CREATIVE GROUNDS
FROM CLOSED CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO NEIGHBORHOOD COMMONS

www.creativegrounds.org

CHICAGO
SPRING | SUMMER
2017

ARCHWORKS
border-less
IN COLLABORATION WITH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, ARCHITECTS, URBAN DESIGNERS & PLANNERS, EDUCATORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND SOCIAL INNOVATORS, THIS RESEARCH AND CREATIVE INITIATIVE WILL COLLECT IDEAS AND DOCUMENT A PROCESS FOCUSED ON ADDRESSING THE TRANSFORMATION, POTENTIAL AND FUTURE OF THESE SITES.

CREATIVE GROUNDS IS A COLLABORATION LED BY ARCHEWORKS AND BORDERLESS STUDIO TO EXPLORE THE URBAN AND COMMUNITY ROLE OF SCHOOLS GROUNDS AFTER THE LARGEST PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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ONE SCHOOL SITE AT THE TIME.

45 1 x 68,000 sf = +3,000,000 sf
Since 2013, approximately 45 Chicago Public Schools have closed due to budget cuts, under-enrollment and low performance. This group of buildings average of 68,000 square feet of indoor space per closed school—this leaves more than 3 million square feet of existing space to be reimagined plus hundreds of acres of outdoor space.

The project, CREATIVE GROUNDS, will work from the premise that these places not only will have a new proposed venture that needs to be financially self-sufficient, but they will also leverage collaborative design to convey a new vision while celebrating the community’s character and identity. What if closed schools remained a learning hubs, but this time invited equal use by multiple generations? What if they were centers for learning about entrepreneurship—a new kind of community-led asset offering job training, business incubation, offices, event and fabrication spaces? What if the community could also learn about health and sustainability? Or technology and design? Equally important, the outdoor space surrounding the buildings must have a central role in this approach: What if this collective space becomes the stage for neighborhood activities year-round, signaling to the community that the building is still active, still an anchor for the community’s public life?

Therefore, an expanded scope for his effort is fundamental—one that integrates the physical aspects of site redevelopment, but also that addresses the quality of life of the community.
FRAMEWORK

CREATIVE GROUNDS is a research and creative initiative that will enable a platform for open dialogue and collaboration addressing the role and future of these former school sites in their communities around the city by:

(a) documenting through an inventory of sites to understand conditions, challenges and opportunities in their corresponding communities;

(b) exploring creative planning and design ideas that reimagine closed schools as anchors for community development while strengthening the neighborhood’s public life;

(c) supporting ongoing or planned redevelopment efforts to amplify and accelerate repurposing processes.

West Pullman Elementary School (1894)
Source: Borderless Studio, Exhibition 50 designers, 50 ideas, 50 wards (Chicago Architecture Foundation)
AN INITIATIVE MADE OF DIFFERENT ELEMENTS

1. DIALOGUES
ENGAGE EXPERTS > FORGE PARTNERSHIPS

- Education and workforce training
- Economic development
- Community organizations
- Art and Architecture
- Urban design and planning
- Public space and public life
- Social and cultural innovation

2. BEST PRACTICES
EXPAND THE SCOPE > LEARN FROM OTHERS

- Innovative programs
- High performance buildings
- Spatial optimization
- Investment strategies
- Supportive partnerships

3. SCHOOL SITES
UNDERSTAND PLACE > SYSTEMATIC DOCUMENTATION

- Neighborhood mapping
- Photography
- Site background
- Redevelopment process
- Oral history

4. ACTION
IMAGINE SCENARIOS > TEST POSSIBILITIES

- Installation
- Program
- Design
- Fabrication
- Demonstration (pop-up) interventions
OPEN UP (THE CLOSED) CONVERSATION

Chicago Public Schools are a constant in the news; the coverage of social, work force or infrastructure challenges of this institution are daily reminders of its priority in the public interest agenda.

CREATIVE GROUNDS | DIALOGUES is bringing together a diversity of practitioners from different fields to learn about their experience, perspective or efforts related to closed public schools. Using research and case studies as a base content for discussion, the purpose of these dialogues is three–folded: to exchange knowledge and perspectives, expand the scope of this initiative’s framework, and to identify a network of potential collaborators.

DIALOGUE 01
JUNE 2016
A common approach to uncertain futures is led by the question: What if? This session discusses capacity and scenario possibilities in West Pullman and John B. Drake Elementary Schools as case studies.

DIALOGUE 02
AUGUST 2016
When public schools reach an end in their life cycle, what could happen between their process of redevelopment and closing? This session concentrates in other areas of opportunity for in between time frames and spaces.

DIALOGUE 03
NOVEMBER 2016
What connections could be encouraged between schools in transition and their communities? How could more opportunities be offered to think about these connections? This session discusses projects that contribute to create social networks and reflect about memory, identity and possibilities.

DIALOGUE 04
APRIL 2017
Hosted at former Anthony Overton Elementary School located in Brownsville (No. 28), this session’s guest presenters from The Chicago Reporter, Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, and the Greater Southwest Development corporation share their perspectives and related efforts.

DIALOGUE 05
JUNE 2017
Where are we now with school repurposing? How to amplify existing repurposing projects? This session’s guest speaker from The Chicago Reporter share their key research findings; and Kidz Express, non-profit located in Austin, share their story repurposing former Leland Elementary School (No. 22).

DIALOGUE 06
AUGUST 2017
How to support, accelerate and amplify repurposing efforts? What are the tools and resources to be aligned? This session will discuss the different types of resources and their availability for an equitable development of schools sites.

PAST PARTICIPANTS

Aaron May, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Aaron Rose, Development Consultant & Writer
Adam Rosa, Urban Planner, Principal, Caminos, Ltd
Alejandra Royo, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Andrew Balster, Archeworks
Ann Lui, Future Firm, School of the Art Institute Chicago
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Armando Quintana, Archeworks
Daniel Ronan, Resilient Heritage, DOCOMOMO-US
Dawood Scully, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Dennis Milam, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Domenic Sapienza, HOK
Elle Lassiter, SB Friedman
Elle Ramel, City Digital
Eli Leecher, Ratio Architects
Kalyn Belsha, The Chicago Reporter
Kareeshma Ali, Greater Good Studio
Jody Zimmer, Archeworks
Lyndette McRae, Metropolitan Planning Council
Mejay Gula, I ace Lab, University of Chicago
Michael Wood, Chicago Architecture Foundation
Michelle Ha Tucker, Design Consultant
Miguel Agular, The Remix Project, Graffiti Institute
Nadia Sulayman, Arts & Public Life, University of Chicago
Phillip Cotton, William Prep, Chicago Public Schools
Robert Bracken, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Sara Poley, Photographer
Scott Sikkema, Chicago Arts Partnership in Education
Steven Vance, Chicago Cityscape
Theodore Eccleston, Impact Design Hub
Tempestt Hazel, Six Inches from Center, Independent Curator
Thomas Hussey, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Todd Palmer, Chicago Architecture Biennial

“we need both: grass roots & global perspective”

“It is important for the right people to have the right intentions in the right place”

“closed schools as an opportunity to create moments of resilience”

“the public has to become more entrepreneurial”
ACCESS TO RESOURCES & TRANSPARENCY IS KEY

“In Kansas City, a lesson in transforming closed schools”

Chicago, which shuttered 50 schools four years ago, turned over the reuse process to aldermen, many of whom didn’t include the public in planning the buildings’ future. With dozens of vacant schools and widespread criticism for not involving residents in the process, Chicago recently ended aldermen’s control of school reuse and handed it back to the school district, which put the buildings up for bid this month.

Kansas City Public Schools, on the other hand, hired an urban planner to manage school reuse. The process has been praised for prioritizing community engagement, transparency and giving nonprofits with limited access to capital the chance to buy a school. Kansas City emphasized finding quality new uses for the schools over generating revenue for the district, which closed half its schools from 2009 to 2010. The Council of the Great City Schools, a nonprofit that advocates for big-city districts, will feature the district in a report of best practices for repurposing schools.

“They didn’t just say ‘OK, you don’t have no money, so we don’t want to talk to you. Goodbye … They said: ‘We want to hear your story. How do you plan to do this? How do you see this working?’”

– Karen Allen, Kansas City resident

MAKE INFORMATION VISIBLE & ACCESSIBLE

In addition to monitoring the status of repurposing of these school sites, CREATIVE GROUNDS finds opportunities to share this interactive analog inventory to make this information visible and accessible to different audiences, raise awareness and keep the public dialogue going.

WHATS NEXT?

Creative Grounds is collaborating with Chicago Arts Partnerships in Education, DOCOMOMO-US, and We All Live Here during Summer/Fall 2017 to create this community event series at former Anthony Overton Elementary (No. 28): Opening Closings is the needed conversation for Chicago’s built environment through public installation. Linking the built environment with questions around public investment and community engagement will be essential to elevating adaptive reuse and youth and community participation around schools for decades to come.