



Maximizing Capital Dollars: Practical Lessons from New Charter Schools' Facilities



A Joint Paper by Civic Builders & Harlem Children's Zone, Inc.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Concerns about facilities have hampered many charter schools during their start-up period because they distract school leadership from more education-oriented concerns such as hiring and curriculum development. In addition, the imperfect solutions often impact the daily schedule and curricular offerings. In order to help charter schools overcome these obstacles, the New York City Department of Education allocated \$250 million in its five year (FY05-FY09) Capital Plan to develop charter school facilities.

In light of this opportunity for charter schools to build facilities, the Harlem Children's Zone, Inc. and Civic Builders, two non-profit organizations with experience in building facilities for charter schools, jointly authored this brief to share their experiences, offer suggestions and encourage schools and designers to build facilities that nurture existing or potential partnerships. We focus our attention on five areas where school facilities design and partnership decisions overlap: community use, space-sharing tensions, flexible spaces, partnerships, and the impact of finance on design.

1. Design Choices Can Encourage and Facilitate Community Use

In addition to providing space for charter schools' core work of educating children, school buildings can also provide opportunities for community use and partnerships. Design choices can facilitate community use while still allowing the student body to remain safe and have its own needs met. What's more, engaging the community in the design process, and respecting community needs through all phases of development and construction, can contribute to a community's positive feelings about the space.

2. Design and Management Decisions Can Ease Space Sharing Tensions

Developing partnerships within the same building often means that multiple groups or individuals feel ownership of the same spaces, which can lead to tension. Solutions include: building multiple storage spaces throughout the building; design for both autonomy and designated shared spaces; and consider the pros and cons of out-sourcing or developing in-house support services.

3. Build in Flexibility

As charter schools grow, their needs, partners and size will change. Hence, the importance of keeping spaces flexible and even "raw" in some cases to meet the dynamic needs of the school.

4. Partnerships Add Value

Partnerships can benefit schools by providing complementary services to children, families and the community during school or out-of-school time. As a tenant, a partner can help pay rent to cover expenses. Decisions may hinge on school financing and what partners are appropriate in a school building.

5. Financing

The financing of construction or renovation may influence design and partnership decisions if a school assumes some debt as a result. The design process must consider the constraints of a non-profit or government budget while at the same time building a bright, beautiful, durable school facility.

This brief encourages charter school leaders and their design teams to build for current or future partnerships that complement the needs of the children and the school.

Charter schools in New York City have a tremendous opportunity to develop new school facilities thanks to the New York City Department of Education's five year capital plan (FY05-FY09). As part of this plan, the City has allocated \$250 million to develop charter school facilities throughout New York City. Successful applicants will have an unusual and important chance to design a space that facilitates their mission, a concept that stands in stark contrast to the challenges that many charter schools have faced with facilities. Often, since many charters envision themselves as community schools, this means constructing space that will serve school children, their families, and the neighborhood at large.

Prior to the City's capital plan, the Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) and Civic Builders (Civic) both used other financial mechanisms to create innovative solutions to charter schools' real estate needs. In this brief, HCZ and Civic come together to share what each of us has learned about the overlap between school facilities' design and mission. In addition, Civic and HCZ encourage those who might utilize the City's capital funds (or who are building schools in other parts of the country), to think broadly about potential partnerships that could be brought into the facility.

Specifically, we draw on our collective development experience to explore ways in which building and design choices impact the feasibility of multi-use school facilities with space sharing partnerships. We have identified five areas where school facilities' design and space sharing decisions overlap: community use, ownership issues, multi-purpose rooms, partnership structures, and financing arrangements. In each, we will examine the design decisions of four different charter school buildings: Bronx Charter School for the Arts (Bronx Arts), which was built by Civic on a small budget with only the charter school in mind; HCZ's Community Center/Promise Academy I Charter School building, which afforded the agency the opportunity to create a building that would highlight best practices in youth and community development; Bronx Lighthouse Charter School, Civic's most recently completed building; and 900 Van Nest Avenue in the Bronx, a Civic project in development which proposes that a charter school and a public school will come in at the same time as new tenants of a Department of Education building and share space.

Who We Are: Civic Builders ("Civic")

Incorporated in 2002, Civic Builders ("Civic") is a non-profit facilities developer that provides turnkey solutions for New York charter school real estate needs. By assuming responsibility for building planning, developing, and financing activities, Civic relieves charter schools of the burden of navigating one of the most complex and competitive real estate marketplaces in the world, enabling school administrators to focus time and resources on the important work of educating children. As a mitigator of facilities risk and uncertainty, Civic helps create an environment that attracts government, philanthropic and commercial funds for the creation of new charter school real estate. As a pioneer in the field, Civic shares its innovations with developers in other urban centers, fostering the creation of state-of-the-art charter school facilities nationwide.

Civic has a strong interest in exploring how multi-tenant facilities can be maximized for the benefit of charters, either by bringing programmatic resources to the table, or by enhancing the likelihood of a potential school site being financed. Civic completed its first soup to nuts development project, Bronx Charter School for the Arts, in summer 2004. The school, which currently serves 242 students in grades K – 5, is a state-of-the-art facility housed in a 24,000 square foot former salami factory in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx. Civic has recently begun construction on Bronx Arts "Phase II," which will transform the building's basement into a combination cafeteria/auditorium, with raw space left for additional offices and an on site health clinic.

Civic's second project, Bronx Lighthouse Charter School at 1001 Intervale Avenue in the Bronx is under construction, fully funded, and on track to open for the academic year 2006-2007. Once fully operational, Bronx Lighthouse Charter School will serve 525 students.

In addition to Bronx Arts and Bronx Lighthouse, Civic Builders has played an instrumental role in rehabilitating Excellence Charter School in the Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, and has two other school facilities under contract and several others under review for client/site matching. One of these sites, at 900 Van Nest Avenue in the Bronx, is the potential home of a public school and a charter school – a unique space-sharing and building financing opportunity that we will explore in more detail later in this paper.

Over the next two years, Civic intends to develop a nine building portfolio of hundreds of thousands of square feet, serving approximately 3,700 charter school students in many of New York's neediest communities.

Who We Are: Harlem Children's Zone ("HCZ")

Founded in 1970, Harlem Children's Zone, Inc. ("HCZ") is an innovative, non-profit, community-based organization that works to enhance the quality of life for children and families in some of New York City's most devastated neighborhoods. Through over 20 centers, HCZ serves more than 13,000 children and adults, including over 9,000 at-risk children. The emphasis of HCZ's work is not just on education, social service and recreation, but also on rebuilding the very fabric of community life.

HCZ operates programs for children and families out of 20 sites, including many public schools. Drawing from the belief that public school buildings are community assets, HCZ helped pioneer the use of public schools by community organizations to run after-school, evening and weekend programs for children and families. HCZ's educational, social and recreational complement of wraparound programs helps buttress schools' educational missions.

Prior to 2003 the organization did not own any property from which it could run programs for children. Instead HCZ learned how facilities impact outreach, education and services for children by sharing spaces in public schools and renting storefronts.

Under two decades of leadership by President/CEO Geoffrey Canada, HCZ has developed over 25 programs and initiatives designed to improve the outcomes for poor children. Many of these programs provide wraparound services to schools by offering high-quality early-childhood development programs (Baby College, Harlem Gems Prekindergarten, Harlem Gems Head Start), providing Peacemakers (Americorps-funded, college-aged interns) in the classrooms to assist teachers during the school day, running out-of-school-time programs at public schools (Beacon Schools, Peacemakers, TRUCE, TRUCE Fitness & Nutrition Center, Employment and Technology Center), organizing the community (Community Pride), offering social work services to support families in crisis (Family Support Center), and helping young people get into and graduate from college (College Success).

These programs have been critical in improving outcomes for poor children in public schools. At the same time, HCZ also believed that it could further improve academic outcomes by opening a charter school. However, the agency lacked both a suitable educational facility and the financing to run a school on solely private dollars. After years of dreaming, twin opportunities arose to both build a facility and apply for a K-12 charter school with public funding: HCZ leapt at both.

HCZ Promise Academy Charter Schools now includes three separate schools under two charters: two elementary schools, (HCZ Promise Academy I and II), and HCZ Promise Academy I Middle School. Each year, HCZ adds grades by admitting new kindergarten and 6th graders. When the charters reach full capacity (K-12 and K-6), the schools' combined population will reach 1,860.

In January 2005, after a four -year span from purchase to construction, HCZ opened its new six-story facility on 125th Street in Harlem. Co-located inside the Community Center, which offers academic, social and recreational programs for children and families after-school, evenings and weekends, are HCZ Promise Academy IMiddle School; the Harlem Children's Health Project which is the Children's Health Fund's new medical, dental and mental health center; HCZ's Practitioners Institute (a program where other organizations come to learn about HCZ's programs); and HCZ's administrative offices. For the majority of the project, HCZ utilized an in-house staff person as project manager who worked in conjunction with Tishman Construction Corporation's construction management team for the project.

Designing Multi-Tenant Spaces: Lessons Learned

We have organized our findings into five major areas: making design decisions for community use, mitigating classroom ownership issues, setting aside raw/flexible space, choosing partners, and financing issues. There is still much to learn, but we hope these lessons will inform future projects and continue the collaborative dialogue.

1. Design Choices Can Help Encourage and Facilitate Community Use

In addition to providing space for charter schools' core work of educating children, school buildings can also provide opportunities for neighborhood use and community partnerships. Design choices can help facilitate community access while still allowing the student body to remain safe and have its own needs met. What's more, engaging the community in the design process, and being respectful of community needs through all phases of development and construction, contribute to a community's positive feelings about the space once it is built.

Engage the community in design

Bronx Arts received a special grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to engage local community members in the design process for their facility. In some sense, defining the appropriate "community" for design discussions is challenging for some charter schools, since students are chosen by lottery once the school is ready to open. In the case of Bronx Arts, the architect enlisted the help of an urban planner, along with Civic Builders, to engage the community in a design charette, a kind of design brainstorm session resulting in several possible broad strokes school design plans. Prospective parents were engaged to talk about what's important to them about the physical space, and then given the opportunity to block out different ways to design the space.

The Bronx Arts community planning process resulted in a number of valuable design innovations. Among them was the creation of internal "pods," -- open common areas shared by 3-4 classrooms. In the Bronx Arts building, the pods provide additional efficient learning spaces outside the classrooms for peer-to-peer tutoring, or special needs instruction, or breakout groups. The design also generated a significant feeling of ownership and buy-in from those community members whose children were chosen to be part of the school.

Be Sensitive to Community Concerns During Pre-Construction

Even before construction begins, a positive message can be sent to the community about the intended relationship between the neighborhood, the future facility and its tenants. Prior to HCZ's purchase and subsequent demolition of its site, the property on 125th Street consisted of a set of decrepit, empty buildings. HCZ took great care to have the site exterminated several weeks in advance of demolition (instead of the typical 2 days) to avoid creating a rat problem for the neighborhood when the site was demolished. In addition, by tearing down the dilapidated buildings immediately after purchase, HCZ sent a message to the community that this site would not lie dormant in for years waiting to be flipped by real estate developers, but rather that the owner intended to build something soon. HCZ painted a bright, colorful mural on site letting the community know a school was coming. About a year later, construction began on the site.

Specific Design Choices that Encourage Community Use: HCZ's story

Historically, HCZ has forged partnerships with public schools in Harlem that enable it to keep the buildings open during out-of-school time for academic, recreational and social services. For example, HCZ operates two Beacon schools and six after-school and summer programs at public schools in Central Harlem.

HCZ strongly believes that school facilities are key resources to help develop communities. Therefore, HCZ wanted to incorporate community-centric design choices into its new facility.

HCZ's team, which included HCZ staff and the architectural firms of Davis Brody Bond and Garrison McNeil and Associates, set out to design a facility that would enable HCZ to showcase its holistic model and vision for a community school. HCZ knew the school building would incorporate a charter school, an after school program, a health center, HCZ's Practitioners Institute and the business offices of HCZ, and that it would remain open into the evenings and weekends with programs for children and adults in keeping with the philosophy of its Beacon School programs. Some design choices HCZ made included:

Multiple points of entry: HCZ designed multiple entries that lead directly to specific areas of the building such as the gymnasium, the cafeteria and the "blue room" (as its dedicated community space came to be known because of its blue ceramic tile). Creating different entries complements the work of the security team: they can direct traffic to specific spaces and close off other entries that would otherwise give large groups access to the entire building. They also have separate entrances for the schoolchildren and "business people" who visit the site to meet with HCZ administrators, the Practitioners Institute or the health center. The entrance for children deliberately leads to the open and airy staircase that children climb (for exercise) to reach the classrooms on floors 2, 3 and 4 while the business entrance leads adults to the elevators and floors 5 and 6.

Designated community use space: In line with HCZ's view of schools as community assets, it wanted to create flexible space that could be used by the community. Therefore, the building team specifically created the "blue room" as a large room fitted out with technology for presentations, so that the community has a space that it can use for workshops or meetings. It is located on the ground level and has a separate entrance and bathroom facilities within the room so it can be self-contained. This can restrict access to the rest of the building, including the school area.

Flexible, multi-purpose rooms that meet school and community needs at low or no-cost: HCZ designed its gymnasium and cafeteria as large, flexible spaces that could serve multiple purposes for the agency's

own programs as well as other community programs and events. These spaces also include state-of-the-art technology such as speaker systems, video projection and drop-down screens to meet the needs of a variety of events for different audiences. HCZ and Promise Academy Charter School have used the gym to host the schools' admission lotteries, dinners for prospective charter school families, the charter school basketball league, a book fair for children, an annual Kwanza festival, school dances and a monthly farmers market. In addition, community members have used the space to host hundreds of visitors for Black History Month events and memorials to leaders who have impacted the lives of children.

Deliberate Streetscape Orientation also Encourages Community Participation

Paying attention to what can be seen at the street level of the building is another way to encourage community participation and acceptance – and even, some positive neighborhood impact.

For example, the street-level floor of HCZ's Community Center features a lot of glass to display a sense of openness and connection to the community. Community members can see right into the gym, which is often a hub of activity, and it generates interest in HCZ and its programs. At the same time, some of that glass is frosted and all of the windows have two types of shades: one to block out light entirely for presentations and videos; another that allows light into the room but obscures visibility to protect privacy.

Similarly, Bronx Arts made an early decision to put its arts rooms at the front of its building where the windows were, and to use skylights to bring natural light to the classrooms. The two arts rooms and the cafeteria (with flexible seating) all have entrances right off the lobby, which allow Bronx Arts to share these spaces and protect access to the rest of the building.

At Bronx Lighthouse, space for a health center that will be open to the families of all students was put at the front of the school, so that parents and siblings would not need to travel to other parts of the building to access services.

2. Design Choices and Facility Management Ideas that Can Ease “Ownership” Issues

All schools feel ownership over their space; those who are fortunate enough to have new space built for them feel particular pride of ownership. When a school or agency's mission also involves sharing some of those spaces, tensions can arise. Here are a few solutions to mitigating those issues based on our experience to date:

Lesson One: don't scrimp on storage space!

HCZ's experience running the after-school programs in other schools led to a very practical design solution: closets. Often tension arises between after-school programs and day school teachers over the use of storage space and the sense of who “owns” the classroom. Both groups need places to store materials for their programs, but a traditional classroom space does not include closet space dedicated to an after-school program. HCZ made sure that each classroom had three closets with separate locks – two for the teachers and one for the after-school program working in that space. This simple design element helps to reduce territorialism between the school and after-school programs.

On the flip side, space and budget constraints have limited storage and administrative accommodations for potential partners at Bronx Arts. This lack of storage space has made it more challenging for Bronx Arts to develop successful partnerships.

Lesson Two: Create as much autonomy for schools sharing buildings as possible, while still taking advantage of the efficiency of common spaces

Civic has also learned from the experiences of its partners sharing spaces within public schools, and hopes to put that experience to the design test at 900 Van Nest Avenue in the Bronx, a future home to a charter school and a public school.

In most cases of charter schools and public schools sharing space, charter school staff, having arrived second, face major challenges finding a way to successfully share common spaces with the public school. Most charters struggle a number of “autonomy” issues, including when and how to use/share the cafeteria, the library, the gym, the speaker system, how to work within DOE contracts with foodservice providers and janitorial services, how to establish their own school culture, and how to make sure their students are safe and feel safe, particularly when school populations are different ages (i.e., an elementary charter school sharing space in a high school).

What is unprecedented about the Van Nest proposal is the idea of building the facility with two separate schools in mind, and making design choices that allow each school to have its own identity, and much of its own space, but still benefit from access to shared spaces.

To date, Civic and its architects have imagined the project largely as two separate schools, with the core of the building used as common space. Each school will have its own entrance that will lead into self-contained hallways, stairwells and classrooms, and each will have a cafeteria. Spaces to be shared include the kitchen, gym, and a rooftop play area. Each school will have its own separate and controlled access to the common spaces. All shared spaces will be maintained by the Department of Education (DOE), with each school having the right to use the common spaces proportionally based on the number of students attending in a given year.

Lesson Three: Be Thoughtful About Facilities Management

For the Van Nest project, the DOE is likely to run and pay for janitorial services for both schools. Uncommon Schools, the charter school operator for this site, feels that what they cede in potential control in this area, they gain in additional funds for educational programming.

By contrast, HCZ has chosen to develop in-house capacity for a number of functions that many organizations and corporations choose to outsource: security, foodservices and facilities management, among others. Particularly in the fields of security and foodservices, this deliberate decision reflects how those departments are integral to operating a successful community center. HCZ has also developed its own facilities department in order to ensure timely service and high quality.

Security

The security staff must keep the building safe while not keeping the community at a distance. The head of the security team graduated from HCZ’s programs and therefore keenly understands its mission and community-friendly approach. By paying security staff directly, HCZ cut out the middleman of an outside security management company. Therefore HCZ can pay the staff a higher

rate than if they were contracted through an outside company. This also helps to develop a sense of staff loyalty to the HCZ, not to an outside agency.

Food Service

Given the obesity levels that HCZ has documented at 44% among elementary school children living in the Harlem Children's Zone, HCZ had a vision for creating a kitchen that would cook delicious, healthy food for all of the Promise Academy Charter Schools, as well as for HCZ's prekindergarten and Head Start programs. To achieve this vision, HCZ hired its own executive chef and staff to run the kitchen. In addition to daily meals, the foodservices department manages the farmers market and conducts gourmet, healthy cooking classes for parents, helping to encourage their use of healthy food and increase their knowledge of nutrition. FoodChange, a non-profit that provides healthy, emergency meals to families as part of its mission, helped HCZ to think about the design of the kitchen and transferred one of its staff persons who became the executive chef.

The downside of in-house services is that it is harder to manage a department in which the governing agency has no particular expertise. However, HCZ finds that the benefits outweigh the learning curve for managing their new departments. In-house services enable HCZ to train staff to its own high standards, quickly handle special projects and ensure that the staff is loyal to the organization, not an outside group.

3. Build in Flexibility

Both HCZ and Bronx Arts knew that they wanted a health center in their buildings. And in both cases – HCZ because they had not yet found the right partner, and Bronx Arts because they did not have the funds – they left part of their building unfinished. HCZ intended to find a partner health organization to build out the space and operate the health center at a later date, but in the meantime, the building team reserved a section of a floor for that purpose.

Bronx Arts left its whole basement raw during the first phase of construction. Thanks to a grant from the City Council and its continued partnership with Civic Builders, Bronx Arts is now building a combination cafeteria/auditorium, or “cafetorium,” in the basement. (The original lunchroom is being converted into classrooms for the incoming 6th graders.) They hope to find additional funding to build out a health clinic for the students and their family members, which they will provide free of charge to the provider in return for free health services to the school community. They will continue to leave that space raw in the hopes that they will be able to make that dream a reality.

HCZ also found it useful to leave the designated health center space as raw and flexible as possible. Therefore, the construction team just built the skin of that part of the building and brought mechanical, electric and plumbing near the space so that the health center could connect to it.

In addition, in all our case examples, most rooms were built with enough flexibility to allow for a change in use, and nearly all buildings have taken advantage of that. Bronx Arts' former lunchroom is being readily converted into two classrooms for 6th graders. HCZ has turned spaces originally designated for a music room into a fitness center. Bronx Lighthouse's offices are being built as one room divided into 6 smaller spaces; all partitions can be taken down or rearranged very easily if the school needs to take up some of the space for additional classrooms. Typically, Civic Builders uses drywall rather than cinderblocks to build walls, which allows for ease in taking down walls and reconfiguring space. Civic's has also tested a number of other material and design configurations to allow for future growth. In the initial Bronx Arts construction, for example, builders reinforced

the steel beams on the ceiling, so that the school could easily add a second floor to the building. Without the foresight and the reinforcement, this option would only be available if they tore open the existing ceiling, which would result in great expense and loss of use of the facility during construction.

4. Partnerships Add Value

There are a number of logical programmatic partners for charter schools, including early childhood programs, health centers, after school programs, and adult/community programs like computer classes, job training programs, GED programs, etc. For HCZ, which already operates many of these kinds of community-based programs, it was part of the plan from the onset to operate multiple programs in conjunction with its charter. HCZ's choices about partners and programs for its community center stemmed, and will continue to stem, from adherence to the organization's overall mission to improve outcomes for poor children. For instance, some members of the community proposed that HCZ consider a commercial tenant in its new building, in order to help the overall economic development of the neighborhood and 125th Street, and increase the flow of pedestrian traffic on the street. But a commercial tenant would eat up space that could be used for mission-driven programs and partners. In addition the projected rental income was not large enough to outweigh the benefits of programs so the idea was rejected. By contrast, while HCZ doesn't operate health centers, it felt strongly about the need to bring a health care provider into the new space, precisely because such a partnership would further the mission. The Children's Health Fund (CHF), in partnership with the HCZ, Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health and New York-Presbyterian Hospital, opened its health center, the Harlem Children's Health Project, in May 2006.

HCZ chose to partner with CHF because of its experience and skill in serving poor children throughout the country through a variety of innovative settings. Early meetings solidified a sense of the complementary nature of their missions as both groups shared the same philosophy of extended hours, health education, and innovative outreach programs to reach children and families.

HCZ develops partnerships with groups whose work it respects and whose philosophy fits well with its mission. Often, HCZ has to say no to some partnerships because they are not aligned with the mission or it would pull too many resources from existing responsibilities and priorities. HCZ also needs to ensure that the potential partner group or organization is appropriate to have in a building with children – for example, HCZ might not invite a clinic serving adults with severe mental illness in the school building, despite its belief in the work.

In some cases, complementarity can be achieved even if partner missions are distinct. Xanthe Jory, Bronx Arts' Executive Director, commented "space sharing partners don't have to have perfect alignment with our mission, though of course that would be great. They need to be organizations that we have some trust with, that will treat the building with respect, and, if they're working with kids, to have a tightly run program." Bronx Arts currently partners with DreamYard, an arts program for local teens. DreamYard is aligned with Bronx Arts in that both have an arts focus, but DreamYard's program doesn't benefit Bronx Arts' student population explicitly.

For Civic, the idea of choosing prospective co-tenants, provided the site is big enough to allow for the possibility, has two potential benefits: in one scenario, a co-tenant brings programmatic resources to bear, similar to the Children's Health Fund partnership described above. In a second

scenario, a co-tenant who pays rent makes the building more financially viable, particularly if the development process required a mortgage or other financing.

5. Issues Related to Financing Buildings

The financing of a building may influence design and partnership decisions as well. In some cases, a capital campaign by a well-established organization may pave the way for the renovations or build-out to be completed without accruing debt, as was the case with HCZ's building. More often, charter schools, partner agencies and charter school developers must think about public dollars and debt financing in advance. In either case, the design process must keep in mind the constraints of a non-profit or government budget.

Using Private Dollars to Build the Facility: HCZ staff had scoured Harlem for years, searching for a site large enough to accommodate the vision for an extended day, extended year school paired with a community center with extended hours. Finally, in 2000, a new piece of property came up for sale and HCZ's Board of Trustees quickly approved the purchase of the land through funds from its endowment. The Board planned and succeeded in financing the remainder through a capital campaign and Board gifts.

The 92,000 square foot facility cost \$42.5M to construct. HCZ's Board of Trustees launched a capital campaign that privately financed the project without a bank mortgage. Using private dollars, while not always feasible, was highly beneficial to the project because it freed HCZ from any external obligations. For example, while many local groups wanted HCZ to put commercial space on the ground level of the building, it was not needed as per contract requirements or to help pay a mortgage. Therefore, it could dedicate the building entirely to direct services for children and their families.

Using Public Dollars in Creative Ways: Civic is currently in the due diligence phase of a potential building at 900 Van Nest Avenue in the Bronx, which they hope will be the future home of two schools: a charter school operated by Uncommon Schools, serving 280 students in grades 5 - 8, and a Department of Education (DOE) public school serving 550 students in grades K – 8.

Civic was already working with Uncommon Schools, a charter school operator with four schools in New York City, to find an appropriate site for one of its newest charters when it came across a 65,000 square foot building at 900 Van Nest Avenue. The facility was too big to house just one charter school, but it had great potential. Civic began to consider possible other tenants for the space that would make it financially viable to develop. Ultimately, it decided to approach the DOE as a potential partner in a joint venture: to open a public school and a charter school in the same facility. For the DOE, the project represents a chance to create much-needed capacity in the public school system in a neighborhood clamoring for more choices, and the opportunity to get in on a great site that it wouldn't have had access to without Civic Builders and the charter school interests they were representing. For Civic and Uncommon Schools, partnering with the DOE solved the building financing issue, since DOE funds would pay for the development of the site, and also resulted in more multi-purpose space options (i.e. gym, cafeteria), than they might otherwise be able to afford. The community benefits as well, by getting two new schools, which they desperately need.

Using partnerships to offset ongoing tenant/ ownership costs: When Civic Builders built Bronx Arts, the goal was to meet the needs of the charter school with a small budget. Space-sharing partnerships were not a strong consideration during the planning and design process. Bronx Arts currently has one

active space sharing arrangement in place, with DreamYard, an organization that provides weekend arts education to teens. DreamYard used Bronx Arts' lunchroom, lobby, dance room and art room every Saturday from October 2005 through April 2006. Bronx Arts charged a fee for use of the space that covered indirect costs, custodial services, and a little extra for the school's general operating budget.

Conclusion

Civic Builders and the Harlem Children's Zone hope that charter schools, governments, developers, design firms and non-profit agencies can draw on our experiences in charter school facility development and the incorporation of partnerships and/or wrap-around services. Whenever possible and within budget constraints, HCZ and Civic suggest dreaming big and thinking ahead: consider space, design, storage and access solutions for schools that complement your educational use while remaining flexible and accessible for partnerships even if the specific partners have not yet been determined.

Looking ahead, the Harlem Children's Zone and Civic Builders will continue to collaborate by applying to the School Construction Authority and the New York City Department of Education for a Charter School Facilities Matching Grant to develop a school facility space for HCZ Promise Academy I Charter Elementary School. If funded, they plan to incorporate these lessons learned into its design and to devise new and creative solutions that best serve the educational interests of the students.