break-out areas for each cluster and for each floor. Each solution was tested and discussed during the concept stage with the current teachers, administration and representatives from Harlem RBI and the Design Team. The decision was made to create break-out space and small group rooms on each floor and to enlarge each individual classroom. This solution allowed for the most flexibility, allowing for the classes to be split into groups within the classroom as well as providing small group rooms if one of the teachers wanted to pull out a group of students for additional support.

For the new elements DREAM was finally able to truly incorporate into its curriculum as a result of the new facility—middle school, art, science, and music—DREAM reached out to other middle schools for their input. We held a workshop looking at middle schools and what characteristics the DREAM middle school wanted to have.

We also met with the decision-makers at Harlem RBI for their input on both the school and offices. We held a series of workshops to bring all of the users together to build consensus about the planning.

It was critical to build consensus among all users; Harlem RBI has been knit into the fabric of the East Harlem community for the past 24 years with offices and after-school space in several locations. DREAM started in fourth-floor space in a local public school. The school had its own classroom space, but had to share a cafeteria and gymnasium with the other school and specialized spaces for art, music, and science were not available. DREAM made do with mobile carts that housed instruments and utensils and supplies for these critical classes, which they wheeled from classroom to classroom, but they were quickly outgrowing the space.

The new school is purpose-built for use by DREAM Charter School and for after-school use by Harlem RBI as well as use by the community. The spaces for community use were strategically placed on the first floor for easy access, easy visibility, and segregated use. A large lobby welcomes users to the school with visual access to the gymnasium and cafeteria. A double-volume lobby and open stair to the second floor allow the students, Harlem RBI staff, and visitors a visual and physical connection to their space—and to each other.



## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The first floor also includes a room dedicated to community use. Located at the corner, it looks out onto the revitalized, much-used park and the bustling East Harlem street, a constant presence and reminder that this facility has been built for its community.

Offices for the Harlem RBI staff are located on the second floor under the residential tower. This staff is able to utilize some of the meeting spaces within the school during the day, while after-school programs organized and hosted by Harlem RBI utilize classrooms during evenings. DREAM students and students from other schools in the community participate in these classes and weekend activities, reinforcing the deep commitment DREAM's partner institution, Harlem RBI, has to the community at large.

The school is then divided into three floors of academic space divided by age with Lower Elementary (K-2) on the second floor, upper Elementary (grades



3-5) located on the third floor, and the Middle School (grades 6-8) located on the fourth floor. Specialized spaces such as art, science, and music are located throughout the facility along with small group rooms that can be used for tutoring and special needs. Art and Science are located on the third floor with direct access to a roof teaching and garden space that tenants in the adjacent Yomo Toro Apartments look down upon. These dedicated music, art, and science rooms are the first DREAM has had in its eight-year history. The new building also provides smaller spaces for one-on-one tutoring, group work, and breakout space, providing students with needed access to teachers that they were missing in their old facility.



## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Finally, with the new building the school now has their own gymnasium and cafeteria so that they can more thoroughly integrate nutrition, fitness, and other wellness initiatives into their programs, an essential component of their educational approach.

The entrance to the school is off of Blake Hobbs Park, which was completely renovated as part of the project. This public park used to be an asphalt-topped park with a few trees that was completely separated from the community. With input from community groups, the project team renovated the park into a safe, multifunctional place where the community could gather and play. The new park provides multiple seating zones, emphasizing seating areas close to a current senior living building; open areas for children to run and play; and area for congregation before and after school.

The building visually connects this park to another green space on the west side of the school through the lobby and gymnasium. The first floor of the school is glazed all along the cafeteria and lobby to further connect the school to the new park and the community. The northeast corner of the building has windows on the east and north facades to visually connect the community room.

The teachers' space and double-volume media center are located on the upper floors above the lobby to also visually connect to the park and community. All spaces, including corridors and stairs, are flooded with natural light dappled through mature trees preserved from the park's previous life.

From the beginning of their matriculation at DREAM, students are taught to strive to attend college. Motivational messages and provoking questions—"How will you inspire someone else?"; "What did you do today that your family can be proud of?"; "How can you advocate for yourself and your community?"; "Have you thanked your teacher today?"; "Who will you be when you realize your dreams?"—encourage the students to reflect on their journeys and their opportunities, to strive for success, and to take responsibility for their actions and their dreams and are located on the walls throughout the school. Windows into each space and breakout spaces in the corridor puts learning on display. Added storage within each classroom—perhaps an unex-

pectedly valuable feature for this facility so used to not having its own space and so accustomed to having to pack materials up to make room for a completely difficult curriculum—importantly allows for a seamless transition between school use and after-school use by HRBI.

The gymnasium houses a garden on its roof, which can be directly accessed from the art and science rooms as well as the breakout space. This roof garden gives the school an added experiential, hands-on learning environment for science and art curriculums, and an abundance of other uses. This school in East Harlem is unexpectedly bookended by nature, once again reinforcing DREAM's educational approach that health and wellness, sustainability and responsibility, are essential components of a student's development.

In accordance with this school's educational approach, the interiors were designed according to LEED CI. The Yomo Toro Apartments are on track to achieve certification from Green Enterprise Communities.

## Family Engagement at DREAM

In addition to its educational and extracurricular programming, Harlem RBI offers a 12-week program called "The Parenting Journey" to provide a safe environment for Moms and Dads to reflect on their roles and build on their strengths. Every week, parents gather over a home-cooked meal to discuss discipline, how to express love, and how to accept mistakes made by their own parents. Luis Sierra, a Harlem RBI parent, described the impact: "Before Parenting Journey, I felt I could tell my kids the right thing to do because I've 'been there, done that.' But now I know how important it is to listen to them, and to understand what their deeper needs are."

As parents get better at modeling communication and coping skills for their kids, their family—and the Harlem RBI family—grow even stronger.

When DREAM Charter School scholars join the school community, their families do, too. One of the most important ways they build connections is through teacher visits to family homes, where parents communicate their scholar's dreams, strengths, and challenges. During these family visits, DREAM teachers promise to maintain high expectations that will lead to college graduation, while parents commit bring their children to school on time every day, read with them, and provide a quiet place for homework. "DREAM takes care of my kids, and they also take care of us. At DREAM, I feel like everyone is working together to make sure my kids do the best they can," says DREAM parent Alexis Arias.

# EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



## THE USE OF COLOR TO REFLECT...

The graduation of one year to another.

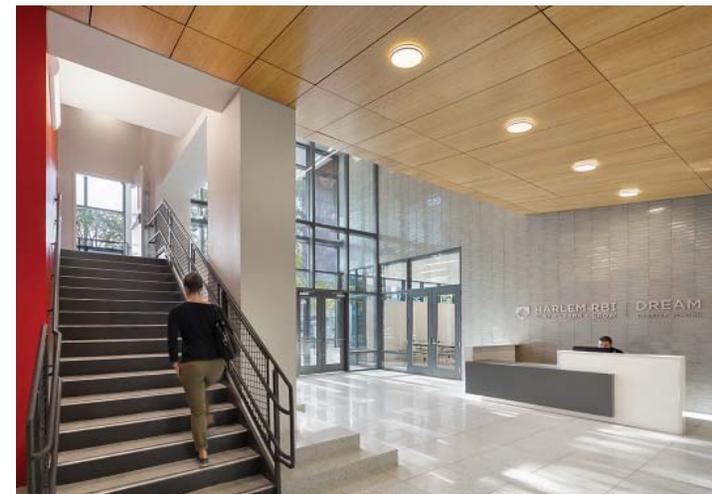
The very open and public first floor plays off the colors of the Harlem RBI and DREAM Charter School logos, whereas the colors of the upper levels reflect the maturation of years from Kindergarten through Middle School.



## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: FLOOR ONE



- 1 Lobby
- 2 Dining
- 3 Servery
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Gym
- 6 Fitness Room
- 7 Admin
- 8 Community Room
- 9 Nurse's Suite
- 10 Mechanical
- 11 Residential Lobby



## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: FLOOR TWO



- 1 Skybox
- 2 Kindergarten
- 3 Grade 1 Classroom
- 4 Grade 2 Classroom
- 5 Admin
- 6 HRBI Office
- 7 Teacher Collaboration
- 8 IT/Server Room



## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: FLOOR THREE



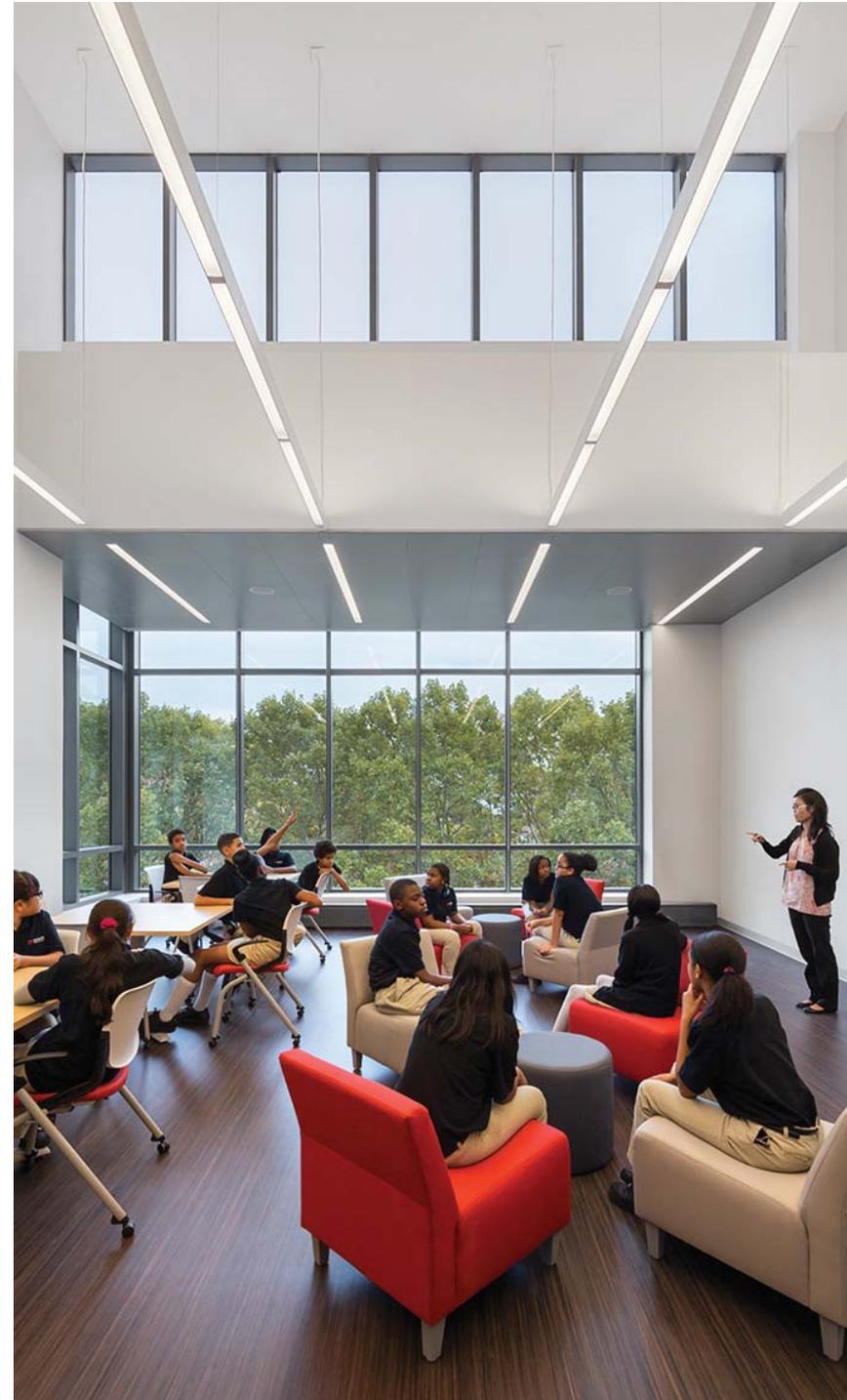
- 1 Meeting Room
- 2 Open Collaboration
- 3 Grade 5 Classroom
- 4 Grade 4 Classroom
- 5 Grade 3 Classroom
- 6 Art Room
- 7 Science Lab
- 8 Outdoor Classroom
- 9 Admin
- 10 Residential Tower



## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: FLOOR FOUR



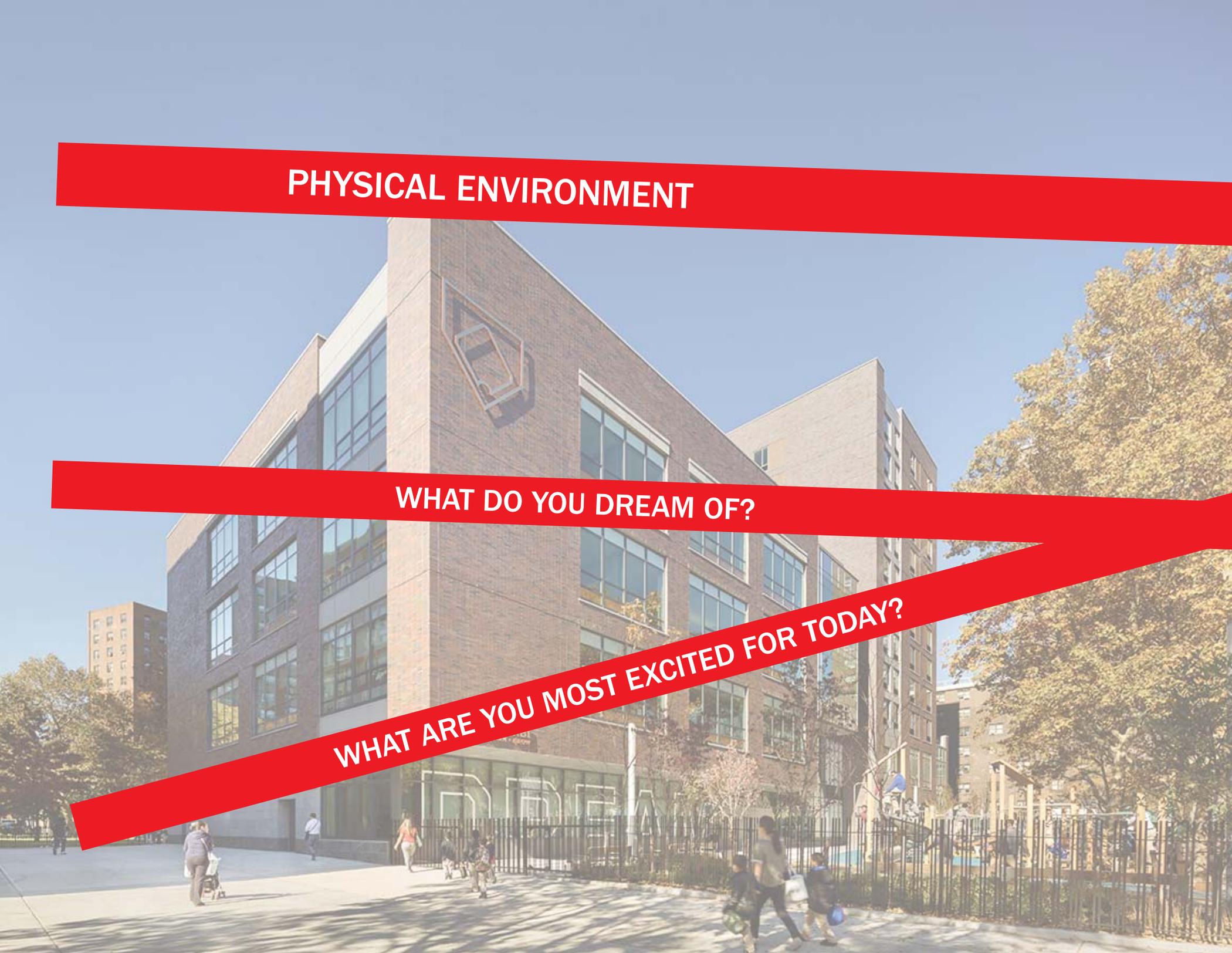
- 1 Library/Media Room
- 2 OT/PT Offices
- 3 Grade 6 Classroom
- 4 Group Room
- 5 Grade 7 Classroom
- 6 Grade 8 Classroom
- 7 Music Room
- 8 Guidance Suite
- 9 Admin
- 10 Residential Tower



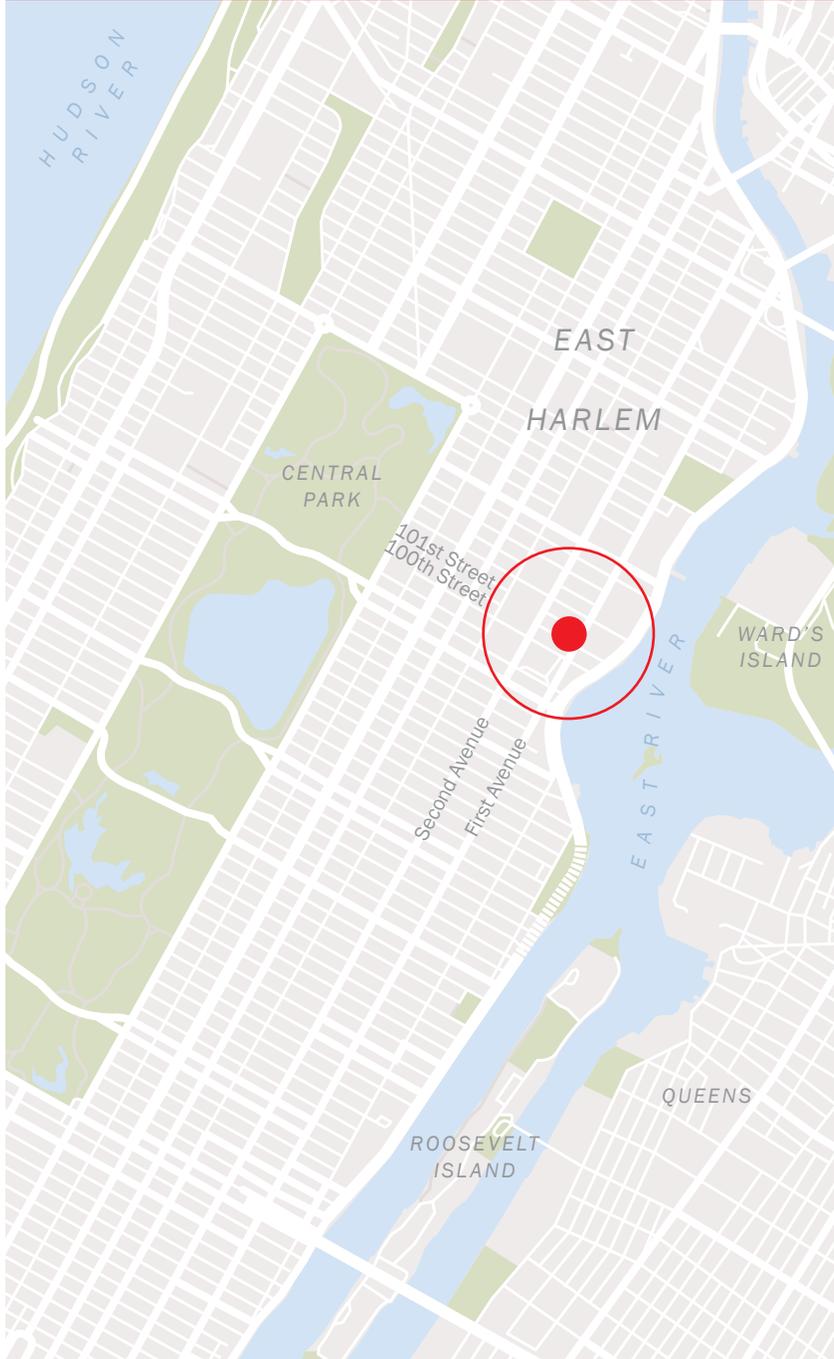
**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

**WHAT DO YOU DREAM OF?**

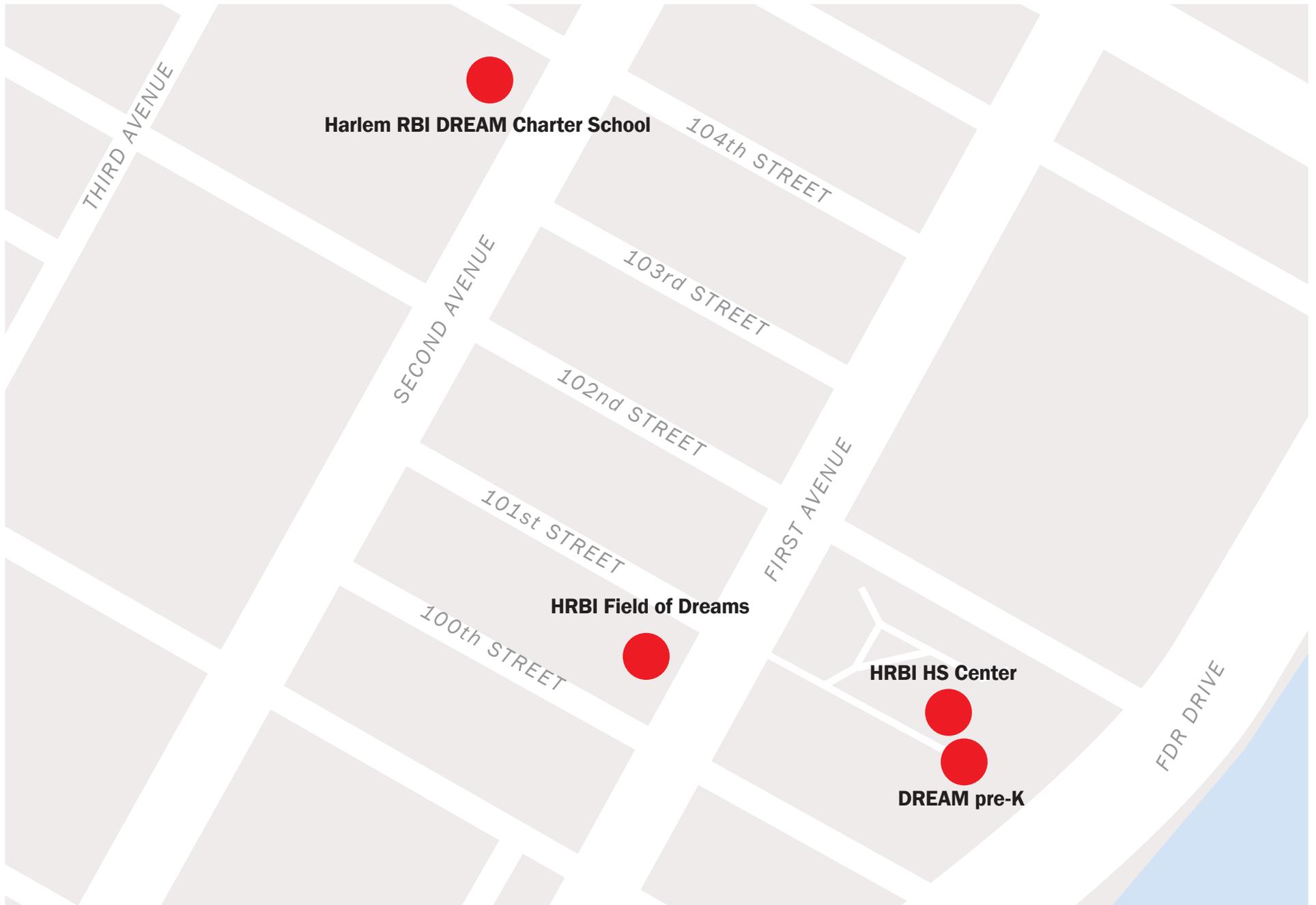
**WHAT ARE YOU MOST EXCITED FOR TODAY?**



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: NEIGHBORHOOD



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: HARLEM RBI AND DREAM CHARTER SCHOOL OUTREACH IN NEIGHBORHOOD



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The site is a trapezoid shaped parcel of land that had been used for parking and trash collection by the George Washington Houses and the existing school building. The site area is approximately 34,000 sf with a buildable area of 30,000sf.

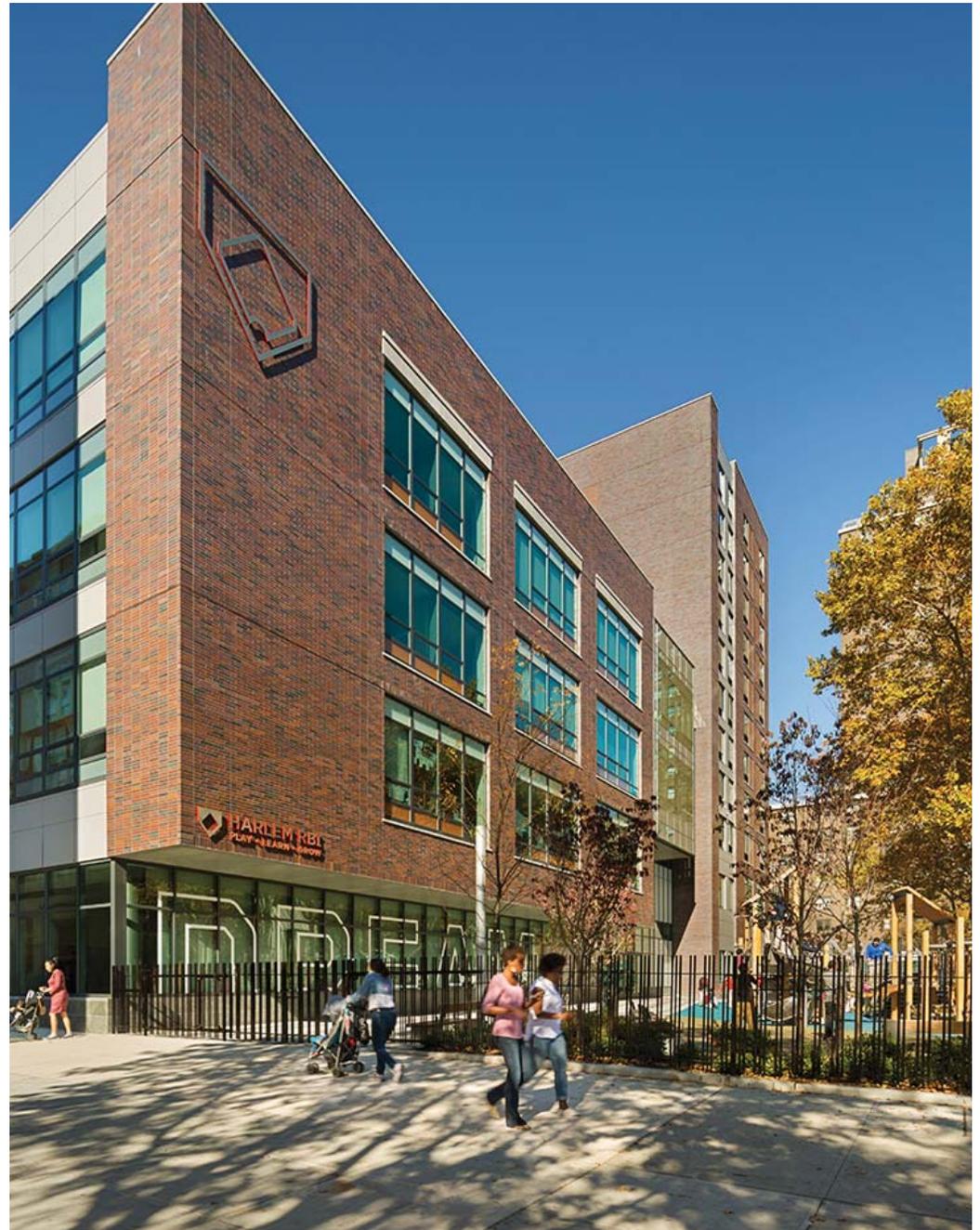
To the north of the site is the Union Settlement Association Building and a 20-story housing tower. To the east is the Blake Hobbs Playground and Park, owned by NYCHA, leased and maintained by the Parks Department. Beyond the park to the east is a row of four-story traditional brownstone-style buildings with retail at ground level. Immediately to the south is an existing school building containing PS 38 and the temporary space for DREAM. The PS 38 building is five stories and approximately 80 feet tall. Beyond PS38 to the east and south are the 14-story buildings of the George Washington Houses development.

### URBAN CONTEXT AND ACCESS

Directly adjacent to the site is Blake Hobbs Park. The park contains existing trees and acts as a visual and acoustic buffer between the site and the main thoroughfare of Second Avenue (and the ongoing work to the subway underground). The site is highly accessible by public transportation including the subway located two blocks away at Lexington Avenue and 103rd Street and several bus lines running along nearby avenues. The Second Avenue subway line, currently under construction, is proposed to have stops at 96th Street and 106th Street. Phase One which includes the 96th street station, is expected to be completed by 2016.

The unique positioning of the site means that there are distinct “faces” and a variety of scales along each elevation. The Union Settlement Association, located opposite the site on 104th street, provides a variety of social service programs. The Union Settlement Association hosts a farmers market on 104th Street and its facilities also offer open outdoor spaces, a garden seating area, and a teaching garden.

Blake Hobbs Playground provided an unprecedented opportunity for HRBI and DREAM to redevelop the open space for optimal use by the facility user groups as well as the entire community, including nearby groups and



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

schools in the area. The park was redeveloped by HRBI and the Parks Department as a separate but integrated project.

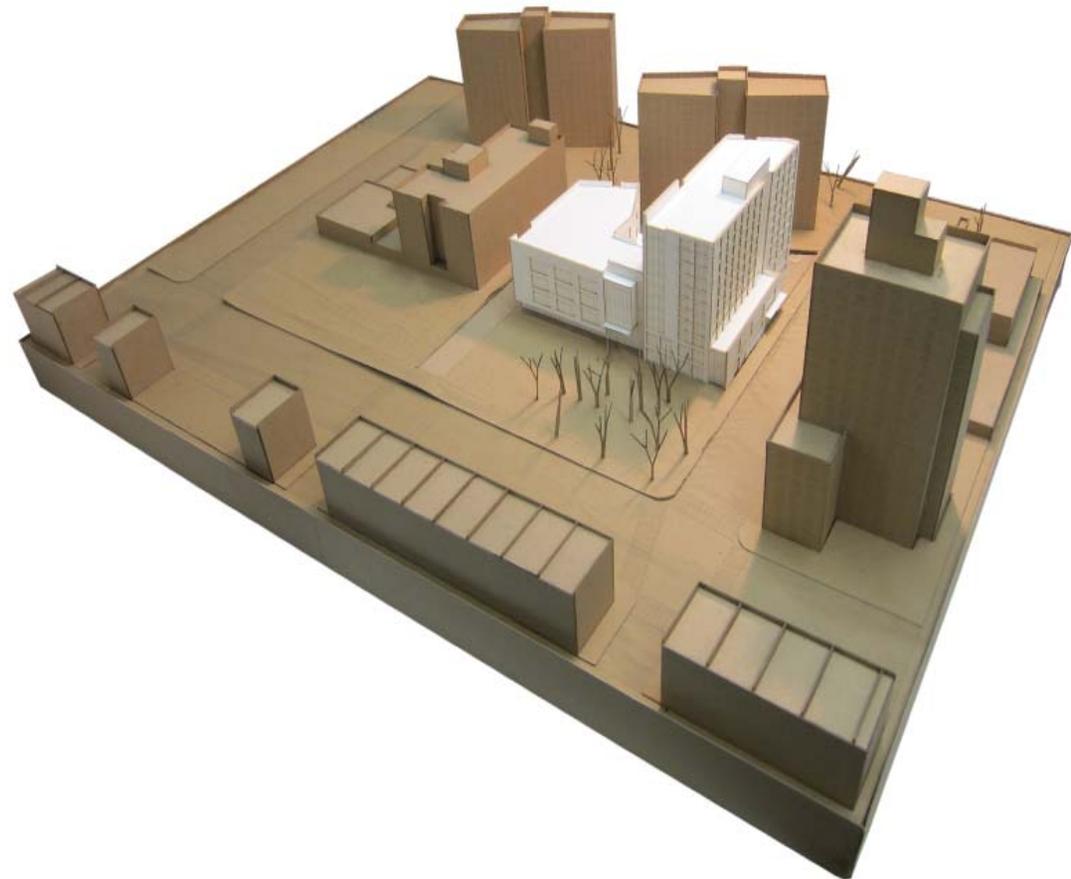
There are a variety of nearby schools in addition to PS 38, including East Harlem School, Amber Charter School, Park East School, and PS 146. The Field of Dreams baseball field, located on 101st Street between First and Second Avenues.

The site also benefits from optimal day-lighting despite its dense, urban context. The orientation of the George Washington houses as well as the adjacency of an open green space on the opposing side result in a good deal of daylighting throughout the course of the day. The only notable disruption occurs to the south during the early morning and afternoon due to the shadows created by the existing school building.

East Harlem is a city within a city. One of Manhattan's most racially diverse neighborhoods, it is also among the most economically and socially distressed. East Harlem is dominated by public housing complexes of various types, with a high concentration of older tenement buildings between these developments. The neighborhood contains the highest geographical concentration of low income public housing projects in the United States. DREAM Charter School/East Harlem Center for Living and Learning is sited within New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) Washington Houses, on land that used to house an under-utilized parking lot and a trash compactor area, on the highly visible corner of Second Avenue and 104th Street. For now, delis, bodegas, fast-food restaurants, and "ethnic" grocery stores dot the streets. But like other neighborhoods in New York City, it has recently started seeing the effects of gentrification. A new charter school is under construction across the street. The extension of the Second Avenue subway line will ease and enhance travel to the neighborhood. And East Harlem was recently named among the "hottest" neighborhoods in New York City. Though still a working-class and moderate-income neighborhood, though still plagued by years and years of social and economic distress, though still suffering from health issues at levels not seen elsewhere in the city (and in some cases, nationally), East Harlem is also a neighborhood changing, a neighborhood ascendant.

DREAM Charter School is of the community. Approximately half of its students live in the housing complex that shares its site. 30 Harlem RBI program instructors live in the attached affordable-housing units at Yomo Toro Apartments. DREAM is an anchor for the community, helping it rise above its past and pave the way to the future, creating the next generation of civic and community leaders.

The building visually connects this park to another green space on the west side of the school through the lobby and gymnasium. The first floor of the school is glazed all along the cafeteria and lobby to further connect the school to the new park and the community. The northeast corner of the building has windows on the east and north facades to visually connect the community room.





**RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT**

**HOW WILL YOU INSPIRE SOMEONE ELSE?**

**HOW CAN YOU BE A ROLE MODEL FOR YOUR PEERS?**

## RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT

DREAM Charter School is the first public school building to be built in East Harlem in nearly half a century has been honored as a “21st Century School” by *Architectural Record*. The vision and level of community engagement has been cited by architectural critic Michael Kimmelman of the *New York Times* as a template for how to build affordable housing in today’s New York City. The overall complex is being heralded as a model of excellence in mixed-use development by the New York Chapter of the Urban Land Institute. It is New York City through and through, while it illustrates how 21st-century students learn and thrive, how urban communities bond and evolve, how access and resources transform and revitalize.

It is also an extraordinary example of public and private agencies and organizations—all told, more than 80—and the design community working together to create a place of promise and potential for future generations, reinforcing the maxim that access to education is the “great equalizer.”

The East Harlem Center for Living and Learning achieves the goals of New York City Housing Authority and the City by creating a new community that integrates with its neighbors and also provides opportunities for the existing residents. Half of the children who attend the DREAM Charter School are residents of the adjacent Washington Houses public housing, giving them access to a beautiful new school facility and a well-respected team of faculty

and after-school coaches. In addition, one young student at DREAM is also a resident at Yomo Toro Apartments; this number is sure to increase as the project matures and the connections between the project’s components strengthen. 16 of the apartment building residents moved from Washington Houses to Yomo Toro and six more moved from NYCHA campuses elsewhere in the community.

The DREAM Charter school is the first new school building to be constructed in East Harlem in 47 years and offers the charter school, which does demonstrably important work for the community, its first permanent home. The new school building represents a significant investment in the community and in the neighborhood youth. Harlem RBI and DREAM Charter School together serve 1,700 students annually in their academic and after-school programs.

A key metric of the project was sustainability. The DREAM Charter School is designed to LEED-CI Silver certification, and the Yomo Toro Apartments is on track to achieve certification from Green Enterprise Communities. Sustainable materials, low or no-VOC paints and finishes, and attractive outdoor spaces for the students, residents, and public were integrated into every part of the project.

The East Harlem Center for Living and Learning has had an undeniably positive impact on the East Harlem community. The housing, educational, and recreational resources it has added have already been fully utilized by the community. On any afternoon Blake Hobbs Park perfectly illustrates the neighborhood’s immediate adoption of the project, with residents, students, and local seniors activating the space from dawn to dusk, an illustration of a community being knit back together.

At the project’s ribboncutting on October 15, 2015, after six years of planning and building, Harlem RBI Executive Director and Chair of DREAM Charter School Rich Berlin summed up the project’s vision:

“Place matters. Where you play, learn, and grow matter. This should not be the exception. A gorgeous school, a safe park, and affordable housing should be the norm.”

**30**

**School employees are residents of the adjacent housing authority**

**47**

**Years since last new school in neighborhood**

**286**

**Neighborhood scholars**

**1,200**

**Local children served by the facility’s after-school programs**

**77,000**

**Applicants for the 88 Affordable Housing Units**

## RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT: ACCOLADES

### **“SCHOOLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY,” ARCHITECTURAL RECORD**

“Some 40 or 50 years ago, education experts sought to seal classrooms by claiming that windows caused students to be distracted, encouraged vandalism, and raised energy costs. Clearly, those days are long gone. “I like being able to see outside,” says second grader Louis Gomez, who also admires the school’s strainforward, L-shaped floor plans: “You know where to go.”

One sixth grader, Aniya King, says she has been in the **DREAM School** since kindergarten. Says this old-timer of the new facility, “The settings are amazing. I get even more help and teacher support.”

“From the point of view of its students and its clients, the design has hit the ball out of the park. The Field of Dreams now has a proper educational symbol to complement its courageous agenda.”

### **“HOW TO BUILD AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN NEW YORK CITY,” NEW YORK TIMES**

“Serving 286 neighborhood students, **DREAM Charter School** is the first new public school building in East Harlem in 47 years. The school is light-filled, airy, transparent, with big windows opening onto the Washington Houses and rows of trees. Developes also paid for a new 20,000 sf public park, to replace a decrepit concrete one that had been on Second Avenue in what’s effectively the school’s front yard.

In the case of the East Harlem Center, change can bring more than new housing. Neighborhoods need schools and parks, not just apartments, after all. They depend on good planning. That’s what earns public trust.”

### **INAUGURAL AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE, “BEST MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT,” URBAN LAND INSTITUTE NEW YORK**

**K-8 CHARTER SCHOOL**



**NON-PROFIT OFFICE SPACE**



**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**



**REVITALIZED PARK**

