

COMMUNITY-LED MONTESSORI SCHOOL DESIGN IN RURAL INDIANA

Co-Presenters: Spencer Steenblik - IU Professor of Comprehensive Design and Lena Blackstock - Partner at Process/Practice Studio

Columbus, Indiana

In the spring of 2023, ABC Stewart Montessori School partnered with the Indiana University graduate architecture program to develop schemes for an entirely new school campus. Professor Spencer Steenblik and the class of 2025, worked with Lena Blackstock of Process/Practice Studio who led students, stakeholders, and designers through a series of workshops and co-creation sessions to re-imagine an ABC Stewart centered on the student experience.



CO-CREATION WITH ABC STEWART STUDENTS

After the initial site visits, Process/Practice Studio ran four co-creation sessions with students across age groups to better understand their hopes and dreams for the new school. By leveraging design stimuli, students were guided through activities to help them imagine and co-design their ideal school space and experience. The learnings from the co-creation sessions acted as guardrails for the ideation workshops and informed final design decisions.



IDEATION WORKSHOP WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Next, the school's founder, administrators, teachers, parents, board members, and local builders were brought together for an ideation workshop to understand their needs and hopes for the future ABC Stewart. Guiding principles based on insights from the co-creation with the students acted as guardrails to ensure ideation continued to be informed by the student's needs.



SYNTHESIS WITH IU ARCHITECTURE GRAD STUDENTS

Though a facilitated synthesis session, IU Architecture students began to make sense of what they learned. The ideas and designs from the ideation workshop helped the students iterate on their design schema and ensure it reflected the goals and needs of ABC Stewart students and staff. This collaboration also exposed the IU students to new human-centered design methodologies and approaches, leveraging research through design, not just for design.



COMMUNITY NOTES

The community engagement between IU and ABC Stewart was highlighted in The Republic newspaper, with an article about the frequent workshops and ideation sessions. Stakeholders were involved in the entire process, culminating with a large showing for the architecture student's final presentations.



IMPACT

Continuing the legacy of Columbus, Indiana, stakeholders from across the community were brought together to collaborate and ideate on the future of ABC Stewart. Professors, students, business leaders, administrators, contractors, and teachers, worked together to ensure the new school building would integrate the diverse viewpoints and experiences found within the community.

The project is still ongoing, and the output from this initiative has helped the school leaders tremendously with their fundraising efforts and will influence final design decisions that will foster an environment for learning and play for many years to come.

STRONG PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN ABC STEWART AND THE INDIANA UNIVERSITY GRADUATE ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM



IU ARCHITECTURE GRADUATE STUDENT WORK - DESIGNS INFORMED BY RESEARCH AND WORKSHOPS WITH ABC STEWART STUDENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS. Featured work by: Jim Blackstock, Jonathan Hill, Samantha Nardine, George Kirton, Anthony Reiss, Will Ziegert, Yoamis Roman

