

22 City Schools Opening in Year

Seats for 40,000 Pupils to Be
Provided—Total Cost
Reaches \$22,000,000

By **BENJAMIN FINE**

Climaxing a five-year building program, twenty-two new public schools (five in the high school division) are scheduled to be opened this year by the Board of Education. Seats will be provided for 40,000 pupils at a cost of \$22,000,000.

While the completion of these schools will not completely eliminate overcrowding, a sizable dent will be made. Altogether, fifty-four schools are now under construction, although a few are still in the blueprint stage. Most of them will be completed by 1940.

A new era in school buildings, from the standpoint both of beauty and of service to the pupils, was seen yesterday by Ellsworth B. Buck, vice president of the Board of Education and chairman of its buildings and sites committee. The day of the drab, standardized school house appears to be over.

Designed to harmonize with the community, each school is to have individuality and dignity. Gone forever, school officials hope, is the factory-like appearance of many of the older structures.

Recently the Board of Education's construction bureau went through an overhauling. After the shake-up, Eric Kebbon came into the department as the school architect. Mr. Kebbon has placed in his designs many features recommended by the board to improve the schools.

Playground Facilities Provided

Besides the artistic exterior which the new buildings are to possess, provision is being made for ample park and playground facilities. In the future, wherever possible, each school will be located adjacent to a park, Mr. Buck disclosed. Not only will this arrangement provide recreational space, but there will be less danger of the school being overshadowed by skyscrapers.

Further, each building will provide special "community" quarters. Schools, the present Board of Education feels, should be open longer than five hours a day. In fact, it is held that day and night use of the building—children by day, adults at night—is an ideal arrangement.

In keeping with this program, the new schools are designed to permit the maximum amount of community participation. In the plans for Forest Hills High School, for example, the two gymnasiums and the auditorium are in separate wings, detached from the main unit. These portions can readily be used as after-school community centers without throwing open the entire building.

"It is our hope that in the future money will be available to use the community rooms on a much wider scale," Mr. Buck observed.

No longer will buildings—Manhattan was the greatest sinner in this respect—rise abruptly from the sidewalk. They will be placed far back from the street so that light and air can penetrate. Rather than being "just another building," the new schools, it is hoped, will improve the neighborhood. Beautiful, cheerful-looking structures are intended to replace the drab foreboding ones.

30 Square Feet Set as Minimum

A new policy has been adopted in regard to recreational space. A minimum of thirty square feet of playroom facilities is to be included in each new school. In addition to outdoor grounds, roof playgrounds and gymnasiums are to be significant items, intended to provide an opportunity for health and education programs.

Some Manhattan schools have as little as five square feet of play space for each pupil. Officials indicated that a "deplorable" oversight of this nature would not be repeated in any of the forthcoming buildings.

Actually, when the fifty-four schools now under construction are completed, the physical face of New York City will be changed for the better. In strategic points in each borough, artistically designed schools will enhance the otherwise routine environment. Some of the buildings, as in Queens, will be broad, spreading over ten acres of land.

Then there will be others, such as Public School 118 (Columbus Avenue and Ninety-third Street) that will rise, skyscraper-fashion, to eight stories. In every case, however, rows of shrubs, trees, flowers or hedges will lend distinction and color to the building.

50 Buildings Finished Since 1934

New York City is now in the midst of a school building program of gigantic proportions. Since 1934 (when Fusion members first came to the board) fifty buildings have been completed, at a cost of \$45,000,000, adding 80,000 seats. PWA contributions totaled \$10,000,000.

When the fifty-four schools under construction are completed, the Board of Education will have opened, since 1934, a total of 104 buildings, costing \$130,000,000, and providing seats for 180,000 pupils. A program of this size and scope has never before been attempted, school leaders believed.

Of twenty-two schools to open this year—one every two weeks of the school year—two are in Manhattan, eight in Brooklyn, five in the Bronx and seven in Queens. Some are representatives of the previous era in design, since plans were too far advanced to make any changes, Mr. Buck noted.

"I hope we are never going to build any more school buildings that are not definite assets to the city," he said.

As soon as possible many Civil War structures will be torn down and replaced by the Kebbon-designed "architectural treats," declared Mr. Buck. In time it is hoped that overcrowding will be eliminated and the worst of the "museum pieces" demolished.

The New York Times

Published: January 22, 1939

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