

# The Post and Courier

## Brainstorming a model classroom

By Robert Behre  
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Not many public school classrooms in South Carolina have a tennis court, but one of the first things that Charleston Development Academy students learned from Liollo Architecture is that when you hold a brainstorming session, no idea is out of bounds.

So when the students returned to Liollo's James Island office, they saw a piece of paper with all their ideas about what they wanted in their new classroom, including a mall food court, a robot, video games and an aquarium.

The collaboration between the downtown charter school and Liollo began when five of the firm's architects decided to enter an international competition sponsored by Architecture for Humanity to design a portable classroom. The winning design will receive \$50,000 toward its construction.

The competition required a specific site and school, and Liollo's team chose the Charleston Development Academy, a small but growing charter school next to the Gadsden Green public housing complex.



LIOLLO ARCHITECTURE/PROVIDED

An artist's rendering of a portable classroom designed for Charleston Development Academy. It's being entered in an international design contest, and if it wins, the school will get money to help build it.

The architects began by meeting with the 5th and 6th grade students at their school. They held a design charette under an oak tree on the campus. They looked at the small piece of land available for a new classroom and talked about what they wanted there. Then they drew.

Just before the end of school, the students dropped by Liollo's Wappoo Creek Drive offices to see how their ideas had translated on paper (and computer).

The next thing the students learned is that while brainstorming may toss a lot of ideas into the air, not all of them will be able to survive the fall.

While the classroom designed had an aquarium, architect Brian Sanders had to break this news to them: "We couldn't quite get that food court in there."

What they did design was a highly flexible room with moveable cabinets and components that can swing out depending on whether it's time for math, art or lunch.

The building has an interior drain to capture rainwater and use it to irrigate the garden, and a lattice for plants covers the southwest side to capture the afternoon sun while screening the building. The design calls for durable, recycled materials, such as rubber cork tile flooring.

A wide set of stairs and a front porch provide an entrance that can double as an outdoor stage.

"This is the fun part. Coming up with all these ideas and presenting it," Sanders tells the students. "Once this is done, you've got to come up with a lot more detail."

Architects Jennifer Hurst, Angela Brose, Jennifer Charzewski and Seth Cantley also worked on the project, which aims to create an international example for a quality classroom that is both inexpensive and easy to move.

"Part of the competition is to engage local students and teachers. That was the fun part for me," Charzewski says.

Later this fall, they'll find out if they've won — and whether the prize money will help get it built. The overall budget is expected to be about \$100,000.

School administrator Cecilia Gordon Rogers hopes it's a winner. The school's enrollment was about 134 this year and is expected to grow to 150 next year, placing a strain on the old Septima P. Clark building at the public housing complex.

"We have totally grown out of our space," she says. "We're looking forward to building this."

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