

Architectural Record

Gluck+ Creates a School as a Social and Spatial Crossroads

Elmhurst, New York

By Clifford A. Pearson



Employing bursts of color and a plan that takes cues from the urban grid, Central Queens Academy populates space on the lower floors of a tower originally envisioned for commercial tenants. *Photo © Here and Now Agency – Paul VU*

August 28, 2023

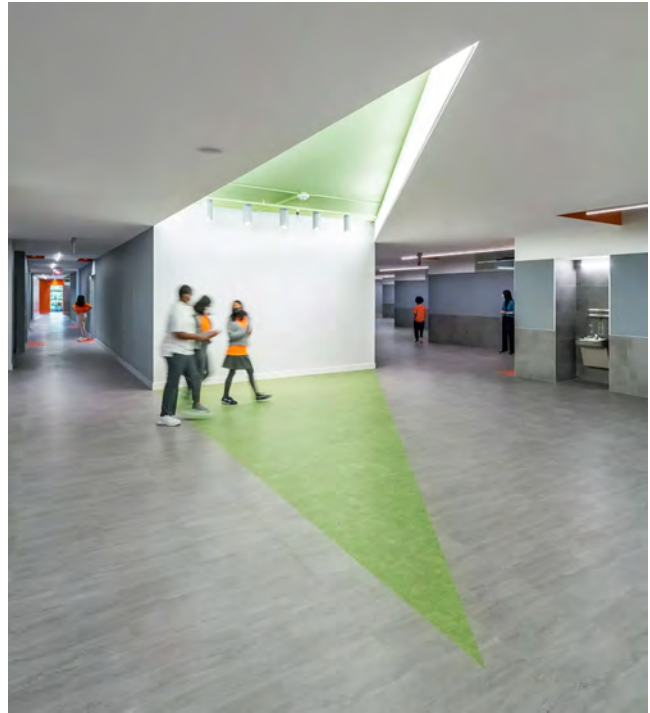
Fitting in can be hard at school. What's true for students applies as well to the school itself,

especially if it's a growing K—8 academy in a mixed-use building in Queens, the most culturally diverse borough of New York City. Occupying two-and-a-half floors in the base of a building that a developer had already erected, Central Queens Academy (CQA) had to work within the constraints of a structure originally envisioned as offices or retail space with 15 stories of apartments above.



Hallway view with a Central Commons on the right. Individual classrooms entrances are distinguished with bold splashes of color and a strip light. *Photo © Here and Now Agency – Paul VU, click to enlarge.*

The school, though, was thrilled to get 83,000 square feet of space, having occupied much smaller, temporary facilities at multiple locations during its first 10 years of operation. “Now we can have music, dance, and theater programs, as well as a full STEM program and phys ed,” says Ashish Kapadia, the school’s executive director. Kapadia and the architects at Gluck+ spent several years looking at about 40 different sites before agreeing to a 48-year lease in a building on the corner of Justice and 55th Avenues in the Elmhurst section of Queens. It shares the first floor with a medical facility run by Emblem Health, but has its own entry on Justice Avenue. Emblem occupies the second floor, while the school has classrooms on the third and fourth floors, in addition to a small lobby and a cafeteria on the ground floor. A gym is nearing completion in a neighboring connected building and will flow seamlessly from the school’s cafeteria.



View of the Crossroads Commons near the school's main stairwell. This area will provide access to a future "gym bridge" leading to an adjacent building. Photo © Here and Now Agency – Paul VU



Learning spaces located around the perimeter of the building are flooded with natural light. Photo © Here and Now Agency – Paul VU

Each of the upper floors of the school offers about 35,000 square feet, which is ideal for offices but difficult for a public charter school serving elementary and middle-school

students. The challenge for Gluck+ principal Charlie Kaplan and his team was to figure out what to do with the space in the center of each floor where daylight is scarce. Their first move was to locate classrooms around the perimeter where floor-to-ceiling glazing helps create bright, attractive interiors. Next, they approached the rest of the space as if it were an urban plan—arranging classrooms in “villages,” laying out hallways as “streets,” and carving out a series of plazas or “commons” in the middle. The school sits at the junction of multiple city grids in Queens, so the architects echoed this sense of urban crossings in the way the commons act as gathering places for different “neighborhoods.”



1



2

Individual commons areas on each floor are envisioned as urban public plazas (1 & 2). Photos © Here and Now Agency – Paul VU



Stairwell connecting the classrooms located on the

CQA, which moved into its new home last fall, now has 800 students in the building and will add another 100 next year. Faculty and staff account for another 110 people. Kindergarten and elementary school classes occupy the third floor, while the middle school is on the fourth. The layout of each floor is near-identical with four commons on each, though the décor and fit-outs vary. The Central Commons on each level has a green carpet that resembles a lawn and a recessed blue ceiling that alludes to the sky. Used for non-traditional teaching, as well as social gathering and relaxing between classes, this space is fitted with built-in seating and a large white wall where

building's third and fourth floors. Photo © Here and Now Agency – Paul VU

children can draw or images can be projected. Kindergarten students get their

own wing at one end of the floor and a commons with a raised platform on one side that can be used as a small stage. On the floor above, this wing is for eighth graders and its commons is lined on three sides with lockers that give the students a hint of the high school experience.

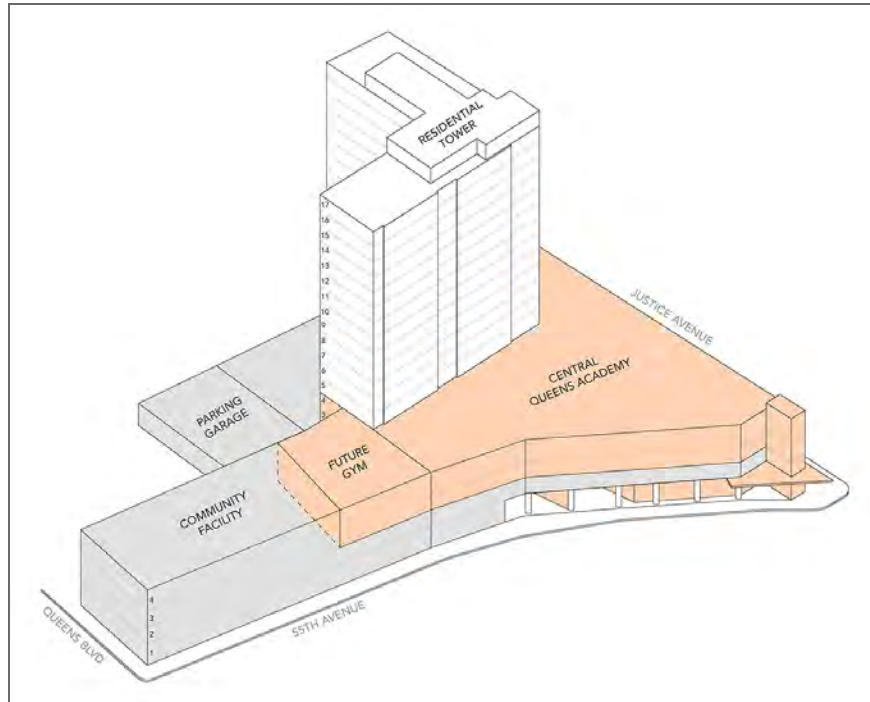


View of learning hub classroom. Photo © Here and Now Agency – Paul VU

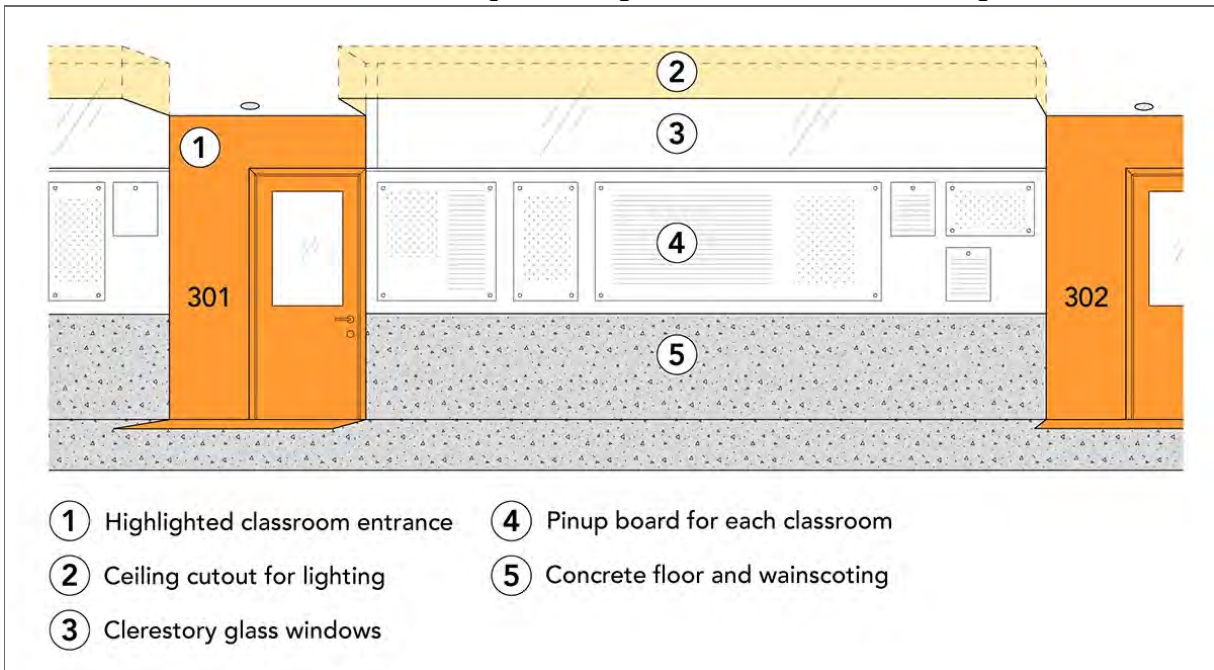
Hallways are lined with concrete-board wainscoting at the base and cork board above for pinning up materials. Clerestory glazing runs above the pin-up board, bringing in daylight from classrooms on the perimeter of the floor. To visually break the long corridors, Kaplan and his team articulated each classroom entry with a cut out above the door, a splash of orange paint, and a strip light. Designed during the Covid pandemic, the school's HVAC system employs one air unit for every two classrooms with a high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filter for each one.

CQA's students come from about 40 different countries and a broad range of racial, linguistic, and economic backgrounds. In turn, the architects designed interiors that would be flexible enough to accommodate different ways of teaching and learning. And by transforming the project's toughest constraints—the areas on each floor farthest from daylight—into social hubs, Gluck+ created a school that aptly expresses the demographic crossroads that is Queens.

Massing diagram. Image © GLUCK+, click to enlarge.



Classroom module diagram. Image © GLUCK+, click to enlarge.



Credits

Location: 88-08 Justice Ave, Elmhurst, Queens

Completion Date: January 2022

Gross Square Footage: 80,000 square feet

Total Construction Cost: \$6,900,000

Client: Friends of Central Queens Academy Charter School

Architect:
GLUCK+
423 W 127th Street, New York, NY 10027
212.690.4950
www.gluckplus.com

Personnel in architect's firm who should receive special credit:

GLUCK+ (in alphabetical order):

Peter Gluck
Charlie Kaplan, Principal in Charge
Yoonjin Kim
Marisa Kolodny
Marc Pittsley
Steve Preston

Architect of record:
Tom Mui, RA, Principal
MYARCHITECT
www.my-architect.com
T. 718.886.8628

Engineers

Structural Engineer:
SILMAN

MEP Engineer:
GEA CONSULTING ENGINEERS

Engineers of Record

MEP Engineer of Record:
EJC Engineering PLLC

Structural Engineer of Record:
Times Building PC Engineering Services

Consultants

Lighting Design:
Lux Populi

Food Service:
Kitchen Consultants, Inc

General contractor:
Grand Construction & Development Group Corp.

Photographer:
Here and Now Agency

Diagrams:
Courtesy of GLUCK+

Real Estate Brokerage and Advisory:
Open Impact Real Estate

Owner's Representative (For CQA):
Zubatkin Owner Representation, LLC

Specifications

Hardware

Locksets: PDQ

Closers: PDQ

Exit Devices: PDQ

Pulls: PDQ

Other Special Hardware: Sugatsune Stainless Steel Hooks and Drawer Pulls

Interior Finishes

Acoustical Ceilings:

USG Ensemble System, International Cellulose K-13 Thermal Insulation Spray,
Armstrong Optima

Cabinetwork and custom woodwork:

Richelieu Standards and Shelves

Paints and Stains:

Zolatone Flex Dimensions, Benjamin Moore Regal

Wall Coverings:

Koroseal Tac-Wall, Koroseal Walltalkers, Guilford of Maine

Plastic Laminate:

Abet Laminati, Wilsonart

Solid Surfacing:

Porcelanosa Krion

Floor and Wall Tile:

Daltile Color Wheel, Nemo Tile Verve, Nemo Tile Basalt, Town and Country Surfaces
Moonstone

Resilient Flooring:

Tarkett Johnsonite Triumph, Tarkett Melange, Tarkett iD Latitude Stone and Concrete,
Tarkett Rubber Tread with Integrated Riser, Rikett RQT Classic, Rikett RQT Medley,
Dex-O-Tex M-E Flooring,

Lighting

Interior Ambient Lighting:

Luxrite LED Flatpanel

Linear LEDs:

Precise LED Zenlite, Precise LED Beam, Precise LED Stud

Downlights:

Precise LED Novation, Acuity Brands Indy LC4, Spectrum Lighting 6" Round Direct Cylinders

Decorative Fixtures:

Coronet Loop, Prudential Lighting O-20, O-40, Coronet PRD-LED, Kuzco Lighting Helena Pendant

Plumbing

Toilets:

Sloan

Urinals:

Toto

Bathroom Sinks and Faucets:

American Standard

Classroom Sinks:

Elkay, Kraus

Classroom Faucets:

Grohe, Watersaver

Plumbing Accessories:

Bobrick, Bradley

Eyewash Station:

Guardian

Mop Sinks and Fillers:

Fiat by Crane

Drinking Fountains:

Elkay

Appliances

Low-temp cook hold Oven:

Alto-SHAAM

Mobile Heated Warming Cabinet:
Metro

Mobile Milk Cooler:
Continental Refrigerator

Teacher Fridge:
GE

Teacher Dishwasher:
GE

Teacher Microwave:
GE

Energy:
LG VRF Systems including HEPA filters and Economizers for maximum classroom air hygiene and outside air



Contributing editor Clifford Pearson is the co-author, with A. Eugene Kohn, of *The World By Design*, and writes about architecture and urbanism.