

# OYSTER RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL

## A FACILITY EVALUATION

### REGARDING ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING

May 2015

Over the past six months, Stephen Blatt Architects has engaged in a study of the ORMS in order to evaluate the facility's impact on the delivery of the academic program to its 680 students in grades 5-8. Members of the Middle School Committee, including administrative, teaching and support staff have participated in extensive discussion through a series of meetings, interviews, field investigation and observation. We were fortunate to have as resources the archive of construction documents regarding ORMS as it has evolved over many decades, and the ORCSD Facilities and Program Analysis prepared by Davis Goudreau Architects (DGA) in December 2011. This report summarizes our findings; it should be considered as one of a series of ongoing studies necessary to determine the status of the existing facility as an effective, efficient vehicle for the delivery of SAU 5's middle school program, along with other options which may become available to the citizens of the District.

As Architect for the recent addition to Moharimet Elementary School, our firm has had the opportunity to become familiar with each of the District's several facilities, the geography of the Durham area, the Administrative Staff and its resources, and the process by which your facilities gain funding for both maintenance and construction. It has become clear to us that of the District's facilities, the Middle School is in the aggregate the oldest, most added-on-to, and most tired of your inventory. Thorough studies (DGA) have indicated the scope and projected cost of repairs and/or replacements to systems; the building envelope, including doors, windows, insulation and roofing are all obsolete and inefficient; and the configuration of the building has evolved to the point where it has become sprawling (1500 l.f. of corridor, 60,000 s.f. of roof) and not supportive of general accepted middle school concepts such as team/grade identity, smaller "neighborhoods" within the larger school, student services delivery, and integration of IT into the curriculum. From programmatic, physical plant, and site configuration perspectives, we feel that the existing building should not be further expanded nor modified in a piecemeal manner.

Very early in our study, we were asked to evaluate several parcels of land for future use by the District. The Middle School site, at 11.5 acres, is considerably smaller than the recommended site size (10 acres + 1 acre per 100 students, or 16- 17 acres). One of the objectives of that initial evaluation was to see if other available sites might accommodate a new middle school facility. Site evaluation will be further considered in a subsequent phase of this study. Although the current Middle School site is smaller than recommended, it does have the distinct advantages of full utility services, proximity to the High School, and its established address as part of the District's and the town's history. This proximity to the town center and the UNH campus makes the real estate itself quite valuable, and may constitute a reason to consider another site for a new middle school facility. That issue will be a subject of future study.

We have calculated the net size of current program space at 74,770 s.f., which for 680 students (current enrollment 5-8) yields 110 s.f. per student. Our extensive experience designing middle school facilities has led us to understand that 150 s.f. per student is an appropriate middle school standard, which in this case would translate to program space of 102,000 s.f., approximately 33% more than currently provided. Acknowledging the forecasted decrease in enrollment in coming years, the existing facility would still be significantly smaller than the norm. The number of classrooms would remain the same, and core spaces such as the gymnasium, library, cafeteria/kitchen, music and art spaces would not significantly decrease in size.

Among the more prominent deficiencies at ORMS are:

- Recommended classroom size (900 s.f.) is met by only 55% of the current classroom inventory (23 of 43). Of the 20 small classrooms, 7 measure under 700 s.f., roughly 25% smaller than recommended.
- Music space (both band and chorus) occupies approximately 2800 s.f., significantly less than newer middle schools of similar enrollment (4150, 4800 s.f.). Of particular note is the chronic lack of instrument storage space and practice rooms, causing corridors to be used for both functions, with acoustic interruption throughout the school when practice occurs.
- The gymnasium, at 6230 s.f., cannot practically accommodate two simultaneous P.E. classes, requiring the use of the multi-purpose room to facilitate scheduling of all students for P.E. The use of the multi-purpose room for P.E. conflicts with the use of the adjacent stage for music instruction. Other middle school facilities of similar enrollment provide 20-30% more space in one location, at the same time affording more versatile use of the space for large gatherings.
- Art classrooms, at 735 and 750 s.f. respectively, should be 1100-1200 s.f. each. Lack of storage space severely impacts teaching in the two classrooms.
- Special Education spaces are mostly makeshift, frequently undersized, some having no daylight. There are approximately half the number of resource rooms as we typically recommend for this population. Small group rooms and testing rooms are virtually nonexistent. Students travel long distances to receive services, which decreases actual face-to-face time with staff.
- Tech Ed space is obsolete, STEM (ScienceTechnologyEngineeringMath) space is makeshift, and both are significantly undersized, making program delivery challenging. As STEM programming becomes more and better integrated within the middle school curriculum, specifically designed space is and will become even more important.

- Middle school programming should include informal gathering spaces scattered throughout the facility, where students can meet elsewhere than in the corridor, where staff can gently pull out a student for either planned or spontaneous counselling. Providing such space within team or grade areas reinforces the identity of the smaller group within the larger student body.
- Conversely, toileting facilities at ORMS occupy more space than at other newer facilities. Roughly 3200 s.f. of “gang” toilet rooms are provided, roughly 20-30% more than at similar middle school facilities which feature single-user toilet rooms scattered throughout classroom areas. These single-user toilet rooms are found to discourage vandalism, intimidation, gender issues and long, socializing bathroom breaks.
- There is a chronic lack of staff support space at ORMS, which currently provides one staff workroom and two staff toilets for a staff of approximately 100 persons. Comparably- sized facilities provide 1300-1800 s.f. of such space, distributed throughout the facility in order to accommodate easier/quicker access for staff.
- The configuration of the site is dictated by severe geographical constraints and the proliferation of additions over past decades. Past and potential conflicts between students, busses, staff and delivery vehicles are well documented, but it should also be noted that many classrooms adjacent to the paved playground suffer from significant noise interruption during recess and when busses are operating. The administrative staff has implemented excellent surveillance and security measures. However, of the several approaches to the school, none are immediately visible from the administrative area, making it difficult to monitor and assure safety where students, visitors and vehicles approach and leave the facility.

In order to provide an effective, efficient and current middle school program, the facility itself must exhibit those same qualities. In order to provide more program minutes each day, bottlenecks caused by inappropriate spaces (such as the cafeteria), inordinately long travel time between classes and activities, and far less than acceptable acoustic separation between activity spaces should be mitigated.

The next step in this phase of our study will involve documentation of operating and maintenance costs for ORMS over recent years, and further investigation of imminent facility improvements including the impact of costs and scheduling. As mentioned, we do not recommend further expansion of this facility, as that would further strain the site and compound the already inefficient, rambling and interruptive configuration of the facility.

We look forward to continuing our work with the District as we consider all viable options for improving the programmatic offerings and efficiencies at ORMS via significantly better site and building configuration.

**BUILDING/SITE ISSUES THAT AFFECT ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING AND ABILITY TO TEACH:  
PRELIMINARY FINDINGS**

**1. Building is obsolete**

- a. Numerous ad hoc additions have resulted in an inefficient layout
- b. Building infrastructure, systems and envelope are in poor condition
- c. Excessive mechanical system noise throughout
- d. Serious lack of storage
- e. Not designed for handicapped accessibility

**2. Poor site circulation, layout**

- a. Parent drop-off chaotic and unsafe
- b. Bus loop not separate from hard play area
- c. Outdoor recess noise impacts first floor classrooms facing hard play areas

**3. Inefficient building circulation**

- a. Excessive travel time cuts into teaching time
- b. High corridor traffic distracting to adjacent classrooms
- c. Difficult to move large equipment & carts due to multiple level changes

**4. Physical separation of teams within a grade**

- a. Makes teacher collaboration more difficult
- b. Dilutes student identity as "grade"

**5. Cafeteria size & configuration**

- a. Small cafeteria requires four separate lunch shifts
- b. Configuration prohibits use as large multi-purpose space
- c. Poor sightlines make it difficult for staff to monitor
- d. Inefficient kitchen layout
- e. Very noisy, poor acoustics

**6. Lack of multi-purpose room & stage for school-wide assemblies**

**7. Gymnasium under-sized**

- a. Cannot simultaneously teach two P.E. classes safely

**8. Inadequate music facilities**

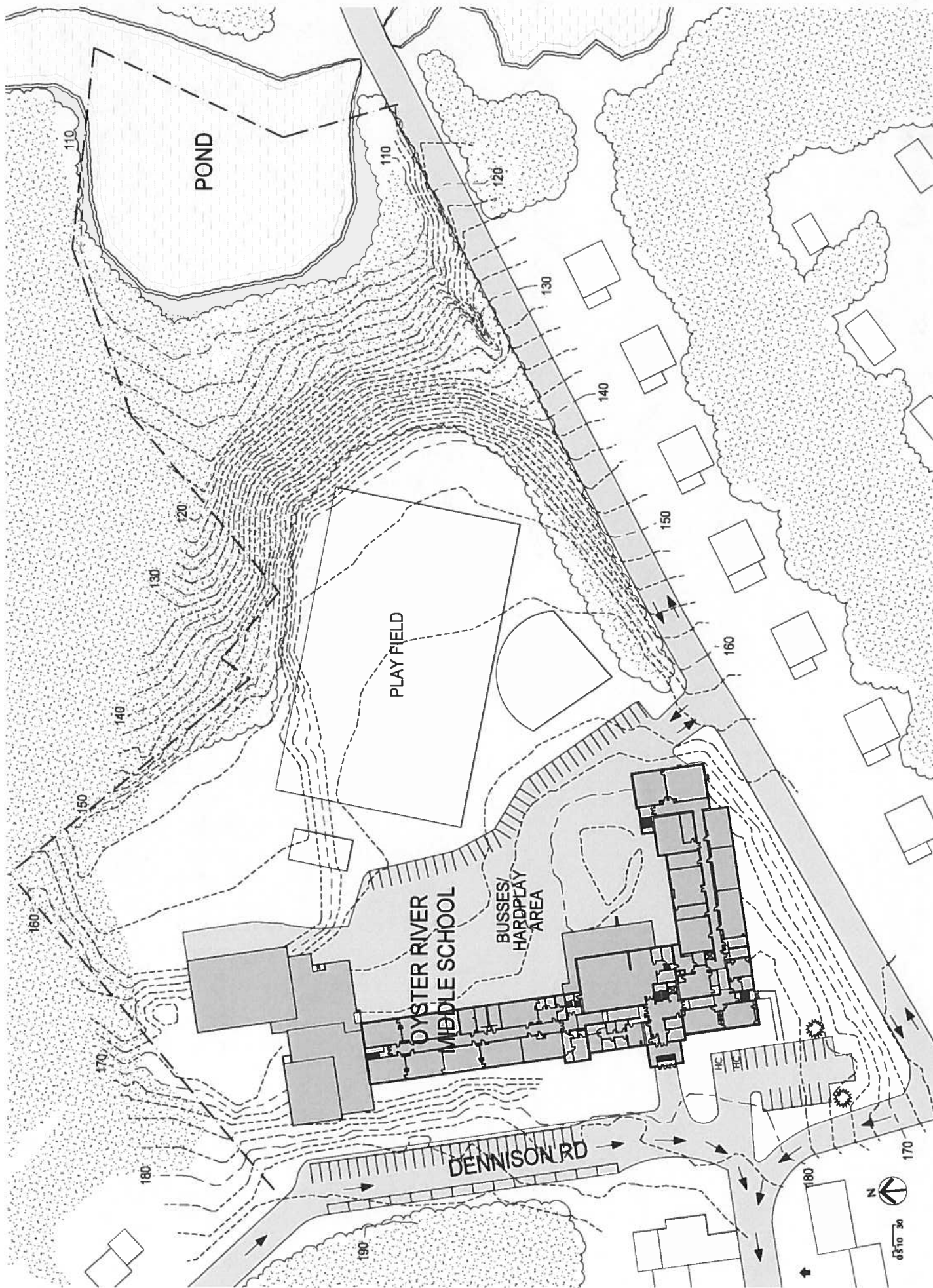
- a. Undersized teaching/performance spaces
- b. Located poorly within building, lack of acoustic separation from other spaces
- c. Lack of music/instrument storage and practice rooms

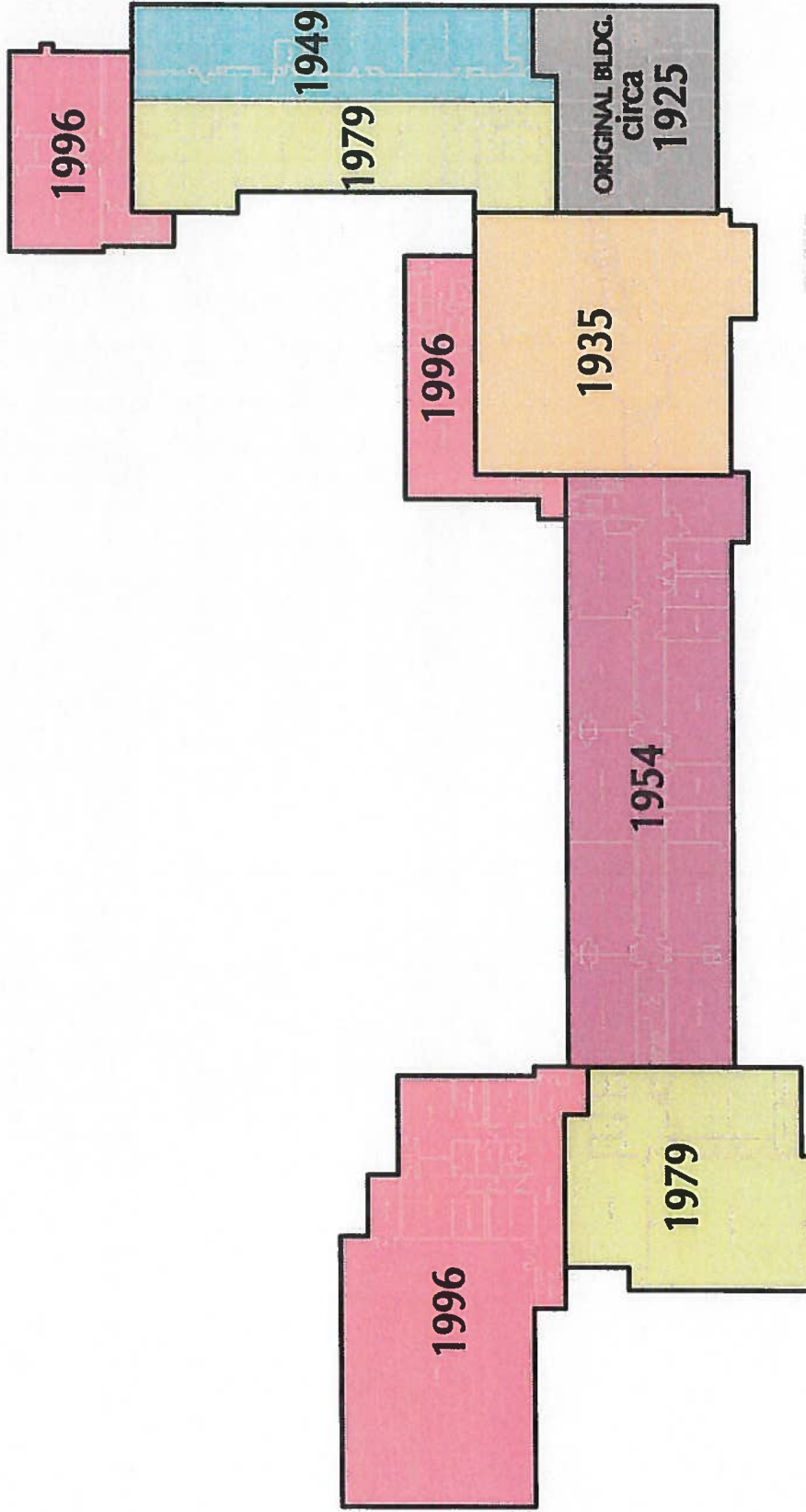
**9. Lack of small meeting spaces, resource rooms**

**10. Lack of teacher prep/work/staff rooms/toilets**

- a. Makes teacher collaboration and interaction more difficult



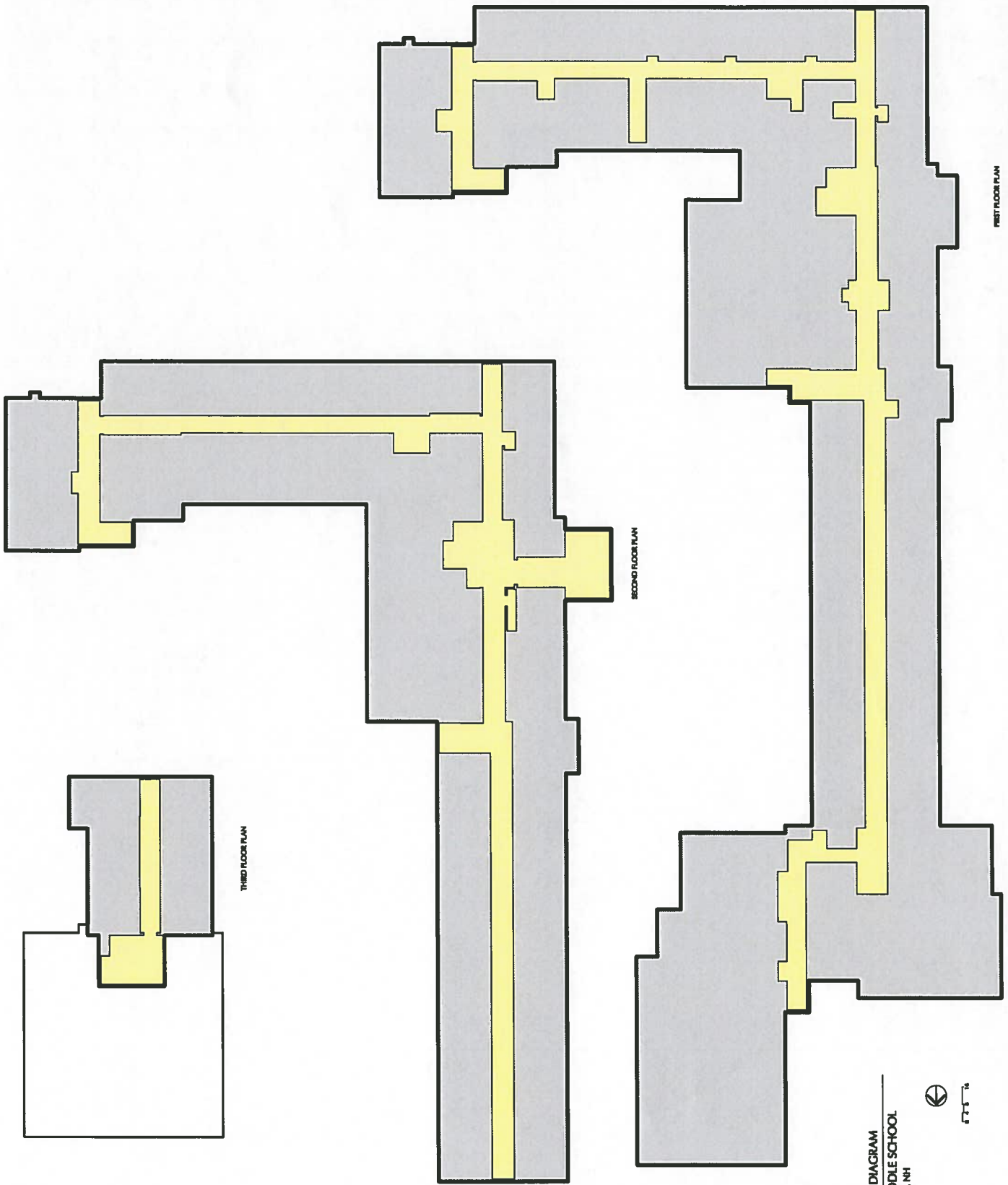




CONSTRUCTION TIMELINE  
OYSTER RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL  
DURHAM, NH

May 14, 2013





CIRCULATION DIAGRAM  
OYSTER RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL  
DURHAM, NH

