

FRANKLIN SCHOOL, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Fact Sheet

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History



The Franklin School opened in 1869. With 14 classrooms for approximately 900 students, it was the flagship of the first public schools in Washington, D.C., offering free universal education to boys and girls and serving as a model for today's modern public school system.

While **free public education**

was available in Washington, D.C., as early as 1805, these schools were deemed "pauper schools." They were housed in makeshift rooms and were not well regarded.



Many **ideas** that are fundamental in today's education system were first introduced at the Franklin School, including grading, curriculum, high school, and professional training for teachers.

The school was named for **Benjamin Franklin**, a bust of whom appears on the building's façade.

It was the home of the first normal school — or **teacher's college** — in 1873.

In 1880, **Alexander Graham Bell** made the first wireless voice transmission from the roof of the Franklin School using a "**photophone**," an invention of his that used a beam of light to transmit sound.



The **Board of Education** was headquartered at the Franklin School from 1920 to 1968. It was renamed the **Franklin Administration Building** in 1925, as the board occupied the building exclusively from 1928 to 1968.

One of the first national meetings of the **American Association of School Administrators** was held in the Franklin School's Great Hall in 1870.

In 1968, the Board of Education began to consider selling the building to finance a new administrative headquarters. In response to public outcry, the American Association of School Administrators devised a plan to keep historic buildings within the jurisdiction and control of the Board of Education. It was used as an **adult education center** until the early 1990s and was later turned into a **homeless shelter** until 2008 and has been unoccupied since.

Building

The Franklin School, located at 13th and K Street at Franklin Square, was designed by **Adolf Cluss**, a highly influential and celebrated German-born American architect who designed numerous public buildings in Washington, D.C., in the 19th century.

The Franklin School is **148 feet long** and **79 feet wide** and is approximately **51,000 square feet in size**. The average height of the walls is **66 feet** and **78 feet high** at the center. A turret rises **112 feet** above the southwest corner of the building.



Cluss described the style of the design as "**Modern Renaissance**" and compared it aesthetically to the *Cinque Cento* in Lombardy, Italy.

The architectural centerpiece of the building is **The Great Hall** on the third floor, a grand room measuring 48 by 66 feet and 34 feet in height, designed to accommodate 1,000 children. It was originally adorned with *fresco secco* paintings in a *trompe l'oeil* design; they deteriorated over the years but will be restored by Beyer Blinder Belle as part of the Planet Word restoration.

In 1873, the Franklin School was awarded with the "**Medal of Progress in Education and Architecture**" at the International Exhibition in Vienna, Austria, and drawings of the building were made by educators from across Europe.



A scale model of the building received prizes at various **international exhibitions**, including in Philadelphia in 1876, Paris in 1878, and New Orleans in 1884.

After being listed on the District of Columbia's Inventory of Historic Sites on November 11, 1964, the building was listed on the **National Register of Historic Places** on April 11, 1973.

It was designated a **National Historic Landmark** on June 19, 1996.

The exterior of the building was **restored** between 1990 and 1992 under a public service grant from the Sigal/Zuckerman Company with Oehrlein & Associates as architects.

It is **one of only thirteen buildings** in Washington, D.C., to be given interior landmark protection.