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**For more information contact George Hanlin
NESCO History and Preservation Committee
georgehanlin@yahoo.com or 317.340.2025**

Award-winning firms dispute school rehab price tag

New study says endangered landmark school requires \$500,000, not \$2.6 million

Advocates for saving an Indianapolis school listed among the state's 10 Most Endangered landmarks got good news. A study produced by an Indianapolis team of architects and engineers claims the IPS School #97 could be rehabbed for \$500,000, less than a quarter of the cost claimed by an IPS consultant.

James T. Kienle and Associates, working in conjunction with Arsee Engineers evaluated the condition of the James E. Roberts School No. 97, located at 1401 E. Tenth St. on the northern edge of the Arsenal Technical High School campus. The team determined that structural repairs to lintels, flashings, masonry, mortar and other exterior elements would cost a total of \$350,000. They also estimated that repairs to windows and interior plaster would cost around \$150,000.

The \$500,000 price tag "compares favorably with the estimate of \$2,691,831 for brick repair, including roof, window and lintels, proposed by others," according to the conditions report. IPS had cited the multi-million dollar figure, from a 2005 assessment by Craig W. Rapp and Associates, as justification for its plan to demolish the landmark school.

The school, opened in 1936 for physically disabled children, has sat vacant since IPS closed it in the spring of 2006. The school board has announced its desire to demolish the school to make way for a parking lot or a soccer field for a nearby middle school.

Neighborhood groups, including the Near East Side Community Organization's History and Preservation Committee, are protesting demolition based on the school's significant social history and architectural value. Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana named it one of the state's 10 most-endangered landmarks in 2006 and again this year.

Construction on the James E. Roberts School No. 97 began in 1935 and was completed the following year. For fifty years the school served Indianapolis' physically disabled students, and it still retains many original details, including wheelchair ramps and a hydrotherapy pool. It is one of only a few Art Moderne-style buildings in the city. In 1986 the Roberts School became home to IPS's Key Learning Community, and most recently it housed the Horizon Middle School. IPS ceased using the building at the end of the 2006 academic year.

The Kienle and Arsee firms conducted their assessment of the school in January, using a lift to assist with close-range observation and a fiber-optic Borescope to assess conditions within the walls. They noted deterioration of steel window heads and displacement of parapet walls but found the building to be in very good condition overall.

The Kienle and Arsee team brings years of experience and unparalleled expertise to the project. In his 38-year architecture career, James Kienle has designed the restoration of many prominent landmarks, including the Indiana and Kentucky capitols and the Old Executive Office Building in Washington, D.C. The recipient of local, regional and national awards from the American Institute of Architects, Kienle was named in 2004 to the AIA's prestigious College of Fellows.

Arsee Engineers, founded in 1968, focuses on structural engineering and offers expertise in the analysis, design and repair of building facades, particularly masonry. The

firm has completed international projects in Canada, Thailand and Saudi Arabia, as well as many local restoration projects, including work on the state capitol, Union Station and the Athenaeum.

The Near East Side Community Organization's History and Preservation Committee, commissioned the new conditions assessment of School #97. NESCO is committed to saving the school and finding an alternate use for it. A grant from Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana helped in funding the study.

"We're grateful to IPS and Dr. White for allowing this 'second opinion' investigation. The assessment clearly shows that the building can be rehabilitated for a reasonable sum. Working together, surely we can find a use for this architectural and civil rights landmark, one compatible with the adjacent Tech campus and the surrounding historic neighborhoods," commented Mark Dollase, Vice President of Historic Landmarks Foundation.