

## High School of the Future

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Briefing Notes Prepared by the Design Advocacy Group

This is one of the most significant public projects of our day—a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for Fairmount Park, the School District, and the city of Philadelphia. The new school is placed on an extraordinary site in Fairmount Park, one of America's most notable environments. It will stand at the terminus of the great axis of the Centennial Exposition fairgrounds and within sight of Memorial Hall. On one side it faces the intersection of important modern streets; on the other it is blessed with a dramatic and beautiful natural setting. This large and expensive undertaking embodies a supremely important program: it will be a model for the education of Philadelphia's children. We must seek design excellence.

The new building should rise to meet these challenges. It should be audacious: well situated and of a massing and scale consistent with the importance of its location. A building created for these purposes and in this location must be excellent.

The preliminary design does not meet these challenges, and its development must be guided. It must both acknowledge its location within the historic Centennial District and its position astride a beautiful natural ravine. The type, finish, and detailing of the materials need careful consideration. The highly irregular outline of the submitted design (which is a costly feature) seems to reflect a relatively early engagement with the challenges of giving outward form to the required interior spaces, and these external forms should be made stronger and simpler through revision.

Going forward, we suggest

- The building must be conceived as an important civic design and must strongly connect itself to the life of the city by establishing its presence on one or both of the major adjacent streets, Girard Avenue and 40th Street.
- The design should be adjusted to contribute to the objectives of the Centennial District Plan, which will simplify traffic patterns on the adjacent streets and increase the prominence of the

historic architectural features (most notably, Memorial Hall and the Richard Smith Memorial Gateway).

- The school should not turn its back on its noble neighbor, Memorial Hall. This is an opportunity both to show respect to the historic building and take advantage of the juxtaposition by opening up views from the school that underline the important history of this location.
- The school should exploit the advantages of being in a park, adopting an architectural vocabulary consonant with this gentle setting and taking every opportunity to offer views from the building into the beauties of the landscape. It should weave together indoors and outdoors, at least visually.
- Because of the building's important role in the community, its main entrance and the relationship between the entrance and the auditorium, gymnasium and other spaces that are likely to be used by the community after school hours should be configured to offer safe and direct public access.