



Property of the Month: Pillar Property Management, ESKW/Architects, IMC Architecture, JV Construction & Consulting and Brisa Builders break ground on \$35m Earl Monroe New Renaissance Basketball School

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Shown (from left) are: Allan Houston; JV Construction & Consulting president Jovana Villanueva; Brisa Builders CEO/managing member Ericka Keller; David Esfhani; Tim Thomas; New York City councilmember Rafael Salamanca Jr.; Charles Smith; Walt 'Clyde' Frazier; IMC Architecture principal Jonathan Imani, AIA; Earl Monroe New Renaissance Basketball School senior Janiyah David; ESKW/Architects partner Kimberly Murphy, AIA; Pillar Property Management principal Kiumarz Geula; Earl "The Pearl" Monroe; Alexander Geula; Earl Monroe School board of trustees vice chairman and president & CEO of Tri-State Construction Jack Irushalmi; Danielle Damaghi and Gabrielle Damaghi, DNG Property; Julius Randle; Tom Thibodeau; former Bronx borough president Ruben Diaz Jr.; and John Starks.

Photo by Brittainy Newman

Bronx, NY Basketball Hall of Famer Earl Monroe and school founder Dan Klores led the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Earl Monroe New Renaissance Basketball School (EMNRBS) in Mott Haven. They were joined by NBA commissioner Adam Silver, Walt 'Clyde' Frazier, Julius Randle, the co-chairman of the school's board of trustees Jack Irushalmi, Pillar Property Management principal Kiumarz Geula, IMC architecture principal Jonathan Imani, AIA, and ESKW/Architects partner Kimberly Murphy, AIA.

A charter, co-ed high school, EMNRBS will be a purpose-built, specialized school with an academic curriculum entirely designed around basketball and the career paths associated with the global game, from broadcast media to sports psychology, law and nutrition. The new school will serve up to 440 students.

Design architect ESKW/Architects and executive architect IMC Architecture designed the five-story building located at 647 Elton Ave. in the South Bronx. The school will operate under a 31-year, triple-net lease with the property's ownership joint venture consisting of developer Pillar Property Management and the previous owner of the 7,000 s/f site. The team also includes construction manager JV Construction & Consulting and general contractor Brisa Builders.

Rendering by IMC Architecture

"Today's groundbreaking is a celebration of two years of hard work by an incredibly talented real estate, design and construction team. I extend my gratitude and congratulations to the school, our joint venture partner David Damaghi, IMC Architecture, ESKW/Architects, JV Construction & Consulting, Brisa Builders and Bank of Hope, which provided a \$21 million construction loan for this \$35 million project," said Pillar Property Management principal Kiumarz Geula.

"We wanted to be part of this incredibly progressive idea: to not only root a school in a language that kids are already drawn to, but to broaden the expectations for a career related to the game," said Kimberly Murphy, AIA, partner at ESKW/Architects.

IMC Architecture principal Jonathan Imani, AIA said, "When completed in early 2026, this 69,000 s/f building will feature state-of-the-art athletic and learning environments, including an 8,000 s/f gymnasium, 27 regular and specialty classrooms, a library and media production studio."

School founder Dan Klores and Monroe decided to establish the specialized school in 2019. The school opened in 2021 in a temporary location in the Bronx. EMNRBS tapped Pillar to serve as developer of its permanent location.

ESKW/Architects joined the project as design architect for the EMNRBS. Pillar retained IMC Architecture as executive architect for the building. Pillar also invited two experienced minority- and women-owned construction firms to join the team: construction manager JV Construction & Consulting and general contractor Brisa Builders, both of which collaborated with the developer on several previous school projects.

The building's steel structural frame and precast concrete floor planks will sit on a foundation of reinforced concrete with spread footings and grade beams. "While planning for large structural steel

elements delivery and erection, we opted for this complex process to take place on weekends to avoid interrupting weekday traffic,” said JV Construction & Consulting president Jovana Villanueva.

The project holds a special meaning to Brisa Builders CEO and managing member Ericka Keller. “Prior to joining Brisa Builders in 2012, I worked for many years as a charter school principal and public school educator. The EMNRBS project quintessentially combines my two professional and personal passions: education and construction,” Keller said.

Rendering by ESKW/Architects

The designers selected exterior materials that are associated with both traditional school buildings and athletic facilities, such as brick and concrete panels. The architecture is inspired by the traditional field house design of the early 1900s, which featured an arched entrance. This element is reflected in the design of the schools’ entrance that will feature two-story-high, angular glazing.

On the first floor, the focal point of the 1,300 s/f lobby space will be a 16’x9’ TV screen wall that broadcasts the school’s information. Passageways from the lobby either lead to the gymnasium or the classrooms on the upper floors.

The gym will have telescopic seating for 350 spectators and an additional 40 seats for players, coaches and staff. It will feature six side-swinging, electrical basketball backstops and one digital scoreboard, as well as support spaces and an area with broadcast and recording equipment. The gym’s seven clerestory windows will allow natural light in but not direct sunlight that would impair the players’ vision.

“The architectural and engineering team faced the challenge of locating a massive gym in a tight, urban location, while ensuring that the building meets the school’s programming needs,” said Imani. “We achieved this by placing the upper floors above the gym, which is unusual due to structural challenges of building above wide-span spaces without columns. The designers developed an oversized truss structural system that is 12-ft.-high with 95-ft.-long lower beams, which will support the building section above the gym.”

The cellar will house the student dining center and lounge, a multi-functional space with an open floor plan designed for social gatherings. It will also feature a nutritional education center and retail space with the school’s merchandise. The cellar will also house a large weight training room and a dance room with a floating floor system.

The second floor will house a VIP lounge area overlooking the gym as well as a multi-functional library.

The third through fifth floors will primarily house classrooms and science labs, and will each contain a whiteboard area for studying after class, as well as various offices.

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