

AIA NEI 2025 Design Awards Application

3. Project Information

Project Name

Is this project a resubmission or has it been submitted in the previous 5 years to another AIA program? Yes No

If yes, please indicate the year submitted and any recognition received.

What is the gross conditioned floor area (sq. ft.) of the project?

What is the primary use/category of the project?

- | | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| Commercial (Retail/Restaurant) | Healthcare |
| Institutional – Educational, K -12, Higher Education | Institutional – Civic, Municipal |
| Interior Architecture | Preservation/Renovation |
| Residential – Single Family | Residential – Multi-Family |
| Religious | Student Work |
| Unbuilt | |

Was a design charrette or sustainability workshop conducted with owner and team? Yes No

Which of the following levels of community engagement were used during the design process?
(Select all that apply.)

No community engagement practices were applied for this project.

Inform: Potential stakeholders were informed about the project.

Consult: Stakeholders were provided with opportunities to provide input at pre-designed points in the process.

Involve: Stakeholders were involved throughout most of the process.

Collaborate: A partnership is formed with stakeholders to share in the decision-making process including development of alternatives and identification of the preferred solution.

Empower: Stakeholders were provided with opportunities to make decisions for the project.

Unknown

Not applicable (please explain)

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4. Project – Ecosystem

Submissions will be reviewed and awarded based on the successful integration of the [AIA Framework for Design Excellence](#)

What percent of site area supported vegetation (landscape or green roof) pre-development?

What percent of site area supported vegetation (landscape or green roof) post-development?

What percent of site area is covered by native plants that support native or migratory species or pollinators?

Which of the following intentional design strategies were used to promote design for ecosystem? (select all that apply.)

- | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------|
| Biodiversity | Dark skies | Bird safety |
| Soil conservation | Habitat conservation, flora/fauna | |
| Abatement of specific regional environmental concerns | | |
| None of the above | Unknown | Not applicable |

5. Project - Water

Is potable water used for irrigation?	Yes	No	NA
Is potable water used for cooling?	Yes	No	NA
Is grey/blackwater re-used on-site?	Yes	No	NA
Is rainwater collected on-site?	Yes	No	NA

What percentage of stormwater is managed on-site?

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6. Project - Cost

Unless otherwise noted, AIA NEI and the jury will keep financial information confidential. AIA NEI will only describe financial information in public narratives with prior consent from the submitter.

What is the cost per square foot for this project?

How does the cost to construct this project compare to similar buildings in the region?

7. Project - Energy

Using ZeroTool, what is the 2030 Commitment baseline EUI (in kBtu/sf/yr) for the project?

What was the predicted EUI (in kBtu/sf/yr) of the project, including on-site renewables? (Note: carbon offsets should not be counted.)

What was the percentage reduction from the benchmark? (To calculate, first subtract predicted EUI from baseline, then divide by baseline.)

Is the project all-electric? Yes No

8. Project – Well-being

What level of air filters are installed?

Do greater than 90% of occupied spaces have a direct view to the outdoors? Yes No

Was a 'chemicals of concern' listed used to inform material selection? Yes No

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9. Project – Resources

Were embodied carbon emissions estimated for this project? Yes No

What is the estimated embodied carbon emissions (in kgCO₂e/m²/yr) associated with the project, including the extraction and manufacturing of materials used for construction?

10. Project – Change

What is the estimated service life of the project? (in years)?

Which of the following risk assessment and resilience services were provided? (select all that apply.)

Hazard identification	Climate Change Risk	Building vulnerability assessment
Hazard mitigation strategies above code	None of the above	
Unknown	Not applicable	

11. Project – Discovery

Has a post-occupancy evaluation been conducted? Yes No

Which of the following building performance transparency steps have been taken?
(select all that apply.)

Present the design, outcomes, and/or lessons learned in the office

Present the design, outcomes, and/or lessons learned to the profession

Present the design, outcomes, and/or lessons learned to the public

Publish post-occupancy data from the project

Publish lessons learned from the design, construction, and/or occupancy

None of the above

Unknown

Not applicable (please explain)



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Please describe your project emphasizing elements of design achievement including project intentions, programming requirements, cost data and the distinguishing aspects of your resolution (limit 500 words).

Please provide a timeline and summary on how the project came to be including the client's perspective from the start and what impact the project has made on the client and community (limit 500 words).

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#2 – Firm Demographics

For each of the race and ethnic identifiers used above, please specify the percentage of each employed with the firm, if available.

2% Asian, 3% Black, 13% Hispanic, 2% 2 or more races, 1% prefer not to say, 79% White

#6 – Project Cost

How does the cost to construct this project compare to similar buildings in the region?

Generally comparable for the time. It was slightly higher than originally anticipated, but bid at the height of COVID uncertainty, and came in lower than many other projects bidding at the same time in the area.

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Please describe your project emphasizing elements of design achievement including project intentions, programming requirements, cost data and the distinguishing aspects of your resolution (limit 500 words).

Chelsea Intermediate School has been reimaged through a comprehensive renovation and major addition. This high-performing school, located in the Chicagoland suburbs, is now a dynamic, welcoming learning environment for 1,000+ Grades 3-5 students. The design for Chelsea's transformation embraces an educational vision that the entire facility is a teaching tool, providing the spaces and resources for teachers and students to "spread their wings" and realize their full potential.

First built in 1975, Chelsea's many changes over four decades began with the consolidation of two separate buildings into one, followed by episodic renovations and additions. The net result was inefficient, outmoded spaces evidenced by:

- Grade level students housed in disconnected locations
- Multi-grade spaces scattered throughout the building
- Increased travel times due to circulation challenges
- Lack of a central core and no cohesive organization of space and resources

Today, Chelsea is a colorful, light-filled environment that supports a thriving learning community where students are clustered in grade level neighborhoods, each branded with distinctive branding colors that aid in wayfinding not only for occupants, but also for first responders. Throughout the school, extended learning and breakout areas as well as wide corridors with seating niches provide a wealth of flexible spaces for learning and social development.

Shared learning and support spaces now occupy the core of the building, easily accessible to all. In these spaces, the branded grade-level color finishes are blended, reinforcing communal identity and pride across grade levels. The STEM lab, art room and media center are co-located with both visual and physical connections. The new cafeteria is designed for a variety of functions for

students and faculty, as well as public gatherings. The space offers a broad learning stair for informal gathering and teaching. Technology is built into the space to support a wide range of presentation needs from small groups to large community presentations. Chelsea now has a new interior courtyard that expands outdoor learning opportunities and provides additional recreational space for students with disabilities located in classrooms directly adjacent to the courtyard.

Chelsea's design prioritizes a wealth of natural light, which is supplemented by LED fixtures. The building incorporates biophilic design elements such as visual connections to the natural environment and the use of natural materials. Overall, the district's choice to reuse and reconfigure the existing building in lieu of a new building was an inherently sustainably minded decision.

Chelsea's new outdoor plaza offers bench seating outside and planters along the curved cafeteria curtainwall that also provides a barrier between the school and vehicle traffic. At the north end of the school site, displaced dirt from the construction process was used to form a natural safety, visual and acoustic barrier between the school and a heavily trafficked adjacent roadway. This serves the dual function of also forming a storm water detention basin and has become a local sledding hill providing a natural recreation option for the community.

Please provide a timeline and summary on how the project came to be, including the client's perspective from the start and what impact the project has made on the client and community (limit 500 words).

Chelsea Intermediate School is one of three schools operated by Frankfort School District 157-C. The other schools had received significant facility investments in earlier years. Chelsea's transformation, based on a long process of community engagement, elevates its learning environments to the level of the other schools, thus achieving equity for all district buildings.

Chelsea's transformation was achieved after the district spent a decade of careful budgeting and planning. Throughout the process, from facilities planning to design implementation, input was gathered from members of the district administration, faculty, staff, students and community members. In 2019, a feasibility study assessed Chelsea's deficits and offered district leaders three options for moving forward:

- Renovate the existing building
- Expand and renovate the existing building, including extensive site work
- Design and build a new facility on an existing property

The District moved forward with a concept design process; to inform its decision making, a 2020 district newsletter was circulated throughout the community followed by phone and online surveys. The community overwhelmingly responded in support of an addition/renovation project, with their second choice being construction of a new school. In 2021, the board decided to expand and renovate the existing school. In doing so, the district achieved cost savings of public resources, minimizing the carbon impact of tearing down an existing building and mitigated the need for all-new building materials by opting for renovation and expansion over completely new construction. Preliminary construction began in summer 2021 on work required to be completed before construction of the main project could begin in summer 2022. Construction was completed in August of 2023.

Chelsea's transformation has not only met, but exceeded community expectations, particularly those of the teachers, students, and staff that occupy the building. In a fall 2024 post-occupancy survey, over 68% of Chelsea teachers gave a 5/5 score to the statement "Overall, the renovated and new teaching areas function well for my teaching needs and my students' learning needs." Significantly, 80% of teachers also gave a 5/5 score that "Grade level branding and common area color blending has been a successful incorporation into the school and aids wayfinding."

Frankfort SD Superintendent Doug Wernet expressed the community's satisfaction: "This project stands as a clear reflection of creative vision and deep understanding of how space and design can enhance teaching and learning. Chelsea Intermediate School not only meets the technical and logistical needs of our staff and students but does so in a way that honors the identity of the school and community. "

This community's investment in effective teaching and learning was recognized by the larger community of educators: in 2024, the Illinois Association of School Boards honored Chelsea with its top honor - an "Award of Distinction" in its annual Exhibition of Educational Environments.