Introduction: “Next Generation” Urban Schools

Public education is experiencing a revolution in thinking as educators, policy makers, parents, students and the public debate the most effective means of preparing students for an uncertain global future.

A leading researcher and voice on the subject, Tony Wagner of Harvard University, author of “The Global Achievement Gap”, “Most Likely to Succeed” and “Creating Innovators: The Making of People Who Will Change the World”, has identified a wide range of factors that create excellent schools. Wagner’s documentary film “The Finland Phenomenon” takes an in-depth look at public schools in Finland, ranked by the United Nations as # 1 in the world. Other educators and researchers have produced similar findings. Wagner’s film will make you want to become active in public education.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhH78NnRpp0&list=PLzsi_E489-gUXFVuciYEqO3AyrPMVAjxP
Schools as Community Catalysts

In many communities of the world, rich and poor, public schools have become new community centers where neighborhood libraries, recreation centers, adult education and meeting spaces are combined with traditional school programs. “Open schools” are an increasing movement, despite what we read about security concerns. Students are not confined to classrooms, or even the school building. High school students are increasingly engaged in their communities through volunteer and internship opportunities. Simultaneously, community members engage the school through mentoring and volunteer teaching assistance and the use of school resources.

The “STEAM” school movement.

There is current interest in the idea of STEAM schools around the world. STEAM stands for a curriculum that emphasizes Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Math. The movement grew out of the STEM schools philosophy when advocates added arts to the educational philosophy. Public STEAM schools are most often “magnet” or “focus” schools that draw students citywide to their special curriculum, rather than being strictly neighborhood schools that draw from a specific area of the city. STEAM schools may be grades K-6, K-12 or other specific age group.

Portland Public Schools

Portland’s public schools are rated high academically by comparison to other major cities in the United States. However, statewide, Oregon has some of the lowest graduation rates in the nation. Similar to matters of sustainability, parks, libraries and public institutions, citizens of Portland have been supportive of a strong public school system.

Unfortunately, Portland’s sound progress in improving the quality and equity of public education have not been matched by the caliber of its schools’ physical facilities. Most of the city’s school buildings are over 75 years old, some over 100 years old (for example Jefferson High School in north Portland and Couch School in Northwest Portland).

Realizing that many of the city’s schools are outmoded and in need of renewal, the Portland School district (Portland Public Schools, PPS) plans to re-build most of its school buildings during the next 30 years. Voters passed a $ 482 million bond funding initiative to rebuild Grant, Franklin and Roosevelt High Schools in 2012, and a $ 760 million bond in May 2017 to rebuild three more high schools (Benson, Lincoln and Madison), Kellogg Middle School and repair several other school buildings. Additional building projects will be financed in a future bond issue expected within 5-8 years.

Despite overcrowding of elementary schools on Portland’s west side and the successful development of the River District (Pearl District) and other parts of the central city, Portland Public Schools / PPS has not built a central city elementary school in over 70 years. On the west side, the closest elementary school to downtown is Chapman Elementary School in Northwest Portland. The River District / Pearl District has no public schools.

Studio Focus and “Next Generation Schools.org”

The studio will first focus on public education, recent changes in educational philosophy and strategies of innovative programs in different urban, cultural and social contexts. We will meet educators and tour innovative precedent schools in the Portland region.
During the past two years I've had the opportunity to work with Portland Public Schools (PPS) and the community of school advocates in Portland. We sponsored a design symposium “Next Generation Schools” in April 2016 which brought international speakers to Portland and created a Website for documentation of research, precedents and recent projects, including University of Oregon student work. In Spring 2017 we organized the lecture and charrette by Colombian architect Giancarlo Mazzanti, the designer of several prolific schools in marginal neighborhoods of Colombia.


**Project Options**

Two project options for the studio are offered, one in Portland and one outside the country. Both projects will include entry in the AIA COTE (Committee on the Environment) student competition.

Option One is a STEAM elementary school on the US Post office site in the Portland Central City. The City is currently planning to purchase the site from the Federal government and redevelop this large property for mixed use development. Urban design and development plans are currently under study. The development may include a much-needed downtown elementary school. We will work with Portland Public Schools / PPS to explore design options for a school on this site.

![Existing USPS site in Downtown Portland,](image)
Option Two is a school for the Pies Descalzos Foundation in Cartagena, Colombia. Pies Descalzos (Bare Feet) Foundation, started by the Colombian recording artist Shakira when she was only 18, builds schools in the most disadvantaged neighborhoods of Colombia. During the past year I’ve had the opportunity to work with the Foundation on the design of a new school in Barranquilla, Colombia. The project was the subject of three design thesis projects last year.

Pies Descalzos plans to build two additional schools in the near future and has an urgent need to design a new school in Cartagena, Colombia. I just returned from a trip to Bogota to meet with the Foundation staff. They have asked us to study the project during fall term. Students who elect this option will be requested to document final drawings in metric, co-title drawings in Spanish and provide written statements in both English and Spanish. The latter requirements are not a problem – I’ve had many past students work within these parameters on other projects.

Additional information on the Foundation may be found on their website:


The webpage has several videos and other information on their work and philosophy.

The AIA COTE Student Competition

Final projects in both options will be entered in the 2018 AIA COTE (Committee on the Environment) “Top Ten” Student Competition. Each year ten projects are selected nationally for the award. The competition involves documentation of the broad sustainability strategy, including urban design. Design and sustainability strategy will go hand and hand in this studio. The final project documentation will be each student’s competition entry. One of my students, Tim Schneider, received an AIA COTE “Top Ten” award in 2016.

Sustainability is not architecture. It is a component of architecture, just as aesthetics, function, and structure are. Although we will participate in the competition, sustainability is not the only emphasis of the studio. The purpose of architecture is to stimulate thoughtful human experience and evoke meaning.
John Weekes, FAIA. Principal, DOWA/IBI Group. Portland.

We are honored to have the participation of John Weekes as a lecturer and visiting studio critic for the term. John has designed several award-winning schools in the region and is a renowned school design consultant around the world. Recent projects include the Rosa Parks Elementary School in Portland (which we will visit), Sandy High School, Wilsonville High School, Redmond High School and, most recently, Trillium Elementary School in West Linn, Oregon. Trillium, which we will visit, challenges your assumptions about a public school. It has “learning neighborhoods”, “learning studios” and no corridors.


**Project Monograph**

A project monograph / portfolio presentation is prepared as a final product of the term, in addition to the digital competition entry.

![Strawberry Vale School. Victoria, BC. Canada. Patkau Architects. Vancouver, BC. Canada](image)
Gerry Gast is an architect / urban designer and member of the University of Oregon Architecture faculty. He served for several years as Visiting Associate Professor in the Program on Urban Studies at Stanford University, where he developed and taught the two core courses in urban design. He is a founding principal of Gast Hillmer Urban Design in the San Francisco Bay area. Recent projects include design of the new Stryiskyi Park campus for the Ukrainian Catholic University in Lviv, Ukraine. He is currently working with the Pies Descalzos Foundation of Colombia on schools in marginalized, high-poverty neighborhoods of the country.

Other professional work includes School Site Redevelopment Studies for the San Francisco Unified School District, “Uptown District” (a mixed use inner site urban development of 313 dwellings and neighborhood retail center in San Diego’s Hillcrest neighborhood), the San Diego County Government Center master plan on the downtown waterfront, the Oregon Science and Technology Park (OSTP) in Gresham –Troutdale, Oregon, and citywide urban design studies for San Clemente, Dana Point and San Diego, California.

Research interests focus on comparative studies of seminal urban design work in North and South America and Europe.