

# U.S. COMMISSION OF FINE ARTS

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NATIONAL BUILDING MUSEUM  
401 F STREET, N.W., SUITE 312  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001-2728

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29 September 2006

Dear Mr. Brady:

In the meeting of 21 September, the Commission of Fine Arts reviewed and approved the revised concept design for the proposed addition to the School Without Walls (formerly known as the Grant School) at 2130 G Street, N.W. The Commission members commented that the front facade was much improved but suggested greater refinement in the detail of the proposed mullions of the curtainwall system. In addition, the Commission would like the next submission to include more development of the plaza landscape and streetscape design with some alternatives to the proposed vertical building sign above the entrance.

Please submit the project for a revised concept review when ready. If you have any questions, the staff is available to assist you.

Sincerely,



Thomas Luebke, AIA  
Secretary

Thomas M. Brady, Chief Business Operations Officer  
District of Columbia Public Schools  
Office of the Superintendent  
825 North Capitol Street, N.E., 9th Floor  
Washington, DC 20002-1994

cc: Dennis Kuhn, EEK  
Carolyn Brown, Holland+Knight, LLP

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**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

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Landmark/District:	<b>Ulysses S. Grant School</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	<b>2130 G Street, NW</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
Meeting Date:	<b>September 28, 2006</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> New construction
Case Number:	<b>06-236</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Addition
Date Received:	<b>March 28, 2006</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Tim Dennee</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Revised concept

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The applicant, Ehrenkrantz Eckstut & Kuhn Architects, agent for owner District of Columbia Public Schools, requests the Board's conceptual review of a revised proposal to construct additions to the east side and rear of the three-story school. As seen in June, little of the existing building is proposed for demolition. The rear addition would be only a single story plus basement and roof terrace, so that it would not block the light available to the adjacent second- and third-story classroom spaces. The side addition would stand four stories tall, with the top level—the school's planned library or media center—set back several feet from the building line and a mechanical penthouse set back about 90 feet.

The revisions have improved the design in several ways. First, the fourth story's roofline has been altered to a curve in front, lowering its profile from the street. This reduces its visual competition with the school's central tower, but the structure is set back a little less than the former version, so its success in this respect will have to be demonstrated by the applicant's model. Second, the façade's bay has been widened to eliminate some of the masonry on the front, and much of the masonry on the front of the fourth floor has also been removed. This reduces the sense that the façade is composed of applied, disconnected parts.

Two further revisions should be considered in order for a recommendation of conceptual approval. First, the bay should come to the ground. There are several reasons for this, including the fact that, relative to the façade of the existing school, the bay is not a projection at all; the main wall plane of the addition is instead recessed. The bay of this addition is *not* similar to or analogous to projections on other buildings in the neighborhood, including the school, because of its width, proportions, scale, the fact that it doesn't actually project into public space, *and* the simple fact that it is not grounded. As the addition's first floor is fully glazed at front, similar to the bay above, it would not appear to hurt to bring that surface forward, and it would tend to resolve the lingering issues of the ambiguity of the extent of the building's base. It would make the proposed entrance canopy more functional by projecting it into public space instead of locating it *under* the bay. Finally, given the bay's size and the typical vantage point from below, it may make the building appear top-heavy.

There is little about the proposed addition that says "school" or that ties it to the existing structure beyond the actual physical connection. Frankly, it needs to demonstrate some relationship beyond mere proximity and similar height in order to be compatible with the historic building and to avoid looking like an office building crammed into the site. The simple gesture of using brick for the masonry framing walls could do the trick.

The staff recommends that the Board support the project in concept with the conditions that the façade projection continue to and include the first-floor façade and that the masonry walls be of brick to match the color of that of the landmark school.