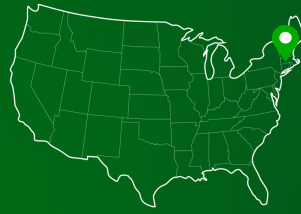


PROJECT PROFILE

Clark Avenue Middle School Chelsea, Massachusetts



THE
**BEAUTY
OF BLOCK**



Photo Credit: Ed Wonssek

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Replacing a local institution that had served as a community hub for generations, this project had to realize many goals: material efficiency, environmental responsibility, low maintenance, fire resistance, human comfort and of course aesthetic beauty. This made CMU the ideal material, delivering on everything from thermal mass to abundant daylighting and even superior acoustics. This project underscored CMU's versatility while delivering lasting value in the most important public spaces.

PROJECT CHALLENGES

For the benefit of the school's students and families, classes had to be allowed to continue during construction. The resulting decision to build the project in two phases allowed the school to stay open throughout the process.

CMU'S CONTRIBUTION TO PERFORMANCE & DESIGN

- Concrete masonry allowed builders to realize ambitious design goals while ensuring a safe and comfortable learning environment for the school's 670 students. Inherently fire-resistant with superior thermal mass and unrivaled design flexibility, CMU made a challenging project not only possible, but rewarding.

ADVICE FOR OTHERS

Look for materials that do more than one job well. CMU supports phased construction by creating a durable, noncombustible barrier that helps minimize noise when schools remain open during construction. Once complete, block is uniquely suited to withstand the daily use and abuse of a school environment.

WHAT MAKES THIS PROJECT UNIQUE?

This structure not only had to replace an institution dating back to 1908; it also had to assume its role as a local civic center in a dense urban neighborhood — all while delivering on sustainability goals.

PROJECT INFO

- **Location** - Chelsea, MA
- **Completion Date** - 2018
- **Project Type** - Institutional & Civic
- **CMU Scope** - Structural & Architectural

TEAM INFO

- **Producer** - Westbrook Concrete Block Co., Inc.
- **Architect** - HMFH Architects
- **Contractor** - W.T. Rich Company, Inc.



Photo Credit: Ed Wonske

Clark Avenue Middle School

Chelsea, Massachusetts

Set within a dense urban neighborhood north of Boston, Clark Avenue Middle School replaces a century-old facility while preserving the site's civic role at the heart of its community. The original 1908 building and 1926 addition had reached the end of their service life. The new five-story, 115,000-square-foot school was constructed in two phases, allowing classes to continue throughout construction — a complex effort that maintained continuity for students and families.

Designed by HMFH Architects, the building provides modern classrooms, science labs, art studios and collaborative spaces for roughly 670 students in grades 5 through 8. Shared areas such as the library, cafeteria, and gymnasium serve both students and the broader community after hours, reinforcing the school's civic presence.

Architectural concrete masonry supplied by Westbrook Concrete Block defines much of the building's exterior expression. Selected for its durability, thermal performance and visual depth, the CMU establishes a

rhythmic pattern and tonal variation that anchors the five-story structure within its residential context. Inside, masonry contributes to acoustic comfort and long-term resilience — qualities essential in high-use educational environments.

Material efficiency and environmental responsibility guided every design move. Reinforced masonry walls provide inherent fire resistance and thermal mass, supporting the project's LEED Silver certification. Abundant daylighting, robust finishes, and durable materials reduce operational and maintenance demands.

Recognized with both Learning by Design and AGC MA Build New England awards, Clark Avenue Middle School demonstrates how thoughtful design and enduring materials can deliver lasting value for students, educators and the community it serves.

