Cherry Park Elementary School of Language Immersion

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Executive Summary
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Serving grades K-5, Cherry Park Elementary School of Language Immersion is the result of the consolidation of three preexisting language immersion programs within Rock Hill Schools--Spanish at Ebinport and Richmond Drive Elementary Schools, and French at Rosewood Elementary School. The merging of these programs and associated resources at a central location allows the school district to provide a cohesive language immersion program that fosters bilingualism, biliteracy, and bicultural awareness from an early age.

The new facility was built alongside the existing Sullivan Middle School, which was partially renovated to house Cherry Park’s fourth- and fifth-grade classroom wing. This location will allow for the easy transition of Cherry Park students to Sullivan Middle School, where their in-depth language studies can continue uninterrupted through the eighth grade.

The nature of the language immersion program and the logistics of merging three school communities called for a high level of stakeholder involvement and input throughout the early phases of this project. The result is a facility that clearly complements the school’s educational program and mission. Cherry Park Elementary is a notable example of successful collaboration in the development of effective design solutions.
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Scope of Work and Budget
Scope of Work and Budget

**Budget**
$19,000,000

**Scope**
The scope of Cherry Park Elementary School expansion and improvements to Sullivan Middle School included:

- The addition of a new K-3 facility
- Renovations to the existing "F" wing at Sullivan Middle School to accommodate grades four and five
- Renovations to accommodate existing program and space deficiencies at Sullivan Middle School

The project totaled 73,258 square feet of new space and 183,607 square feet of renovated space.
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School and Community Engagement
The Community
South Carolina’s fifth-largest city, Rock Hill lies near the North Carolina border and is part of the greater Charlotte metropolitan area. It is home to more than 74,000 residents, and its school district serves roughly 18,000 students.

Stakeholders
This project’s stakeholders include:

• Students (including those from Ebinport, Richmond Drive, and Rosewood Elementary Schools)
• Faculty/staff (including those from Ebinport, Richmond Drive, and Rosewood Elementary Schools)
• Families/parents (including those from Ebinport, Richmond Drive, and Rosewood Elementary Schools)
• The school district
• The broader Rock Hill community

Challenges
This project presented the distinct challenge of designing a facility that would meet the needs and expectations of three established school communities, each with its own students, teachers, and administrators.

This project also had a set goal of becoming the first LEED-certified school in the district.

Available Assets
The existing Sullivan Middle School facility, which once operated as a high school, had space available to accommodate the upper grades of Cherry Park Elementary. The existing building is now connected to the K-3 addition, and the proximity of the elementary and middle school facilities creates an educational pipeline that strengthens the district’s language immersion program.
Value of Process and Project to Community at Large

The two-day design charrette for this project included participation by school administrators, teachers, students, parents, community members, architects, and engineers. Discussion covered challenges and opportunities for Cherry Park as well as specific input around the development of spaces to support the language immersion program. The charrette created an opportunity for community collaboration that hugely benefited the project overall.

As a LEED-certified facility, the school saves the district dollars in energy expenses and provides a healthy environment for students and staff. Indoor contaminants are reduced through the use of low- or zero-VOC (volatile organic compounds) materials, high-rated filters in ventilation systems, and sufficient exhaust systems for spaces (such as housekeeping areas and art rooms) that might house hazardous gases or chemicals.

The quality of the final Cherry Park Elementary School facility and the client’s satisfaction with the process throughout has set a new precedent for all future Rock Hill Schools projects. The effect upon future school design projects will have an impact that is felt far beyond the teachers, students, and families of Cherry Park.

Furthermore, this facility will be an integral part of the continued success of the district’s language immersion program, supporting the development of a population that is prepared to participate in the world community.
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Educational Environment
Educational Vision and Goals of the School
Cherry Park’s language immersion program is based on the Utah Dual Language Immersion model. Under this approach, students spend half of their school day learning in English, while the other half of their day is taught in a foreign language.

Cherry Park Elementary aspires to achieve national recognition for developing bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural students. Their goal for students is the expansion of communication skills and an increased connection to the world community.

How the Environment Supports the Curriculum
Because the students of Cherry Park split their time between two languages, classrooms are arranged in pairs, sharing a common door. While one class is learning in English, the neighboring class might be learning math in French. The connection between classrooms allows the program’s teachers to move easily between the spaces as the classes transition between languages.

One of the key concepts to arise out of the design charrette was the Casa Maison (literally, "House House")—an open, collaborative space outside the classrooms where both teachers may instruct their classes jointly or facilitate small group work. The school has three Casa Maisons, one each in the wings shared by Kindergarten and first grade, second and third grades, and fourth and fifth grades.

How the Environment Supports a Variety of Learning and Teaching Styles
The Casa Maison concept allows instructors to take their students out of the traditional classroom setting for collaborative learning. The new addition also includes a flexible learning lab, which can be used by Cherry Park students or for teacher professional development or community use.
How the Environment is Adaptable and Flexible
Flexible furniture throughout the school may be arranged and rearranged as needed, and the facility’s spaces were designed to support a variety of configurations. The ability to immediately adapt the space to suit instructional needs enhances learning and engagement for students.

Additionally, flexible walls and room dividers allow further modification to the environment. The fourth- and fifth-grade Casa Maison, flexible lab, and cafeteria/multipurpose space (shown above) can all be separated into smaller environments with operable walls that can be entirely hidden when not in use. (See the partition visible at far right in the lower image.)
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Physical Environment
Physical Attributes of the Environment
The most distinct features of the Cherry Park Elementary School design are the use of adjoining classroom spaces with a common door, and the shared Casa Maison collaborative space found in each wing. Additionally, the school’s multilevel design takes advantage of the existing site and provides a feeling of security for the K-1 playground, located between the building wing and upper level parking. Inside, 50 percent of the school’s floor area meets LEED v4 targets for daylight autonomy.

How the Facility Fits within the Larger Context of the Community
Sullivan Middle School, originally a high school, has stood in the community for roughly half a century. The design of the adjoining Cherry Park Elementary addition brings new life to the site and also places Rock Hill Schools’ consolidated language immersion program at a more centralized location.

How the Project Inspires and Motivates
Having a direct involvement in this project’s early stages gave Cherry Park teachers a strong sense of ownership over the school and its features, allowing them to become the facility’s greatest champions. They know and appreciate why things were done the way they were, and their enthusiasm for and satisfaction with the project is one of the most inspiring outcomes of the process.

As Rock Hill Schools’ first project to receive LEED certification, Cherry Park Elementary School of Language Immersion has also set a standard that will continue to spur the district’s sustainability efforts going forward.
Results of the Process and Project
How the Project Achieves Educational Goals and Objectives
The design charrette process proved invaluable to the creation of an educational space that truly supports Cherry Park’s mission. This collaborative discussion resulted in a vision for Cherry Park Elementary School that guided the project from that point forward. The concepts generated at this early stage, most notably the Casa Maison, allowed the design to be tailored to the specific requirements of the educational program.

How the Project Achieves School District Goals
The new, centralized facility allows Rock Hill Schools to provide a cohesive language immersion program for elementary school students that now feeds directly into the adjoining middle school property. The project allowed the school district to successfully bring together three programs, consolidating resources and creating a clear pipeline for students through their middle school years.

This project also achieved the goal of becoming the district’s first LEED-certified school, a major milestone in Rock Hill Schools' sustainability efforts.

How the Project Achieves Community Goals
This project saw the successful merging of three separate school communities and programs, and the inclusion of community input during the process ensured that final outcome reflected a collaborative process.

Unintended Results and Achievements of the Process and Project
The positive effect of the design charrette upon the entire design process was more than could have been hoped for. Rock Hill Schools’ follow-through on the concepts developed at this early stage allowed for the design of a facility that truly caters to the school’s program and is fully embraced by its occupants.

Additionally, the quality of the final design and the achievement of the district’s first LEED certification have set a new bar for future school construction projects in the area. Perhaps the clearest indication of the client’s satisfaction with this design is the district’s expressed desire that all future projects meet the standard established by Cherry Park Elementary.