

October 13, 2015

Good Design = Good Business” Award Winner Strengthens the Mission of Progressive Public Schools



Isackson Design Group (IDG) announced today that the firm has been honored with a 2015 “Good Design = Good Business” Award from the Baltimore Chapter of the American Institute of Architects for its work on City Neighbors Hamilton (Grades K-8) and City Neighbors High School (Grades 9-12).

Inspired by the new vision for what public school could be for urban students, IDG transformed an Industrial Age former public middle school site to a warm and inviting setting that exudes exemplary 21st Century physical learning environment to house both schools. With new separate entrances and shared community spaces, the design aligns the physical learning environment with the mission of City Neighbors schools through project-based learning, arts integration, parental involvement and community engagement.

“The design team collaborated closely with the school leaders through six years of renovation,” Aisha Isackson, President of IDG explained. “Despite a limited budget and challenging schedules, the innovative yet cost-effective design solution resulted in a learning environment that clearly values independence, creativity, collaboration, communication and critical thinking.”

As the operator of two new progressive public schools for 600 Baltimore City public school students, City Neighbors Foundation required that the physical environment play a strong role as “the third teacher” in the education of the students. For each school to achieve its mission, the physical environment must scaffold and support pedagogy and practice, while communicating value and worth to those in it. It must wield practical and symbolic power, showing all who entered that it mattered in its beauty, function, and philosophical alignment where everyone in “Known, Loved, and Inspired.”

Bobbi Macdonald, Executive Director of the City Neighbors Foundation that operates the public charter schools, said, “IDG created an extraordinary design solution that reflects the City Neighbors vision and mission. We couldn’t be more grateful to IDG President, Aisha Isackson, AIA, who is a founder of City Neighbors, and has served as our designer and project manager since we first opened in 2005.”

The jury’s comments included stating that the project “demonstrates that Good Design is Good Business through the interaction among the client and designers, in particular through the effectiveness of the student-designed spaces. The jury commended this project for articulating its mission, and how it lifted up the environment for the students. It feels as if the students own these spaces, which means it achieved its goal. The design warms up the school’s spaces through color and materials, is embracing and welcoming, and evokes a sense of community and togetherness. The message that “the environment is the third teacher” is embodied well in this project, and provides an outstanding example for other schools.”