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Port Coquitlam School Design Wins Prestigious Award

(Coquitlam, BC – December 4, 2015) School District No. 43 (Coquitlam) and design partner Perkins+Will Architects are pleased to announce that the design of École Pitt River Community Middle School in Port Coquitlam has received the prestigious Lieutenant Governor of British Columbia Merit Award from the Architectural Institute of BC. Established in 1920, the Architectural Institute of British Columbia is the independent, professional self-regulatory body with the mandate to regulate the profession of architecture within the province. École Pitt River Community Middle School was the only school to receive recognition at this year's award ceremony.

École Pitt River Community Middle School was highlighted for its innovative design that allows for flexible learning spaces which support 21st Century Learning principles and its use of natural light, wood and energy-savings strategies, making it an environmentally sustainable facility and extraordinary learning environment. Part of the design process included engaging with students who offered thoughtful and innovative input into elements of the overall design.

"This is another example of how our district is innovating to provide exceptional environments for our students that facilitate new ways of learning," commented Patricia Gartland, Superintendent.

At the outset of the project, the School District set aside its older design guidelines and started fresh in order to create a prototypical facility to support the key goals of fiscal responsibility, energy efficiency, and 21st Century Learning—key to which is the provision of a selection of flexible sizes and types of spaces in which to situate different learning activities. The latter goal was accomplished through a variety of different room configurations within each pod, and through the use of operable partitions to allow adjacent spaces to be opened up to one another. This combination of variety and flexibility of spaces supports individual learners and the team approach to teaching that is employed in middle schools in Coquitlam. Also central to 21st Century Learning is connecting learners to one another, connecting them with their community, and putting learning on display through the use of half-height lockers, large windows connecting corridors and learning studios, and large exterior windows providing spectacular views of the community and environment.

"As designers, one of our key areas of interest is the impact of a building on the health of its inhabitants, and we feel this is especially important when the building is a school full of growing children," said Alex Minard, Senior Associate, Perkins+Will. "We therefore selected simple, healthy materials and introduced plenty of daylight and outdoor air, resulting in a welcoming and inspirational place to learn."

To meet the energy-savings goal, several modern design elements were used. Low-flow plumbing fixtures enable a reduction in water usage, and wildflowers instead of lawns eliminate the need for irrigation. The building was modeled to consume less energy than a typical new school of the same size. This includes a reduction in lighting power density, thanks to exterior LED lighting, vacancy sensors, and photo cells. During construction, a significant amount of demolition waste was diverted from landfills and recycled content and local materials were favoured. The indoor environment is enhanced through natural ventilation, views of the outdoors, and healthy materials with an inherent finish, like wood and concrete.

All of the goals had to be achieved with the same tight financial budget as every other public middle school in the province. The design team was consistently challenged to find ways to make building elements function in multiple ways

to save money and space. In addition to a limited construction budget, minimal ongoing operations and maintenance budgets were considered in the design. It was therefore necessary to ensure that the new École Pitt River Community Middle School would be a low-maintenance facility, while remaining a welcoming and supportive environment for learning.

“We are very proud of the bold and innovative steps taken by our district design team and the architects who invested their experience and expertise in making an extraordinary learning environment within limited budget and space constraints,” added Judy Shirra, SD43 Board Chair.