

**United States Department of the Interior**  
 National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Cedarbrook Elementary School

Other names/site number: W. Townes Lea Elementary School; VDHR ID 108-6195

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

## 2. Location

Street & number: 439 Cedarbrook Drive

City or town: Danville State: VA County: Independent City

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

XA \_\_\_B XC \_\_\_D

_____ <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>Title :</b>	
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION: school

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: International Style

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK; CONCRETE; METAL

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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#### Summary Paragraph

Located at 439 Cedarbrook Drive in Danville, Virginia, Cedarbrook Elementary School is situated on a 10.27-acre site in a residential suburb. Constructed in 1962-63 in an International Style design by Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle, and Wolff (LBC&W), the one-story building features horizontal massing, a flat roof accentuated by a steel fascia beam, and brick veneer walls. The banks of aluminum windows are accented with porcelain enamel panels and structural glazed tile. The original "L" of the building consists of a central entrance with the library and cafeteria to the south and the twelve original classrooms forming the intersecting wing to the north. A T-shaped covered exterior walkway shelters the entrance and connects the cafeteria and north wing. Designed in 1969 by the same firm, a one-story, brick veneer wing with a flat roof forms the current "U" configuration. This south wing was expanded in the mid-1980s with a gymnasium addition. Interior finishes include painted concrete block walls, glazed concrete block wainscot, terrazzo and vinyl asbestos tile floors, and acoustical tile ceilings. The original 1962-63 section features interior banks of operable windows at the entrances to the library and classrooms. With little to no alterations to the original school and 1969 classroom wing, Cedarbrook Elementary School retains a high degree of historic integrity.

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#### Narrative Description

##### Site and Setting

Cedarbrook Elementary School is in the Stokesland neighborhood of Danville, Virginia. The 10.27-acre parcel, recently subdivided from the original 22-acre parcel, is near the city's western limits, about a half mile west of West Main Street and the Danville Golf Club. The school faces



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east to Cedarbrook Drive, with a setback of about 140 feet, and is fronted by a lawn planted with grass, shrubs, and a few deciduous trees. A semicircular driveway and concrete sidewalk approach the school entrance. The U-shape formed by the 1962–63 school and its 1969 addition creates a grassy rear courtyard enclosed by a chain-link fence. A small parking lot is located northeast of the school. A wooded area is at the rear of the property. To the south, now on a separate parcel, is a baseball diamond and a blacktop area for games. The surrounding neighborhood possesses a suburban and residential character, comprising houses built in the mid-20th century.

### Exterior

Constructed in 1962-63, Cedarbrook Elementary School is a one-story, brick-faced masonry building with a flat roof. The school expresses the International Style with simple geometric forms, minimal ornamentation, and horizontal massing. The U-shaped building is divided into four sections: the front wing, oriented north-south, with a library, administrative offices, and cafeteria; the north wing, oriented east-west, which contains the twelve original classrooms; the south wing, oriented east-west, which is a 1969 addition containing five classrooms; and a mid-1980s gymnasium addition at the rear of the school, connected to the 1969 addition by a narrow hyphen.

Defining exterior characteristics include a flat roof, walls faced in stretcher bond brick veneer and structural glazed tile, and banks of aluminum windows, accented by porcelain enamel panels at the front entrance and cafeteria. A T-shaped covered exterior walkway with a flat roof supported by steel posts approaches the main entrance and connects the cafeteria to the north classroom wing. A steel fascia beam with sheet-metal coping unifies the roof lines of the original school, the 1969 addition, and the covered walkway.

On the front elevation, three single-leaf, flush main entrance doors are contained within an aluminum-frame window wall system with plate glass in the top two rows and tan porcelain enamel panels in the bottom row. The walls to each side of the main entrance are faced with tan structural glazed tiles arranged in a vertical stack bond. Flanking the structural glazed tile walls are aluminum-frame window wall systems, each with rows of plate glass across the top and a row of blue porcelain enamel panels across the bottom.

The north classroom wing is characterized by plain brick walls on its front and rear elevations and banks of aluminum sash windows on the side elevations, recessed between engaged brick piers. The windows rest on cast stone sills over blue structural glazed tiles in a stack bond and are divided into 18 lights: 6 vertical columns of 3 lights. Deeply recessed entrances are centered on the front and rear of the north classroom wing with double-leaf, half-light doors with single-pane sidelights and transoms.

The cafeteria, located at the southeast corner of the original school, is slightly taller than the rest of the building and incorporates an aluminum frame and glass curtain wall system accented by panels of blue porcelain enamel on its front elevation. On the plain brick wall of the cafeteria

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adjacent to the curtain wall are aluminum channel letters that spell “W. Townes Lea Elementary School.” Brick wing walls project out from the face of the cafeteria on the front and side elevations adding visual interest. The cafeteria has exterior entrances on side elevations, each containing paired doors. Porcelain enamel panels accentuate the wall above the south elevation doors. Behind the cafeteria is the kitchen, which features several windows and utilitarian entrances.

The 1969 addition, designed by the same architectural firm as the original school, continues the horizontal massing and material palette. The addition has a flat roof and is faced with brick veneer. The addition also incorporates a steel fascia beam, unifying the original school and the addition at the roof line. The addition features a higher solid-to-void ratio, with fewer windows, arranged in a notably different pattern. The narrow, vertically oriented, and deeply recessed “slot” windows of the addition rest on cast stone sills and stacked glazed blue tile. A one-story gymnasium, connected to the rear of the 1969 addition by a brick hyphen, was added in the mid-1980s. The gym is faced in brick veneer and has a metal, gable roof.

### Interior

The interior plan features a single-loaded, north-south corridor at the front entrance that accesses the administrative offices, library, and cafeteria. The spacious cafeteria with a high ceiling is located at the southeast corner of the school. The kitchen is west of the cafeteria. The twelve classrooms and toilets that comprise the original 1962–63 school are arranged along a double-loaded, east-west corridor at the north end of the building. Four classrooms in this wing feature individual toilet rooms. The 1962–63 section of the school incorporates banks of operable windows into the corridor walls around the classroom doors and the library to provide natural light and ventilation to the corridors. The 1969 addition comprises five classrooms and grouped toilets arranged along a double-loaded, east-west corridor. Folding partitions separate four of the classrooms.

Modern materials characterize the corridors and classrooms of the original 1962–63 school and 1969 addition. The corridors are distinguished with terrazzo floors and a 6-foot 8-inch glazed concrete block wainscot. The classrooms, library, cafeteria, and administrative offices are finished with painted concrete block walls with bases of glazed concrete block and vinyl asbestos tile floors. The windows rest on slate stools. The kitchen features glazed concrete block wainscot and quarry tile floors. The toilets have ceramic tile floors and glazed tile walls. There are acoustical tile ceilings throughout most of the school and plaster ceilings in the toilets and kitchen. Interior doors are generally simple painted wood slabs in hollow metal frames. Many doors contain square vision lights.

### **Statement of Integrity**

The 1962-63 Cedarbrook Elementary School retains the physical features that define its historic character as a mid-20th century elementary school that reflects trends in education and school design during the decades following World War II. Although the original 22-acre site has been

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subdivided from the surrounding public park, the property retains integrity of location, setting, feeling, and association. The school remains on a large, grassy 10.27-acre parcel in a suburban residential neighborhood, where it still physically serves as the nucleus of the Stokesland neighborhood. Compared to the surrounding one-story Ranch houses, the large scale of the building tangibly expresses its significance to the neighborhood that developed around it. Little to no changes have been made to the historic landscape features, such as the semi-circular driveway, covered walkway, minimal landscaping, and the rear courtyard.

The school retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The exteriors of the 1962–63 school and 1969 addition – including their character-defining one-story forms with flat roofs and horizontal massing, brick veneer, windows, and accents of enameled porcelain panels and structural glazed tile – are intact. The historic floor plans of the 1962–63 school and 1969 addition also remain remarkably intact. The classrooms, cafeteria, library, and offices retain their initial configurations along the corridors. Most original interior finishes and features appear to remain substantially intact.

The mid-1980s gym addition does not negatively impact the integrity of the historic school as it is compatible with its scale, massing, and materials and is located at the rear, connected by only a small hyphen.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1962–1969

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle, and Wolff (architect)

John W. Daniel and Co. (builder)

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The 1962–1963 Cedarbrook Elementary School in Danville, Virginia, is eligible for the National Register under Criterion C with significance on the local level in the area of Architecture. Designed in the International Style by the well-known South Carolina firm of Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle, and Wolff (LBC&W), the mid-century elementary school reflects the interface between changing trends in Progressive education philosophy and the evolution of the Modern architectural movement. Additionally, its design demonstrates how new building materials and technologies were utilized to meet the demand for rapid and economical school construction during the decades following World War II. Located on a large tract of land in the center of the Stokesland annexation area, the elementary school also exemplifies the critical role of schools in suburban development during the second half of the 20th century. As the most intact of the three elementary schools in Danville designed by LBC&W between 1958 and 1969, Cedarbrook Elementary School represents the work of this national firm during a period when it appears to

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have provided architectural services for the Danville School Board. The period of significance for the school begins in 1962, the year of its original design and construction, and ends in 1969, to encompass its addition, which was designed by the same firm and continued to reflect changing trends in school design.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

*Criterion C Justification: Architecture*

Designed by LBC&W in the International Style, the 1962–1963 Cedarbrook Elementary School represents the response of modern architecture to the child-centered approach to Progressive elementary school education that dominated mid-century school design. The one-story form with a flat roof and horizontal massing, along with the covered exterior walkways, achieved a human scale that welcomed rather than overwhelmed young students. Likewise, the entrance and banks of windows, accented by porcelain enamel panels and structural glazed tiles, created transparency that allowed an approaching child to see and comprehend the activities taking place inside before entering the building. On the interior, the plan is organized by activity type with the more public administrative offices at the central front entrance and the gathering spaces of the library and cafeteria to the left (south). The original twelve classrooms flank a double-loaded corridor that forms the north wing of the original “L” configuration. This clustering of activities served to separate the more publicly accessible gathering spaces of the entrance, administrative offices, library, and cafeteria from the less public spaces of the classrooms for both noise and activity control. Lower ceilings that provided a more residential feeling, and operable banks of windows on the interior corridor walls that brought additional natural light to the classrooms and library, also reflect the impact of the Progressive educational movement on mid-century school design.

Cedarbrook Elementary School’s practical design and construction also demonstrate how advances in materials and building technologies available after World War II enabled rapid and economical construction to meet the unprecedented demand for new schools. With a contract amount of \$328,800, the twelve-classroom school was completed in approximately nine months utilizing mass-produced and standardized building components such as steel, concrete block, brick veneer, structural glazed tile, porcelain enamel panels, glass curtain walls, and banks of aluminum-frame windows. The interior finishes of painted block walls, glazed-block wainscot and trim, acoustical-tile ceilings, and terrazzo or vinyl asbestos tile flooring provided cost-effective and durable surfaces made necessary by the heavy use of an active student population. The construction method utilized at Cedarbrook also provided flexibility—a cornerstone of Progressive education—that allowed for the original building to easily be expanded with later additions in 1969 and the mid-1980s.

The 1969 classroom addition, also designed by LBC&W, continued the horizontal massing of the original building with a wide steel fascia beam extending along the roofline, as well as the use of brick veneer accented by structural glazed tile. This classroom addition and mid-1980s

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gymnasium form the south wing and continue the plan organization by activity type while also incorporating folding partition walls between classrooms to enhance the flexibility of the space.

The courtyard formed by the U-shaped configuration of the building, along with the surrounding site, also followed the Progressive pedagogy of integrating indoor and outdoor space for education. Easy access to the surrounding site provided ample areas for outdoor recreation that would serve to expand the play, learning, and socialization opportunities for students. The interior banks of operable windows surrounding the doors to the library and the original classrooms also reinforced this integration of the outdoors into the building interior by providing additional sources of natural light and ventilation. The fenestration of the 1969 classroom addition, however, represents a shift in educational pedagogy and the use of natural light in school design. While the steel-frame and brick veneer addition continues the one-story form with horizontal massing and the flat roof of the original school design, it has a much greater solid-to-void ratio. The vertical “slot” windows, which continue to be accented by stacks of glazed tile at the base, are narrow and recessed individually rather than the large banks of windows that had characterized school buildings since the late 19th century. This change in design reflects the growing desire and ability to control light in the classroom given the increased use of audio-visual equipment and fluorescent lighting.

The siting and architectural design of Cedarbrook Elementary School also illustrates the critical role of the school in the development of suburban neighborhoods during the second half of the 20th century. Cedarbrook Elementary School was constructed in 1962–1963 as one of three elementary schools built based on Danville’s 1956 Comprehensive Plan recommendations. As predicted by planners, the school served as a neighborhood asset that helped to attract new residential development to the area, which had recently been annexed to the City of Danville in 1951. Within the first five years of operation, school enrollment increased to a level that required additional classrooms. By 1968, modular classrooms were used until a new five-classroom addition was completed in 1969. In addition to the accessible outdoor recreation areas on the school site, the organization of the school plan also allowed for separate secure access after school hours by community residents to the gathering space of the cafeteria.

Finally, Cedarbrook Elementary School is the most intact example of the elementary schools designed by LBC&W for the Danville School Board between 1958 and 1969 when the well-known South Carolina firm was used to design all new public schools and many additions to existing public schools in Danville. The three elementary schools designed by LBC&W included Woodberry Hills (1959), Cedarbrook (1962), and Park Avenue (1967). All three schools are one-story with designs influenced by the Modernist Movement and are located on generous sites central to suburban residential areas. Of these three schools, Cedarbrook appears to retain the highest degree of historic integrity as the windows at Woodberry Hills have been replaced, and the Park Avenue roof has been altered in an incompatible manner. Therefore, Cedarbrook Elementary School is the best surviving example of the Modern, International Style elementary school designs by LBC&W in Danville.

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### *Historical Background*

Following World War II, the city of Danville experienced tremendous growth in land area and population due to its significant annexation of Pittsylvania County in 1951. The annexation of 6,201 acres increased the city's total land area by 154 percent to 10,231 acres, and the population grew by 32.8 percent.<sup>1</sup> The 1956 Comprehensive Plan for Danville by Harland Bartholomew and Associates included an analysis of the 1951 annexation areas with recommendations for civic infrastructure improvements, including new schools, considered necessary for their development.

Cedarbrook was one of three new elementary schools planned and built over the next decade based on the 1956 Comprehensive Plan recommendations. The Stokesland area, where Cedarbrook Elementary School is located, was identified in the plan as one of several annexation areas where new residential growth and development were expected.<sup>2</sup> In theory, the new schools and associated recreational facilities would serve as a nucleus for these areas of anticipated suburban growth and would help draw the population.<sup>3</sup> The plan recommended building an elementary school in the Stokesland area with a capacity for 540 students, a minimum site size of 10.4 acres, and a location near the center of the neighborhood.<sup>4</sup>

Voters approved a bond for a new elementary school for the Stokesland area in the fall of 1961. The school was designed by Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle, and Wolff (LBC&W) of South Carolina. The new school in Stokesland would replace the West End School, a white elementary school built in Pittsylvania County in 1922, before the annexation. The new school was planned on a 22-acre site, to include twelve classrooms, a library, administrative offices, and a cafeteria. The construction contract was awarded to local contractor John W. Daniel and Co. in May 1962 for \$328,800.<sup>5</sup> The Danville School Board announced in December 1962 that the new Cedarbrook Elementary School would likely be ready for occupancy in February 1963.<sup>6</sup>

Opening as a new elementary school for white students in early 1963, Cedarbrook Elementary School represents how new school construction in the rapidly expanding, and predominantly white, suburbs in Danville and throughout Virginia perpetuated de facto segregation in public schools.<sup>7</sup> Following the 1954 and 1955 landmark decisions in *Brown v. Board of Education* that ruled segregated schools were inherently unequal and must be integrated "with all deliberate speed," Virginia maintained segregation in public education until 1959. This policy, known as Massive Resistance (1956–1959), attempted to avoid school integration in Virginia by providing "separate but equal" school facilities. Although the 1959 Freedom of Choice policy allowed for limited integration by application and assignment, Danville continued to operate a segregated school system until the mid-1960s. After five Black students opted to attend the all-white George Washington High School in 1964, Danville finally instituted the Freedom of Choice policy the

<sup>1</sup> Harland Bartholomew & Associates, 1956:17-18.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid:136-137, 146-147.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 164.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid:166.

<sup>5</sup> "New Stokesland School Contract Goes to Daniel," *The Danville Register & Bee*, May 8, 1962.

<sup>6</sup> "New Stokesland School To Be Called Cedarbrook," *The Danville Register & Bee*, December 7, 1962.

<sup>7</sup> Hershman, James.



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following academic year beginning in 1965. That same year, students entering the first, seventh, and ninth grades were assigned to schools, including Cedarbrook Elementary School, based on their geographic residence rather than race.<sup>8</sup>

In 1968, the Supreme Court rejected the Freedom of Choice policy and required school systems to submit desegregation plans. The US Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) approved the city of Danville plan in March 1969; however, Danville public schools did not fully integrate until the 1970–1971 school year. Cedarbrook Elementary School students in the first through fourth grades when the new school opened in 1963, would have attended the newly integrated high schools in Danville that year.

By 1968, a building boom in the Stokesland area necessitated the temporary addition of two mobile classroom units to accommodate increased school enrollment. As a result, a five-classroom addition, also designed by LBC&W, was completed in 1969.<sup>9</sup> A gymnasium, connected by a hyphen at the southwest corner of the addition, was constructed in the mid-1980s. Cedarbrook Elementary School was later renamed W. Townes Lea Elementary School in 1983, in honor of the former Danville School Superintendent who served from 1955 to 1983. The school continued to operate as an elementary school until 2012.<sup>10</sup>

#### *Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle, and Wolff (LBC&W)*

The South Carolina firm of Lyles, Bissett, Carlisle, and Wolff (LBC&W) worked throughout the Southeast from 1948 to 1976. The firm expanded outside South Carolina in the 1960s, with satellite offices in Washington D.C., Virginia, Maryland, and North Carolina. Their portfolio consisted of a wide range of project types, including apartment complexes, private residences, primary and secondary schools, and higher education facilities, as well as government, military, commercial, industrial, and healthcare buildings. Their designs show the influence of the Modernist Movement and primarily employ the International Style, Neo-Formalism, or Brutalism.<sup>11</sup>

LBC&W's first known project in Danville was Langston High School, an equalization school built for Black students in 1958. George Washington, Danville's high school for white students, was designed by the architecture firm Thompson and Ragland and was completed in 1956. After Langston High School's completion, it appears that the Danville School Board continued to use LBC&W through the late 1960s to design all new public schools and many additions to existing schools. The firm designed Woodberry Hills Elementary School (1959) and Cedarbrook Elementary School (1962), which were both for white students. LBC&W also designed Park Avenue Elementary School (1967) and North Danville Junior High School (1968), which opened after Danville instituted the Freedom of Choice policy in 1965. The LBC&W-designed schools

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<sup>8</sup> Hedrick, James E., 2002:84.

<sup>9</sup> "N. Danville Junior High Plans Nearing Completion," *The Danville Register & Bee*, June 16, 1968; "\$102,610 Low Bid Offered On Cedarbrook Addition," *The Danville Register & Bee*, August 7, 1968.

<sup>10</sup> "Cedarbrook renamed for W. Townes Lea," *The Danville Register & Bee*, June 10, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, Casey, 2016:20,47.

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in Danville are influenced by the International Style. Of the three elementary schools designed by LBC&W, Woodberry Hills and Cedarbrook are similar with flat roofs, brick veneer, covered walkways, and large banks of windows. Park Avenue differs in its design, with minimal fenestration in narrow, vertical window slots—similar to the 1969 Cedarbrook addition designed by LBC&W.

### *National Trends in Mid-Century School Design and Construction*

Although the sprawling one-story school buildings with flat roofs and minimal detailing built throughout the country during the third quarter of the 20th century may appear mundane and common compared to the monumental and classically inspired designs of their earlier counterparts, the architectural design of mid-20th century schools is distinctly representative of a transformative period of growth and development in the United States. As Americans recovered from the tolls of World War II and faced the uncertainty of the Cold War, the modern architecture of mid-20th century schools reflected an optimistic focus on future generations and embodied the belief that “good design had the power to change behavior and improve society.”<sup>12</sup> With an unprecedented demand for new schools due to population growth and deferred construction and maintenance, the design and construction of new schools following World War II provided a unique opportunity for modern architecture to impact everyday lives across the country. Typically designed in the International Style, mid-century schools illustrate the comprehensive response of modern architecture to the changing trends in Progressive education, the demand for rapid and economical construction, and the role of the school in suburban development that are often overlooked and under-appreciated due to their ubiquitous presence.

### *The Progressive Education Movement and Mid-20th Century School Design*

The Progressive education movement in the United States began in the early 1900s with a philosophical shift, promoted by John Dewey, from a regimented approach based on the absolute authority of the teacher and rote memorization to a more nurturing environment centered around the development of the individual child through experiential hands-on learning.<sup>13</sup> Monumental, multi-story school buildings of the early-20th century with classical detailing and grand entrances that emphasized the academic rigor of education were replaced with less imposing, one-story schools with a flat roof, human-scaled entrance, covered exterior walkways, and simplified detailing designed to welcome rather than overwhelm the student. School design also reflected this shift by expanding the classroom beyond the traditional four walls with the creation of flexible spaces with moveable partition walls and furniture. The school learning environment was further enhanced through the integration of indoor and outdoor spaces by providing easily accessible courtyards and other designated outdoor activity areas, as well as bringing more natural light into the school building through the incorporation of multiple light sources, including interior windows and glass wall systems.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ogata, Amy F., 2008:563.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid:563.

<sup>14</sup> Christman, 2016:33-34; Ogata, 2008:563.

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As early as the 1920s and 1930s, architects began responding to the shift in educational philosophy and pedagogy by designing experimental schools that were avant-garde at the time. These well-publicized designs for elementary schools, including Oak Lane Country Day School (1929) and the Hessian Hills School (1931–1932) by the Philadelphia firm Howe and Lescaze as well as Richard Neutra’s open-air schools in California (1927–1939), featured one-story forms with large windows and integral outdoor activity areas. Completed in 1940, the design by Eliel and Eero Saarinen for the Crow Island School in Winnetka, Illinois was celebrated as a model school that incorporated the key ideas of creativity, individuality, and experimentation that characterized the Progressive movement in education.<sup>15</sup> As a stark departure from the traditional school design of the early 20th century, the low-profile building was integrated into the surrounding site with intentional connections between the classrooms and outdoor spaces as well as multiple sources of natural light in each classroom. The spatial organization of the interior was based on activity types and grade levels while interior finishes gave the spaces a homey, residential feeling with lower ceilings, window drapes, bright colors, and furniture that was moveable to accommodate different learning activities and be more comfortable for small children. These design elements combined to make school a nurturing experience for the individual child.<sup>16</sup>

### *Post-World War II School Construction*

While the Progressive education movement was well underway before World War II and a few well-known architects had begun responding with avant-garde school designs, the impact was not fully realized until the 1950s and 1960s due to a lack of funding and building materials for new school construction during the Great Depression and World War II. In 1947, educators at the National Conference for the Improvement of Teaching declared a national crisis with an estimated 50-75 percent of existing schools considered obsolete.<sup>17</sup> The population boom after World War II exacerbated this situation, resulting in primary and secondary school enrollment more than doubling from 25.1 million in 1949 to 46 million in 1971.<sup>18</sup> This combination of deferred construction and population growth created a need for new schools second only to housing following the war. Additionally, as the United States entered the Cold War era, education became even more critical to ensure a successful economy and democracy to compete against the Soviet Union.<sup>19</sup>

Numerous publications, including professional journals in education and architecture, as well as popular newspapers and magazines, called attention to this predicament. Benjamin Fine, a reporter with *The New York Times*, conducted a six-month survey in 1947 of educators on all levels and published a series of more than a dozen articles. Fine concluded that “the education received by young American citizens — the future voters of the land — does not meet present-

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<sup>15</sup> Ogata, Ibid:564-566.

<sup>16</sup> Ogata, Ibid, 564-567.

<sup>17</sup> Fine, Benjamin, “Building Program for Schools Urged.” *The New York Times*, July 5, 1947; cited in Christman, Abigail, 2016:12.

<sup>18</sup> Ogata, 2008: 562.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid:16.

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day needs of society. Although we are living in an atomic age, our children are receiving a horse-and-buggy education.”<sup>20</sup>

The nationally distributed *Life* magazine also reported on the overcrowded and unsafe conditions of schools as well as the need for improvements to compete against the Soviet Union in several articles, including “War Babies Hit the First Grade” in September 1949, “New Schools, Economy Too” in February 1954, and “Crisis in Education” in March 1958.<sup>21</sup> In the last article, *Life* claimed, “the schools are in terrible shape. What has long been an ignored national problem, Sputnik has made a recognized crisis.”<sup>22</sup> These publications successfully brought national attention to the need for new and improved schools and, perhaps more importantly, taxpayer support to fund them. By 1964, postwar school construction in the United States totaled \$20 billion.<sup>23</sup>

All the while, new school construction was so critical that the war demands on materials and the post-war construction boom led to a significant rise in construction costs. A 1954 article in *Life* magazine reported that “in 1930, \$100,000 would buy a ten-room school; in 1940, it would buy an eight-room school; and in 1950, it would buy a four-room school.”<sup>24</sup> The post-war surge in the demand and cost for new schools required design and construction solutions that would be efficient, functional, and cost-effective.<sup>25</sup> As public schools were typically funded by local bond referendums, taxpayers were directly invested in the cost of new school construction and expected their public dollars to be spent efficiently and effectively.<sup>26</sup>

Innovations in design, building materials, and construction techniques to meet these criteria included school designs with standardized components that could be mass-produced as well as plans that could be easily modified with moveable partitions or additions to adapt to changing curriculum and enrollment. Schools were also often designed to be constructed in phases based on projected enrollment and funding.<sup>27</sup> Innovations in building materials also contributed to constructing new schools that would be durable, practical, and economical. While architects and manufacturers experimented with new materials during the 1930s and 1940s, the demand by the military for rapid and efficient building techniques during World War II greatly advanced the innovative use of new building materials and methods that benefitted new construction following the war.<sup>28</sup> After ramping up production for the war effort, the steel industry promoted the construction of one-story schools as a fast and cost-effective method of building schools that allowed for increased adaptability with the steel frame construction that eliminated the need for

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<sup>20</sup> Fine, Benjamin, “Teacher Shortage Imperils Our Public School System.” *New York Times*, February 10, 1947; cited in Christman, 2016:12.

<sup>21</sup> Christman, 2016:13, 18.

<sup>22</sup> “Crisis in Education,” *Life*, March 24, 1958, 25; cited in Christman, 2016:18.

<sup>23</sup> Ward, Hugh 2015:4.

<sup>24</sup> “New Schools, Economy Too.” *Life*. February 1, 1954; cited in Christman, 2016:28.

<sup>25</sup> Ogata, 2008: 562.

<sup>26</sup> Christman, 2016:42.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*:12.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*:31.

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permanent load-bearing walls.<sup>29</sup> The steel frame could then be enveloped with a less-expensive skin of brick veneer, concrete block, and aluminum-and-glass curtain walls. Other new materials that provided durability and practicality included hollow concrete block, plywood, plastic, and aluminum. Asphalt and rubber flooring tiles provided more durability while acoustical materials resulted in thinner ceiling and wall assemblies that could still achieve sound insulation. The use of fluorescent lighting allowed for less dependence on windows for natural light, more light control, and lower utility costs. Prefabricated building components—such as ceiling and wall panels and aluminum-frame curtain wall systems—also saved time and money through mass production and labor costs through repetition.<sup>30</sup> This emphasis on the use of new materials was touted as early as 1945 in an article in the *Review of Educational Research* that reported: “the trend is toward simplified design—modern not modernistic—and this trend has demonstrated that beauty in architecture can be achieved thru simplicity of line, plain surfaces, and attractive colors rather than thru ornamentation.”<sup>31</sup>

### *The International Style and Mid-20th Century School Design*

With an emphasis on function and practicality, the International Style was well suited for the design of mid-century schools. Characterized by low, horizontal massing, and simple, clean lines, the style employed the innovative use of new materials and construction techniques rather than extraneous ornamentation. As noted by *New York Times* reporter Leonard Buder in 1956, “the so-called ‘frills’ that used to adorn school buildings have gone the way of the hickory stick and the dunce cap.”<sup>32</sup>

The elements of the International Style supported the Progressive education movement in mid-century elementary school design as well as the demand for fast and cost-effective construction in the decades following World War II. The low-profile buildings with clear geometric volumes, a flat roof, and simple glass curtain-wall entrance worked well for mid-century elementary schools that aspired to have a human scale that welcomed rather than intimidated the young student. True to the honest expression of function in modern architecture, the simple geometric forms served to identify the functional organization of the plan with the interior spaces of classrooms, cafeteria, and gymnasium clearly evident from the exterior by their form, massing, and fenestration patterns. Typically built of steel frame with a skin of brick veneer, aluminum-and-glass curtain wall systems, and ribbon windows, the International Style of the mid-century school allowed for transparency of function, natural light, and maximum flexibility while also providing for rapid and economical construction. Contrasting, textured, and colorful materials—rather than extraneous ornamentation—achieved visual interest and celebrated new materials while maintaining the simplicity of the style. The asymmetrical balance of the International Style also allowed for flexibility and adaptability—which were cornerstones of the Progressive education movement—as additions could easily be constructed to meet growing school

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<sup>29</sup> Ogata, 2008: 568.

<sup>30</sup> Christman, 2016:32.

<sup>31</sup> Marsh, Reginald E, 1945:57; cited in Christman 2016:32

<sup>32</sup> “New Schools of Thought: Modern Trend in Education Is Reflected in Buildings Themselves.” *New York Times*, December 16, 1956; cited in Christman, 2016:25.

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enrollment.

### *Mid-20th Century Schools and Suburban Development*

As the United States population grew and automobiles became more affordable during the prosperous years following World War II, most of the new residential development occurred in suburban areas on the outskirts of towns and cities. As a result, most post-war schools are in the suburbs. This new development pattern led to the emergence of school planners as a profession to address not only the need for new schools but also the coordination of planning these schools as part of the larger suburban development.<sup>33</sup> The school was often the first, and sometimes only, civic structure in the new suburban community. As Harland Bartholomew and Associates noted in the 1956 Comprehensive Plan for the City of Danville, “before a residential neighborhood can be considered completely desirable, it must have educational and recreational facilities of the highest standard.”<sup>34</sup>

The design of the new suburban schools reflected this role in the community. These schools were sited on larger tracts of land to combine the public amenities of the school and park for the surrounding community. As a greater emphasis was placed on the role of play and recreation in education, mid-century schools were designed to take advantage of easily accessible outdoor spaces with their sprawling one-story form that included multiple entrances (sometimes directly from the classroom) and covered exterior walkways as well as courtyards, sports fields/courts, and other designated activity areas.<sup>35</sup> As a result, new school construction required larger tracts of land with school planners recommending a minimum of five acres plus one additional acre per 100 students for elementary schools and ten acres plus one additional acre per 100 students for high schools.<sup>36</sup> Not only did these large tracts allow for future expansion of the school but they could also be justified to the taxpayers by serving as a public recreation area.<sup>37</sup>

The school building was also designed to serve as a place for various community activities, such as musical or dramatic performances, civic or club meetings, adult education, voting precincts, and recreational sports.<sup>38</sup> This was accomplished by locating the cafeteria, library, auditorium, or gymnasium in a manner that allowed for limited and secured access (which often included exterior entrances directly into the dual-use space) for community residents to utilize outside of school hours.<sup>39</sup> In addition to avoiding redundancy and saving taxpayer money with this dual use of the school building and site, suburban schools created a community center that would serve as the nucleus of the neighborhood and attract new residential development.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Ogata 2008, 570

<sup>34</sup> Harland Bartholomew & Associates, 1956:150.

<sup>35</sup> Christman, 2016: 34-35

<sup>36</sup> Ibid:35.

<sup>37</sup> Christman, 2016:35; Harland & Bartholomew, 1956:152.

<sup>38</sup> Christman, 2016: 26.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid:35.

<sup>40</sup> Harland & Bartholomew, 1956:136-137, 146-147, 150, 152.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Ward, Hugh. "Architecture of Academic Innovation: Progressive Pedagogy, Modernist Design, and Perkins & Will's Heathcote Elementary in Post-War America." New York: Columbia University, May 2015.

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  
 previously listed in the National Register  
 previously determined eligible by the National Register  
 designated a National Historic Landmark  
 recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** DHR #108-6195

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 10.27

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 36.559534 Longitude: -79.465307

**Or**  
**UTM References**



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Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The current boundary corresponds to the lot lines of 439 Cedarbrook Drive, recorded by the City of Danville as parcel number 59803. The true and correct historic boundary is shown on the attached Tax Parcel Map and Sketch Map + Photo Key.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary of the 10.27-acre parcel nominated represents the legal boundaries of the property currently associated with the former Cedarbrook Elementary School. Adjacent land that was historically part of the original 22-acre school parcel, which continues to contribute to its historic setting, is under separate and unrelated ownership.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Katie Gutshall & Alison Blanton  
organization: Hill Studio  
street & number: 120 Campbell Avenue SW  
city or town: Roanoke state: VA zip code: 24011  
e-mail: kgutshall@hillstudio.com/ablanton@hillstudio.com  
telephone: (540) 342-5263  
date: August 2024

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

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- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Cedarbrook Elementary School

City or Vicinity: Danville

County: N/A

State: Virginia

Photographer: Kate Kronau

Date Photographed: January 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 22. Front, view southwest.
- 2 of 22. Front, view west.
- 3 of 22. Front entrance, view west.
- 4 of 22. Covered exterior walkway, view north.
- 5 of 22. Side, view southwest.
- 6 of 22. Side, view northwest.
- 7 of 22. Side, view east.
- 8 of 22. Rear, view northeast.

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- 9 of 22. Rear, view south.
- 10 of 22. Rear, view west.
- 11 of 22. Interior, single-loaded corridor, view north.
- 12 of 22. Interior, administration offices, view northwest.
- 13 of 22. Interior, library, view southeast.
- 14 of 22. Interior, double-loaded corridor, view west.
- 15 of 22. Interior, classroom, view northwest.
- 16 of 22. Interior, classroom, view northwest.
- 17 of 22. Interior, cafeteria, view south.
- 18 of 22. Interior, kitchen, view west.
- 19 of 22. Interior, addition, corridor, view east.
- 20 of 22. Interior, addition, classroom, view east.
- 21 of 22. Interior, addition, classroom, view southwest.
- 22 of 22. Interior, gymnasium addition, view northeast.


**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

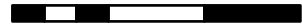
**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.

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DHR ID# 108-6195

 Proposed Boundary

0 150 300 450  
 Feet







**Legend**

Cedarbrook Elementary School (1508-6195)  
Danville VA

 NRHP Boundary

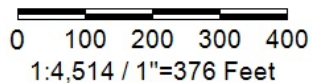
Latitude: 36.559534  
Longitude: -79.465307



VGIN Aerials (with labels)  
Map created in V-CRIS



Feet



**Title: Cedarbrook Elementary School**

**Date: 4/25/2024**

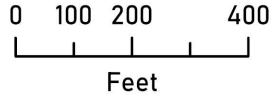
*DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.*

*Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.*

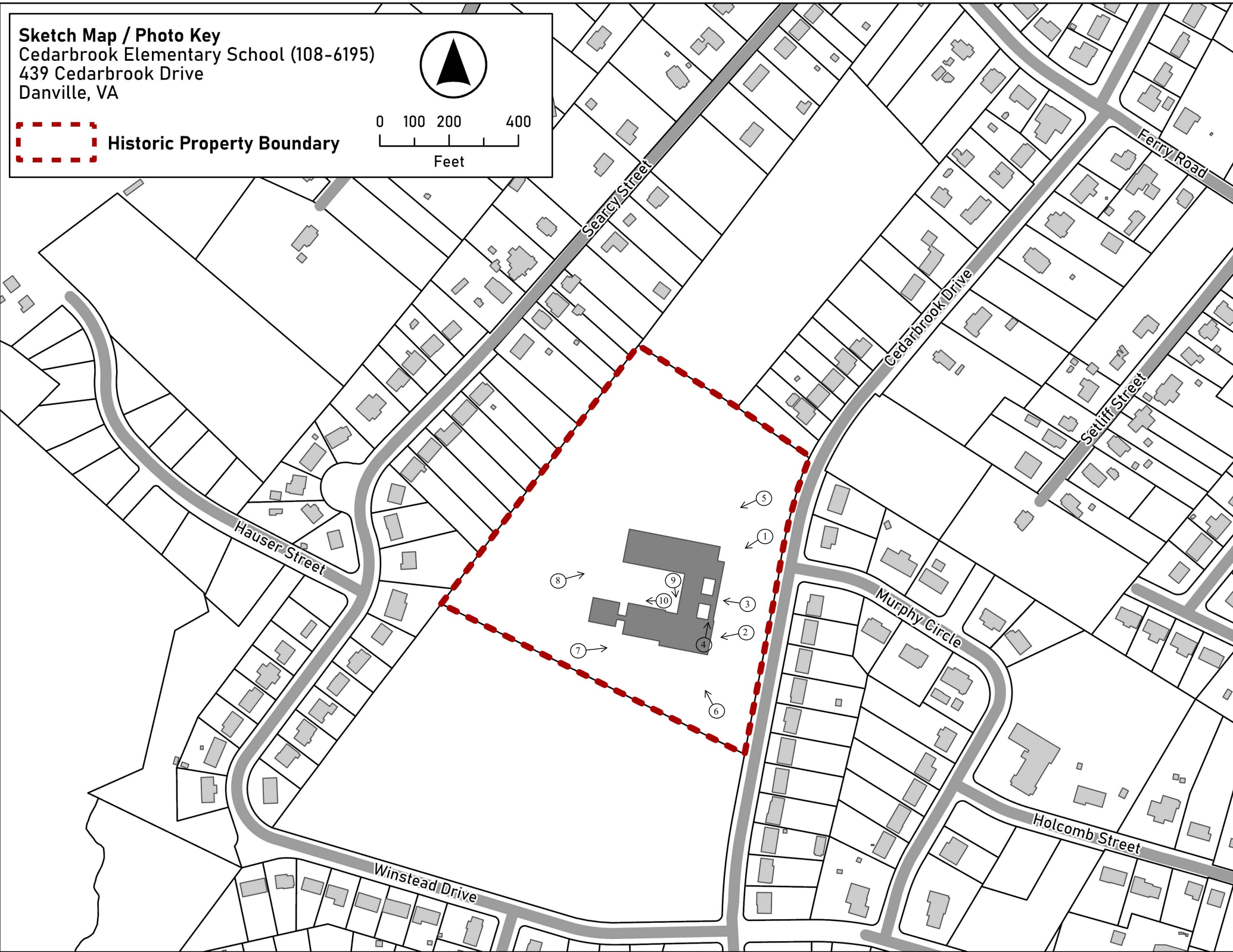


**Sketch Map / Photo Key**

Cedarbrook Elementary School (108-6195)  
439 Cedarbrook Drive  
Danville, VA



 **Historic Property Boundary**









A photograph of W. Townes Lea Elementary School, a single-story brick building with a long row of windows on the left. The school's name is mounted on the brick wall. The foreground is a grassy area covered in fallen brown leaves. Bare tree branches are visible in the upper left, and a tall flagpole stands on the right. The sky is blue with light clouds.

W. TOWNES LEA  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

JK













































































