

# THE LEXINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL: A PROFILE

By

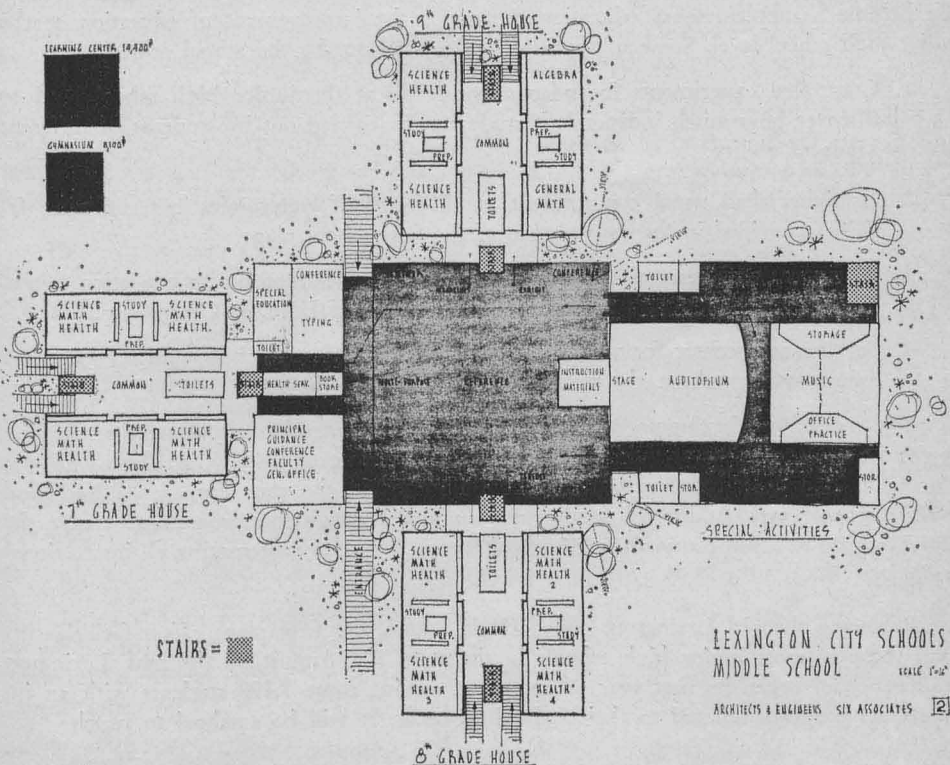
KENNETH E. HOWE<sup>1</sup>

The new Lexington Middle School, completed in the summer of 1966, has been designed to reflect the most forward thinking about early secondary education. In the library and audiovisual facilities, which are the major special features of the plant, the Middle School places emphasis upon independent study and innovative forms of school organization.

In addition, the architecture of the school embraces a house-plan type of organization which will give a kind of attention to the individual student designed to make a major difference in the way students feel about the school they attend and their motivation and interest. Initially, one house will be used for each grade: seven, eight, and nine. The plan does not prevent grouping the students in each house on some other basis. Most of the instructional work for each grade will take place in the appropriate house, although facilities more centrally located will serve the programs in art, home-making, industrial arts, music, physical education, and typing.

A third major feature of the school, reflected in the classroom and corridor design of the building itself, is the provision for varied size groups of students and for a variety of activities not typical of the usual organization for seventh, eighth, and ninth grades.

Extensive planning, conducted with the help of the State Department of Public In-



MAIN FLOOR, LEXINGTON MIDDLE SCHOOL — SCALE: 1"=16'

struction and the Learning Institute of North Carolina, has gone into the development of the new school plant and the instructional program. This planning began in the spring of 1964, when a combination of factors made it necessary to expedite plans for replacing the old junior high school plant. A committee from the Lexington City Schools staff was established to develop educational specifications for the new facility. Consultant service was made available by the Division of School Planning, State Department of Public Instruction. Once the building plans were completed, working committees were appointed to explore such areas as the school's plan of organization, curriculum, use of building space, community information, and student services and activities.

Next steps were considered in a conference held in August, 1965, with the assistance of the Learning Institute of North Carolina, whose staff worked with the Lexington staff in developing a proposal for a "planning grant" under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. In recognition of the unique opportunities afforded in the Lexington Middle School to experiment with new approaches to education in the junior high school years, the United States Office of Education awarded the school a planning grant, funds from which are being used to support intensive curriculum study by the faculty. Faculty members of the school were employed during August to participate in an in-service education course offered by extension from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Consultant service in developing tentative courses of study will be provided this fall by the University at Greensboro and the North Carolina Advancement School in Winston-Salem.

In service to the state as well as to the Lexington community, the Middle School can become a supplementary education center for the improvement of education at the junior high school level. Some of the ideas to be tried out by the school are:

1. Controlled experiments in independent study at the junior high school level to discover how much independent study can be carried out by students of different kinds of ability.
2. A higher than usual commitment to all forms of communications, utilizing facilities provided in the construction of the new school plant.
3. Serving as a center for teacher education in newer approaches to education, working in cooperation with the School of Education of UNC at Greensboro.
4. Serving as a center for visits by school administrators, teachers, and school board members throughout the state.

The role of the Lexington Middle School as a demonstration center won recognition by the State Department of Public Instruction in the spring of 1966, when the school was selected as one of ten demonstration school libraries in the state for the 1966-67 and 1967-68 school years. Additional funds were supplied through this program to enable the school to acquire a full complement of school library resources representing all instructional media.

Replacing the old Lexington Junior High School, the new plant offers facilities beyond those of most junior high schools in the state. On August 30 the new Lexington Middle School began its first year of operation, serving some 1,190 students with an instructional program tailored to their individual needs. It will be a school to watch.