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Prospect Heights Campus Unveils New State-of-the-Art Library

BROOKLYN, Nov. 10 – The Prospect Heights Educational Campus unveiled its new, \$1 million, state-of-the-art library and media center today, part of an initiative by New Visions for Public Schools to provide modern resources to small schools within large, often neglected facilities.

“The vital role school libraries play in bolstering academic achievement is too often taken for granted,” said Robert Hughes, president of New Visions, which supports 76 schools citywide as a partnership support organization (PSO) for the New York City Department of Education. “By offering our students state-of-the-art library facilities and technology, we not only help level the educational playing field, but we provide them with much-needed tools for success in today’s global economy”

Support for the two-year project was made possible with funding from the New York City Council — allocated by Councilwoman Letitia James — and the Heckscher Foundation for Children. In addition to renovation, the funding supported updated technology and software as well as professional development for members of a newly formed Library Advisory Council at Prospect Heights. The purpose of the council, which includes the principals of each of the four schools, is to re-imagine the library’s programming and align it with the goal of college and career readiness. A special section of the library is dedicated to college and career and appropriately named, The Heckscher Center for College and Career Exploration.

The Prospect Heights Educational Campus serves four high schools: Brooklyn Academy of Science and the Environment (BASE), Brooklyn School for Music and Theatre, High School for Global Citizenship, and International High School at Prospect Heights; three of which are New Visions schools.

The new library is part of New Visions’ Library Media Centers for the 21st Century (LMC21) initiative to revitalize libraries and provide modern resources to the small schools it serves. Supported by the New York City Council and the Astor Fund for Public School Libraries, LMC21 has resulted in four renovated libraries in the past 10 months, with three more on the way.

Like so many libraries across the city, the Prospect Heights library suffered from a lack of consistent support, resulting in outdated collections, inadequate technology, and a cramped, uninviting space for teachers and students. A rehabilitated space was created through a participatory design process involving school staff, students and community. Now, with a new collection of books and improved lighting and design, it will be a hub of learning. Modern furniture enables to flexible use of space for large group lessons, small group work and independent research. New computers are equipped with Internet access and an electronic card catalog.

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Library Background

In July 2007, the Prospect Heights Educational Campus received \$500,000 in City Council funding – allocated by Councilwoman Letitia James – to renovate the campus’ library. Like so many libraries across the city, this one had suffered from a lack of consistent support over the years, resulting in outdated collections; inadequate technology; and a cramped, uninviting space for teachers and students. New Visions received additional funding from the Heckscher Foundation for Children, which enabled us to supplement the physical renovations with:

- a facilitated, collaborative design process and professional development to ensure that library and school-wide programming supported effective use of the new space; and
- computers, equipment, and additional resources to bring the library into the 21st century and give students access to the technologies they must master in order to be truly prepared for college and careers.

Our work on the campus included two overlapping strands: first, facilitation and advocacy around the design and construction processes; and second, technical assistance and professional development for the campus’s newly formed Library Advisory Council (LAC), including the principals of each of the four schools on campus, to re-imagine the library’s programming and align it with the goal of college and career readiness.

Construction was completed on the library this summer and, through the generosity of the Heckscher Foundation and Councilwoman James, the newly renovated space represents a dramatic improvement, including:

- The results include:
 1. **Upgraded technology**, both at the Librarians “information hub” and in the reading room, provide easier access to the internet for research
 2. A **“Flex Zone”** is a space designed for flexibility where tables and chairs can be set aside for an auditorium-style meeting, or for performances and ceremonies
 3. A **lounge area** with soft seating is where students can “chill” with a favorite book or meet in small groups to work on collaborative team projects
 4. **Bold colors** highlight special areas in the Library such as the “information hub” and curved seating modules can be arranged to divide different program activities.

Today’s opening ceremony gives the entire Prospect Heights Educational Campus an opportunity to celebrate the new library, thank the supporters who made the renovation possible, and look forward to the revival of this space as a center for learning and community across the campus.