

Fairhaven elementary school selected as state model

By Beth Perdue

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DAVID LAMB / Photography

Because of its cost-efficient design, energy efficiency and flexible use of space, East Fairhaven was chosen to be one of the state's four "model schools."

FAIRHAVEN — East Fairhaven Elementary School is a model school. Literally.

The state confirmed what Fairhaven parents and children have known since the school opened in 2007 — that the playful design, pastel colors, fun shapes and bright lighting are worthy of replication by other Massachusetts communities.

East Fairhaven was one of four elementary schools identified by the Massachusetts School Building Authority in late July for inclusion in its Model School Program. The program, which began in 2008 at the high school level, has already saved taxpayers millions, the MSBA said in a statement.

"The success and cost savings associated with the Model School Program prompted us to look for additional schools that might meet our high standards and that could possibly be used as model designs," said Katherine Craven, MSBA executive director. "As we continue to try to expand the Model School Program, we will save more communities across the commonwealth money."

Model schools help reduce design costs and shorten the time it takes to get a project out to bid, said Emily Mahlman, MSBA spokesperson. Although optional, communities who choose a model design receive five additional incentive points on their state reimbursement rate, she said.

The MSBA chose East Fairhaven because of its cost-efficient design, energy efficiency and flexible use of space. Features highlighted included natural lighting, multi-use of space like a gymnasium that doubles as assembly space, and classrooms with connecting doors to facilitate resource sharing.

Designed by Cambridge-based HMFH Architects, the school was completed in 2007 for just under \$13 million in construction costs.

The simple floor plan and durable materials make the building easy to replicate with a flexible footprint that can be expanded or reduced from Fairhaven's approximately 75,000 square feet, according to Pip Lewis, HMFH project manager for the school.



“It’s a very simple, straightforward and therefore inexpensive floor plan, so it allowed us to build more inexpensively,” Lewis said.

Yet despite the simplicity, the building also provides many personal touches such as bright colors, playful patterns and individually designed glazed tiles created by Fairhaven students and teachers.

“When you go through the school today, you don’t feel like you’re looking at a building that was running up against budget problems,” Lewis noted.

MSBA’s selection is a testament to the individuals who took part in the building project, said Fairhaven Superintendent of Schools Robert Baldwin, offering his gratitude to HMFH; Building Committee Chairman Christopher Bunnell and Executive Secretary Jeffrey Osuch, among others.

“I just think it’s quite an accomplishment,” he said. “It’s proof that the community should trust that this process works and the people in charge of the process have the betterment of the community in mind.”

The news comes as the town is beginning a new school building project working with virtually the same project team, he said.

A School Building Committee, charged with identifying best options for improving elementary facilities, will meet next at 6 p.m. Tuesday in the high school library.