

Catlettsburg Elementary School (Historic Public Schools of Kentucky MPS)

Name of Property

Boyd County, Kentucky

County and State

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Auditorium, sports facility

EDUCATION/School

Current Functions

EDUCATION/School

7. Description

Architectural Classification

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: CONCRETE

Exterior Walls: BRICK, CONCRETE

Fenestration: METAL/Aluminum, METAL/Steel

Roof: ASPHALT

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Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

Catlettsburg Elementary School (BD 509) is a sprawling, two-story consolidated school built alongside, and conjoined to a gymnasium constructed by the Public Works Administration (PWA) in 1937, located at the intersection of Louisa Road (US 60) and Spring Street, in Catlettsburg, Boyd County, Kentucky. The school is located in the heart of Catlettsburg, a small river city on the Big Sandy River and where it meets the Ohio River, which combined serve as the Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia borders. The school is situated on the west side of US 60 and sits on just shy of 4 acres, consisting of the entire parcel that has historically and presently been associated with the school and related activities. The Period of Significance stretches from 1937, the year the PWA gymnasium was constructed, through 1975, the last year included in the Multiple Property Listing *Historic Public Schools in Kentucky*. The building is in good condition and retains sufficient integrity for listing.

It should be noted that while this school building has had many names over the years, each representing a different point in its construction timeline or a distinctive era in Catlettsburg's educational history where the building served various grades, throughout this nomination it will be consistently referred to as Catlettsburg Elementary School, as that is the current name. Conversely, it will be called one of the various other names when referring only to that point in the building's history.

Character of Site

Catlettsburg Elementary School is surrounded on the north, east, and south by historic and modern development, commercial, residential, and industrial, and on the west by dense, undeveloped, forested land. The school is located on the south side of Catlettsburg, a small urban area that has been heavily developed and utilized since the late 19th century. Catlettsburg is situated on the Kentucky side of the convergence of the Ohio and the Big Sandy Rivers, marking the border between Kentucky, Ohio, and West Virginia, which has aided in the city's sustainability and growth over the years. Moreover, across US 60 from the school are two branches of the historic Chesapeake and Ohio (C&O) Railroad, now CSX; one that continues south through Kentucky, and one that curves east and has a long series of approach spans that carry the railroad over several streets and ultimately the Big Sandy River into West Virginia. The presence of this historic railroad and the meeting of two lines in Catlettsburg helped the city grow as a regional hub in the early 20th century.

Catlettsburg Elementary School is built on a large, sloped hill, making the topography of the lot and the details of the construction unique. The east half of the lot is flat and dominated by a large parking lot on the south end and a playground and basketball court on the north end, all of which is enclosed with a combination of chain-link and aluminum panel fencing. The school itself is expansive in length, stretching from the southern to the northern property lines. The western portion of the lot is undeveloped, partially landscaped grassland immediately adjacent to the school and dense forest further removed, in the westernmost section, with a chain-link fence separating the two. The grassy area is severely sloped and has retaining walls periodically and from different

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Figure 1. Boundaries of Catlettsburg Elementary School, as shown on an aerial map (Google Earth). Location relative to the surrounding area in the insert corner callout.

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eras of construction. There is a gravel drive that stretches north from Spring Street that runs just west of the school and wraps around to the rear delivery access.

As previously mentioned, the school was constructed on a lot with varying grades, with the gymnasium sitting higher than the rest of the school. As a result, the building appears to be many more levels than it truly is, and the interior design of the original school addition and the 1981 addition are uniquely laid out. Even the levels of the gymnasium vary and required steps to lead from the original entryway to the main floor, to accommodate the sloped landscape.

Catlettsburg Elementary School has had several additions since its construction, expanding its footprint and ability to effectively provide the necessary education and space for the schoolchildren. The first portion of the Catlettsburg Elementary School, as it appears today, was the PWA gymnasium, situated in the southwestern corner of the building, constructed in 1937. At that time, there was another Catlettsburg public school, Hatfield Elementary School, also known as the First Ward School, on the current parcel. In 1965, as part of the school consolidation movement, and to address the shortcomings of the existing public high school of the time, Thomas R. Brown High School, the Catlettsburg High School was constructed onto the existing gymnasium and joining with the elementary school, all in an effort to accommodate the growing student population, one that had outsized Thomas R. Brown almost immediately after its construction in 1910. The elementary portion of the building continued operation until 1979 when it was demolished to make way for the largest addition to the Catlettsburg Elementary School building, constructed from 1980-1981. This addition extended off the north end of the school. The last exterior addition occurred in 1996 and consisted of a simple two-story hyphen providing a connection between the 1965 and 1981 portions.

Information on the evolution of the Catlettsburg Elementary School and its development over the years was gathered using a multitude of sources which add to the validity of the information throughout this nomination. In addition to the site visit and tour of the school, the following resources were consulted at length to develop the construction narrative and physical description of the school: the most updated Boyd County School District Facility Plan, historic aerials, school floor plans and as-builts throughout the years, in-person discussions with school administrative and county maintenance staff, plaques installed on the school itself, discussions and comments from longtime Boyd County residents, former teachers, former students, and historians etc.

Description of Resource

In 1965, the original school was built to be two stories, but due to the uneven topography, they are staggered. The 1981 addition is effectively only one level, but due to the topography, the “first floor” on the rear of the building lines up with portions of the elevated portions of the original building (floor 1.5). It should be noted that throughout this description, due to the unique layout and design of the building employed as a result of the bank it is built into, the floors will be described using the nomenclature used by the school itself. Floor 1 refers to the entirety of the first floor from the main entryway that stretches the length of the school, however, in the 1981 addition, this floor only has rooms on the east side of the hallway. Floor 1.5 (also known as 1R) refers to the level slightly above floor 1 and more in line with the entry level of the PWA gymnasium, which effectively is situated between floor 1 and floor 2 and contains the cafeteria, kitchen, and other

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rooms. This level includes the cafeteria and other portions of the 1965 construction as well as the “upper” portion of the 1981 addition that, in contrast to floor 1 of the addition, only has rooms on the west side the hallway. This is what accounts for the odd roof form on this portion of the building. Floor 2 accounts for the east facing rooms of the 1965 portion of the building, directly over floor 1 while floor 2.5 (also known as 2R) is the 1965 portion of the building situated above the cafeteria that contains classrooms and the library. The 1996 elevator addition connects all of these levels and has stops associated with the aforementioned nomenclature (1, 1R, 2, and 2R). The elevator addition also includes other ancillary rooms such as a computer lab, storage rooms, mechanical rooms etc. The gymnasium is essentially a level unto itself and is not accessible via elevator, however, exterior entryways is what allows this portion of the building to remain ADA compliant.

Exterior

Catlettsburg Elementary School is a two-story, Modern school building with a concrete block foundation, exterior walls clad in brick, and a combination of a low-pitched monitor roof above the gym, hipped roof, a gable roof with shed roof extensions, and an asymmetrical, skillion and lean-to roof portion, also known as a clerestory roof, only without the clerestory windows, all of which are clad in asphalt shingles. The east (main) façade is separated into three periods of construction. The southernmost portion of the building is the original school building, constructed in 1965 around the existing PWA gymnasium. On the southern third of this façade is a flat roof overhang sheltering the main entryway to the building that is supported by simple metal posts. The entryway consists of two sets of double doors. Fenestration on the 1965 portion of the building consists of several ribbons of replacement pairs of metal windows where one out of every pair is an operable casement. The windows are all in a ribbon of four with the exception of two sets of two windows just north of center. It should be highlighted that, while the windows themselves replaced ribbons of awning windows stacked four high, the window openings have all remained the same in size and the overall rhythm of the façade. The bands of windows have varying spacing with three evenly spaced wide vertical sections with extruded brickwork.

The northern portion of the east façade, which was constructed in 1981, features the clerestory roof with an unadorned, recessed portion (floor 1.5) that only has lettering spelling out “Catlettsburg Elementary School.” The first level (floor 1), which is partially shaded by a deep roof overhang, features 17 replacement metal windows, black to match the replacements on the other portion of the building, a recessed entryway centered in the façade, and small vents near ground level separating some of the windows. Connecting the southern and northern portions of the building is a two-story hyphen with an internal vestibule and elevator. This central addition occurred in 1996 and was likely completed to make a connection between the northern and southern portions and to accommodate the elevator to meet ADA compliance requirements. This hyphen is slightly recessed from the southern portion and features a pair of security doors with transoms and a pair of replacement metal windows to match the rest of the building on the second floor.

The south façade of the Catlettsburg Elementary School shows the difference in topography, however, the severity of the grade change is softened due to the construction of the building and the paved roadway. This façade shows differing elevations, which is a result of being built into the

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bank and of the original construction of the PWA Gymnasium. There are four distinct portions of this façade. The westernmost sits lower, is a part of the original gymnasium, and accommodates the storage rooms, locker rooms, and other areas of the gym. It is largely unadorned with the exception of a security door. The next portion is the main section of the gymnasium. The only fenestration on this portion of the façade consists of seven louvered vents with stone sills. There is a small, recessed portion just east of the main gym that is associated with the interior stairways leading to the gymnasium, and is a part of the original construction. It is unadorned. The easternmost section is the 1965 addition and features replacement windows on both floor 1 and floor 2 that match those from the east façade. There are three replacement metal security doors, two of which are located at the ell where the addition meets the gym band are covered by a simple flat roof awning.

The west (rear) façade is the most irregular due to it being in the rear of the school and built into the bank. The façade protrudes out at different places and is recessed at others to accommodate the eras of construction. However, the overall fenestration remains the same, matching those from the east façade, with the exception of boarded windows in storage rooms associated with the original gymnasium. In addition to the various grade changes, some natural and some manmade (for access and system functionality), there are mechanical systems off the rear of the building, a small concrete pad outside the 1996 addition with picnic tables, and other miscellany that is to be expected behind an active school building. The north façade is largely hidden from view by a large retaining wall stretching along the northern property boundary.

Interior

The interior of the Catlettsburg Elementary School is a multi-story school building with varying levels and access points, all as a result of irregular topography and different eras of construction, primarily building a 1965 school around a 1937 gymnasium without harming the original or altering its integrity. The general makeup of the school is a mix of concrete and vinyl flooring, with the exception of specialized rooms such as the library and gymnasium which have carpet and wood flooring, respectively, concrete block walls, and drop tile ceiling throughout the hallways, corridors, and classrooms. Materials used throughout the building are consistent and are nearly all original. Upon entering the building, there is an open lobby with offices, reception and other administrative spaces. To the right (north) there is a hallway which leads to classrooms on floor one, and straight ahead (west) is a set of stairs that leads to the original gym entrance, the open space in front of it, and a hallway leading to an exterior entryway to the south. The entrance to the gym is the original façade of the 1937 PWA-built gymnasium and is of brick construction and features three arched entryways; the outer two leading to interior stairways to the gym and the central to what was once the ticket booth.

The stairs leading from the original gym entrance to the interior gymnasium are poured concrete and are broken up into two sets of stairs with a small landing. The two doors that are at the top of the entrance stairways come out to the lower level of the bleachers, which are raised above the gym floor. On the far end of the gym (west end) there is a raised stage for when the room was used as an auditorium. The gym itself, along with the associated spaces, is almost completely intact. The bleachers and wood floor are original, behind and to the sides of the raised stage are stairs that lead to subterranean storage rooms, locker rooms, and other facilities, many of which have not

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been significantly altered over the years. Aside from minor updates, new basketball goals, and a new drop ceiling, the gymnasium looks much as it did in 1937.

Outside of the gymnasium's entryway, there are two sets of stairs, one that leads to the lobby of the school, and the other that leads to floor 2. The floor 1 hallway seamlessly extends from the lobby north, through the 1996 elevator addition corridor, and into the 1981 addition. Aside from the administrative area in the southeastern corner of the building, the entirety of the floor 1 is made up of classrooms, bathrooms, storage rooms/closets, offices, and a teacher's lounge.

To access floor 1.5, without elevator use, there is a straight set of stairs on floor 1 in the hallway leading from the lobby on the south side of the cafeteria. This stairway is longer than most others and leads directly into the cafeteria. There is another stairway, central to the building, that wraps around and provides access to the entirety of the original building. This stairway, which is north of the cafeteria, leads to the central corridor, a secondary cafeteria entrance, and the rest of the floor. The central corridor seamlessly stretches from the 1965 portion into the 1981 addition and this level consists of classrooms, storage rooms, bathrooms, the cafeteria, kitchen, and other associated spaces.

Access to floor 2 comes from either the elevator, the stairs outside of the gymnasium entrance, or the central staircase. Floor two consists of a single corridor and student spaces. Floor 2.5 is only accessible via the central stairway or the elevator and features a small selection of offices and classrooms. There is little material difference throughout the building and the 1981 addition did a great job matching the materials and elevations from the original school building.

Changes to the Property Since the Period of Significance and Impact on Building's Integrity

The earliest portion of the Catlettsburg Elementary School, the gymnasium, was originally constructed by the PWA in 1937. Since then, it has undergone several changes, additions, and updates. Additions have taken place to initially create a much-needed consolidated school, and later to increase offerings and meet the growing needs of the city and county, and lastly to make the school ADA compliant. Interior changes have all been necessary to the ongoing use as a functional and safe school, and include such alterations as replacement flooring, classroom realignment, HVAC renovations, lighting renovations, technology and communication installations and ongoing updates, and other minor alterations.¹ In the mid-to-late 1990s, the school's roof was replaced and the form was changed. This includes building up the monitor roof of the gym and encompassing the entirety of the 1965 portion of the school in a hipped roof. The most notable modern material change to the building is the recent replacement of all windows in the building (2024). While this is a large-scale change, it has been confirmed, after speaking to National Park Service personnel, particularly National Register reviewers, that this change does not detract fatally from the building's integrity. Instead, it should be noted that the windows, while different material, still utilize the original openings and do not permanently alter the building's

¹ Kentucky Department of Education, Office of Finance and Operations, Division of District Support, District Facilities Branch, *Boyd County School District Facility Plan*. February 2020.

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appearance. The fact that the original openings were not altered is important, as too many other schools infill openings during alterations rather than utilizing what is originally there.

There are some modern stylistic instances incorporated into the building's interior, namely in the administrative and welcome areas, that have been altered and no longer match the institutional feel of the rest of the school, however, these are to be expected as they serve a different purpose entirely, acting as the welcome area and space for office staff. These changes include newer vinyl flooring, and carpeting. While these changes have sought to modernize the school building, they have all embraced the original architectural style of the school and reinforced, rather than diminished, its original construction methods and design intent. The original corridors, classrooms, restrooms, and larger assembly spaces all remain intact, especially, the original gymnasium which retains excellent integrity and features most of its original fixtures, characteristics, and materials. The manner in which students, faculty, and staff move through the school remains unchanged from how it was in 1975, reinforcing the integrity of the design and association. The materials of the additions and renovation also match the original construction materials. The painted concrete block walls, synthetic square floor tiles, and acoustic ceiling tiles all reinforce the building's integrity of materials and craftsmanship.

Additions completed during the Period of Significance

One of the largest, and most impactful, additions to the Catlettsburg Elementary School occurred during the Period of Significance in 1965 when the first classroom building was constructed around the PWA gymnasium and connecting to the older Hatfield Elementary School building, also known as First Ward School. The construction of the Catlettsburg High School building, as it was known as then, was instrumental in the consolidation movement in Boyd County and was built in the modern style associated with that era. Building onto the existing, functional gymnasium and elementary schools allowed for the introduction of modern educational ideologies into school architecture, such as ample lighting, central corridors, etc., while utilizing existing infrastructure and meeting the recreational needs of the time. Moreover, due to the school's location in the heart of Catlettsburg, the school took the more urban approach, as opposed to the rural designs of surrounding Boyd County, by making the building two stories, while also leaving the option for later additions open. The new addition artfully incorporated the façade of the gymnasium into the design of the new school and used creative design to allow for the two levels to work together with the gym's elevation and the parcel's topography.

1981 Addition

In 1981, there was a large-scale addition constructed just north of the original school building. As was common with consolidation-era schools, the school's wing was left open to the possibility and expectation of an expansion, especially since the Hatfield Elementary School was getting woefully outdated. This addition was artfully executed at this site, lining up the two stories of the original school to the floors of the addition, which was built into the same steep bank. This addition acts as a large-scale extension of the original layout to greatly increase the educational offerings of the school and boost the number of students the school could serve, adding 13 classrooms, additional administrative space, and restrooms. This addition, while slightly angled from the original building, as a result of the topography, serves as an extension of the original layout and ultimately appropriate in design, style, and plan. As discussed in the *Historic Public Schools of Kentucky*

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MPD, these additions, especially one that occurred just slightly after the end of the Period of Significance, are to be expected and were actually a part of the original consolidation-era ideologies. Schools built during this era were intentionally designed and laid out to allow for future additions, wings, and expansions to meet the school and community's growing needs. In this context, these additions serve to emphasize the original design and intentionality of layout that anticipated the needs of the school, instead of detracting from its integrity.

1996 Addition

The 1996 addition is a small hyphen that was constructed between the 1965 and 1981 portions of the building to bring the school up to code to meet ADA requirements by adding an elevator that leads to each level. This addition seamlessly links the two wings, which is made more impressive due to the oddity of design as a result of the topography. In addition to the elevator and associated mechanical rooms, this addition added supplementary educational and administrative space to the school. The elevator was thoughtfully designed and installed in a location where the doors can open to either the east or west, allowing access to floor 1, 1.5, 2, and 2.5, something that was difficult given the building's layout and the site's topography.

The overall impact of the additions and renovations on the pre-1975 building are negligible to understanding the building within its context of public education in Kentucky. In fact, the large-scale addition provides insight into the intentionality of the original consolidation-era designs that allowed for such expansion. The classrooms were still individualized by grade and teacher. The materials, both the original and the newer replacement materials, retained the same utilitarian nature of the original 1965 building. By keeping additions to the side of the building, it is able to retain the overall general layout of the school interior, with a central hallway flanked by classrooms, one-room deep. These sympathetic additions allow for the cohesive feel of the interior, creating a seamless fit visually and allowing for the overall flow of the building, something that was intentional to the original design, to remain intact.

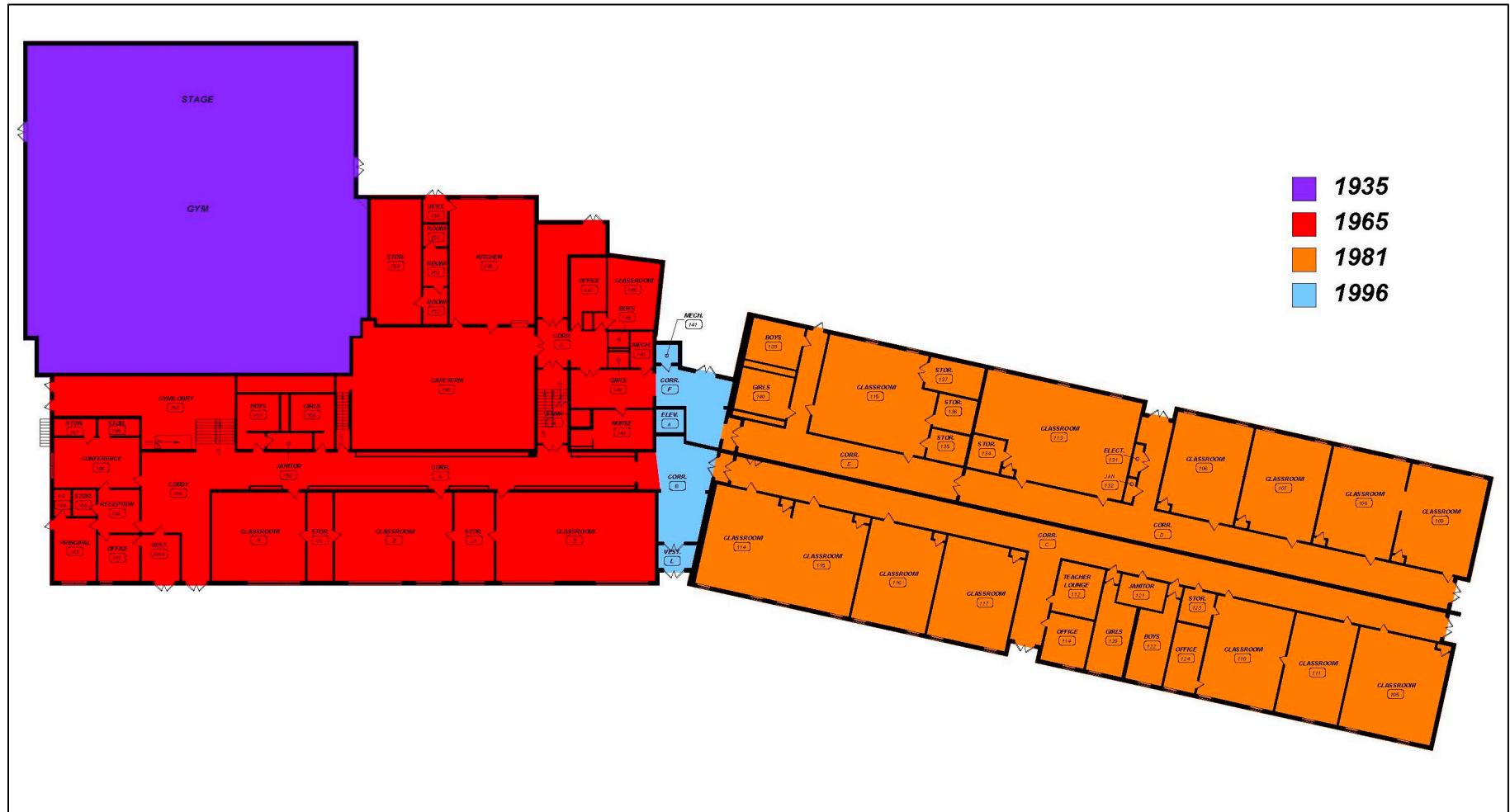
The school retains integrity as a functioning school building that has been used as a school over the course of its history. The various additions and renovations done to the school ensure that its history and function as such can continue. The historic portions of the building's exterior is still entirely visible on the east façade and portions of the original gymnasium's historic façade is still preserved in the building's interior. The additions off the north match the original construction in material, style, and design, done in the modern style. Although the new windows differ in material and operability, they retain the original opening, something that, confirmed by NPS personnel, is of the utmost importance. Catlettsburg Elementary School is an excellent example of a school that meets two Property Types. The gymnasium is a great New Deal-era building that is significant for its role to the local community and the ongoing recognized needs for recreational activities to accompany educational offerings. The 1965 school is a great example of a school from the later consolidation movement, being constructed in the modern style with an emphasis on modern educational ideologies and architectural styles and simplicities. These modern, Post-war schools were intended to grow, in enrollment, educational offerings, and in physical footprint and size, something that was done in an appropriate way at Catlettsburg Elementary School. Despite the material changes to the building, the building still retains sufficient integrity and meets the Registration Requirements set forth in the Historic Public Schools of Kentucky.

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Site Plan and Evolution of Catlettsburg Elementary School

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

- 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

Areas of Significance

EDUCATION

Significant Person

NA

Period of Significance

1937-1975

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Significant Dates

1937, 1965, 1974

Architect/Builder

Frankel and Curtis – Architects-PWA Gym
Ramey and Castle – Contractors-PWA Gym

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Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph

Catlettsburg Elementary School (BD 509) is locally significant within the historic context, Public Schools in Kentucky 1800-1975, as outlined in the *Historic Public Schools of Kentucky MPD*. It is a rare example of a building that exemplifies two different property types, Late 19th and Early 20th-Century School Buildings and Post-War School Buildings. The building has sufficient integrity to justify listing on the NRHP and it meets the Registration Requirements of the MPD. Catlettsburg Elementary School is significant as a PWA-constructed educational facility, one that exemplifies the high priority that New Dealers placed on education and education-related facilities, particularly gymnasiums that benefited the students and community as a whole. New Deal agencies, such as the PWA built school buildings throughout the Commonwealth and the country as a whole. Such buildings, like the intact Catlettsburg Elementary School gymnasium, are significant resources that tell the story of how New Deal agencies utilized federal money to benefit Americans, particularly in rural counties, by spotlighting the need for more modern, consolidated, and community-oriented educational facilities, something that was second only to improving national transportation networks and infrastructure, in the New Dealers' list of priorities. Moreover, the Catlettsburg Elementary School is a significant consolidation-era school in Boyd County, one that tells the story of the only school consolidation effort by the Catlettsburg Independent School District before rising issues, including deteriorating facilities and shrinking enrollment, led to the merging of that district with the Boyd County School District. Moreover, this school is the last vestige of the earlier era before the districts' merger and a testament both to the efficacy of the consolidation-era construction and a lasting resource reflecting the deal of the district merger that required that one school always remain within the City of Catlettsburg's boundaries. Lastly, Catlettsburg Elementary School is locally significant as a consolidation school. This school was constructed at a time when all of the district's facilities were becoming outdated and deteriorating due to deferred maintenance and growing needs and enrollment that the previous facilities could not handle. The construction of the first classrooms on this site, to accommodate the Catlettsburg High School, were completed to take the burden off the antiquated facilities, provide modern facilities and amenities to the area's students, and fully integrate the contemporary educational ideologies that were deemed necessary for educational growth and success. In addition, this school has continued to meet these needs and demonstrate the essential functionality and utility of its design as it has evolved over the years to not only accommodate additions, which were anticipated expectations of the school's design, but also to serve different school-aged populations and the requirements of the children, transforming from a gymnasium, to a high school, to a junior high school, and finally to an elementary school.

Integrity is both equally as important as significance when evaluating Kentucky's public school buildings and sometimes a concern, as these facilities have often been frequently altered to accommodate changing needs, growing enrollment, and improved technologies. As such, there will be a more thorough integrity discussion at the end of this section.

The first phase of the school's construction, the PWA gymnasium, brings historic significance to the property as a whole as a New Deal era project. The school derives further significance as an excellent example of the school consolidation movement, which resulted in the construction of

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modern educational facilities throughout Kentucky to cater to a wider geographic region and provide better educational accommodations for the schoolchildren, and how that movement positively impacted rural and urban communities alike. Schools, such as Catlettsburg Elementary School, were essential for Kentucky's smaller towns in predominantly rural counties, as they provided adequate educational facilities, established with progressive ideologies best suited for learning that could grow and evolve as needs arose.

The 1965 portion of the Catlettsburg Elementary School was constructed to create a modern school for a small, but once prosperous, town that was besieged by outdated and crumbling facilities, financial burdens, and declining enrollment. Then, shortly after the Period of Significance, a large-scale addition was added, in line with the modern progressive educational ideologies, after the school merger that combined city and county school districts. This addition further embodied the philosophies and allowed the school to cater to a now vastly larger geographic area. As was common and expected with consolidation era schools, the original design allowed for frequent additions which, due to their nature and their emphasis on expanding not only the school's footprint but expanding on the importance of the modern school design, can continue to demonstrate a facility's significance and enhance its integrity rather than detract from it.

Catlettsburg Elementary School meets the Registration Requirements set forth in the Multiple Property Listing. The Late 19th and Early 20th Century School Buildings Property Type includes New Deal era buildings as they were philosophically aligned with the broader consolidation movement as they sought to bring modern amenities and facilities to rural and smaller communities across the Commonwealth. As with a lot of New Deal era construction projects, the PWA had a style that was often reflected in their buildings, sometimes referred to as PWA Moderne or PWA/WPA Moderne. This style employed a utilitarian design with minimal ornamentation and an emphasis on a classical balanced and symmetrical form, facades organized and arranged with an accent on verticality with recessed fenestration and accented pillars dividing bays, and clean lines and mostly flat surfaces. The Catlettsburg Elementary School is an excellent example of both of these identifying factors; the ideological reasons behind its origination and the architectural style used in its construction. As such, buildings that fall into this Property Type will be eligible as long as they have not lost sufficient integrity and no longer possess the characteristics of this type. Catlettsburg Elementary School still possesses a high level of integrity for this Property Type as the gymnasium has remained mostly untouched, especially the details, characteristics, fixtures, and materials on the interior, but it also continues to serve the functions for which it was created; providing students and the community with amenities that might be otherwise unavailable. Furthermore, while the gymnasium's front façade has since been enclosed by the construction of the large school addition in 1965, they retained its architectural features and continue to utilize the original gymnasium entryway, albeit from the now interior gym lobby.

Catlettsburg Elementary School also meets the Registration Requirements set forth in the Multiple Property Listing for Post-War School Buildings. This Property Type includes buildings that were a part of the ongoing consolidation movement of the mid-20th century. These buildings are characterized by the prevalent architectural and educational ideologies of the time, those that were designed to best foster learning for Kentucky's schoolchildren. They were built in the Modern Style with ample light, simple utilitarian designs with central passageways flanked by classrooms,

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and amenities such as cafeterias, libraries, gymnasiums etc. These buildings' ability to evolve and grow in order to accommodate ongoing needs was paramount. As such, buildings, such as Catlettsburg Elementary School, were frequently altered and additions were added. These additions and alterations that occur after 1975 are weighed against the significance of the building, to determine whether the building's significant identity survives in material form. The important question an eligible property must answer in the affirmative is whether the building's physical status today continues to reinforce the significance of local historical educational efforts. As outlined in the MPD, alterations and additions that occurred after the Period of Significance in most cases do not detract from the overall integrity or eligibility of a historic public school building. Instead, it can be argued that these additions fulfilled the original purpose and design of the schools and, as long as the additions do not detract from the original styles and character-defining features, both architecturally and in overall design, then they will be seen as sympathetic and compatible examples of ongoing growth and evolution.

Brief History of Boyd County Schools

The landscape of public education in Boyd County, Kentucky looked much different around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when compared to today. Still a relatively young county, Boyd County, established in 1860, relied on small local schools to educate its children for its first few decades. However, this began to change in the last years of the nineteenth century in the county's two largest municipalities; Ashland and Catlettsburg. As a result, the school systems in each of these areas were city school systems as opposed to county-wide systems that were established elsewhere in the Commonwealth. In Catlettsburg, the robust and successful school system was due to the city's location at the mouth of the Big Sandy River where it meets the Ohio River. This location allowed the city to develop as a booming trade center which, in turn, provided the adequate population and tax base to sustain a municipal school system over the sparser county system.

Because of the continued success of the City of Catlettsburg and the burgeoning population, by the early years of the twentieth century, the city began to significantly invest in educational facilities. By the mid-1920s, the Catlettsburg Independent School System had a brick high school, a frame building for African American students, and three brick grade schools, each of which served a different area of town; to the north was 4th Ward (eventually renamed Haney), centrally located was 2nd Ward School (eventually renamed Yost), and to the south, and adjacent to the eventual PWA gym and on the site of present Catlettsburg Elementary School, was 1st Ward (eventually renamed Hatfield).²

The landscape of public education in Catlettsburg began to change slightly into the mid-twentieth century. At this time, county districts and rural schools were seeing an influx in the school-aged population as a result to changing demographics of the areas with the return of veterans and the subsequent baby boomer population, as well as the constant improvement of the Commonwealth's infrastructure and the increasing availability of automobiles for Americans, all of which led to the

² "New High School Gymnasium and Auditorium is Splendid Addition to Catlettsburg's Public School Plant; Construction of Stadium Underway." In *Ashland Daily Independent*. February 6, 1938.; Sanborn Map Company, *Map of Catlettsburg, Kentucky*, Sanborn Map Company, Broadway, New York: Various.

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ever-growing consolidation movement. Catlettsburg, too, reached a point in the mid-twentieth century where facilities could no longer meet the rigorous modern educational standards and a new approach to educational architecture was required, thus, the construction of the Catlettsburg High School in 1965.

The Boyd County School District was slowly growing in the early twentieth century, albeit, at a slower pace than the Catlettsburg Independent School District. Originally comprised of one-and-two-room grade schools, the county's first high school, Boyd County High School, did not graduate its first class until 1929, 19 years after Thomas R. Brown High School was opened. However, by the mid-1960s, as a result of the consolidation movement and the aforementioned factors that the rural landscape was experiencing, the Boyd County School District had seven elementary schools and one high school.³

The rise in demand, enrollment, and growth in the county schools as opposed to the city schools was exacerbated by the struggling Catlettsburg economy. In the 1950s, Catlettsburg was at the peak of its success and was at its largest in terms of population. However, that same decade, major industries, including the C&O Railroad, which had previously began to replace river transportation, left the city causing a downturn in population and economic activity. As a result, by the 1970s, the Catlettsburg Independent School District was plagued with "declining enrollment, decaying buildings and financial problems," all of which led to the 1974 merger between the city and county school systems.

Today, Boyd County School District has four elementary schools, two of which were built in the 1960s and two of which were built in the 1990s, a high school, a middle school, and several other alternative and technical schools and academies.

History of Nominated Property

The history of the Catlettsburg Elementary School is an interesting one and is the embodiment of the overall growth and evolution of schooling in Kentucky. The history of education at this site began in 1923-1924 when the First Ward School was constructed in the center of the current parcel. The name of the First Ward School was eventually changed to Hatfield Elementary in 1940. In 1937, at the height of the New Deal era, the PWA constructed a gymnasium, complete with a stage for auditorium usage, just south of Hatfield Elementary to serve the city's athletic, recreational, and community needs.⁴ The gymnasium was funded by the PWA, planned and supervised by the architects Frankel and Curtis, and constructed by the contracting firm of Ramey and Castle out of Ashland.⁵ The following year, in 1938, the WPA, another New Deal agency, constructed bleachers and a football field just in front of the gymnasium and the Hatfield school, further emphasizing the importance of athletics and recreation.

³ Boyd County Public Schools. "A History of Boyd County Public Schools." Electronic Document, <https://www.boyd.kyschools.us/district/district-information/history-of-bcps>, accessed August 2025.

⁴ "New High School Gymnasium and Auditorium is Splendid Addition to Catlettsburg's Public School Plant; Construction of Stadium Underway." In *Ashland Daily Independent*. February 6, 1938.

⁵ Ibid.

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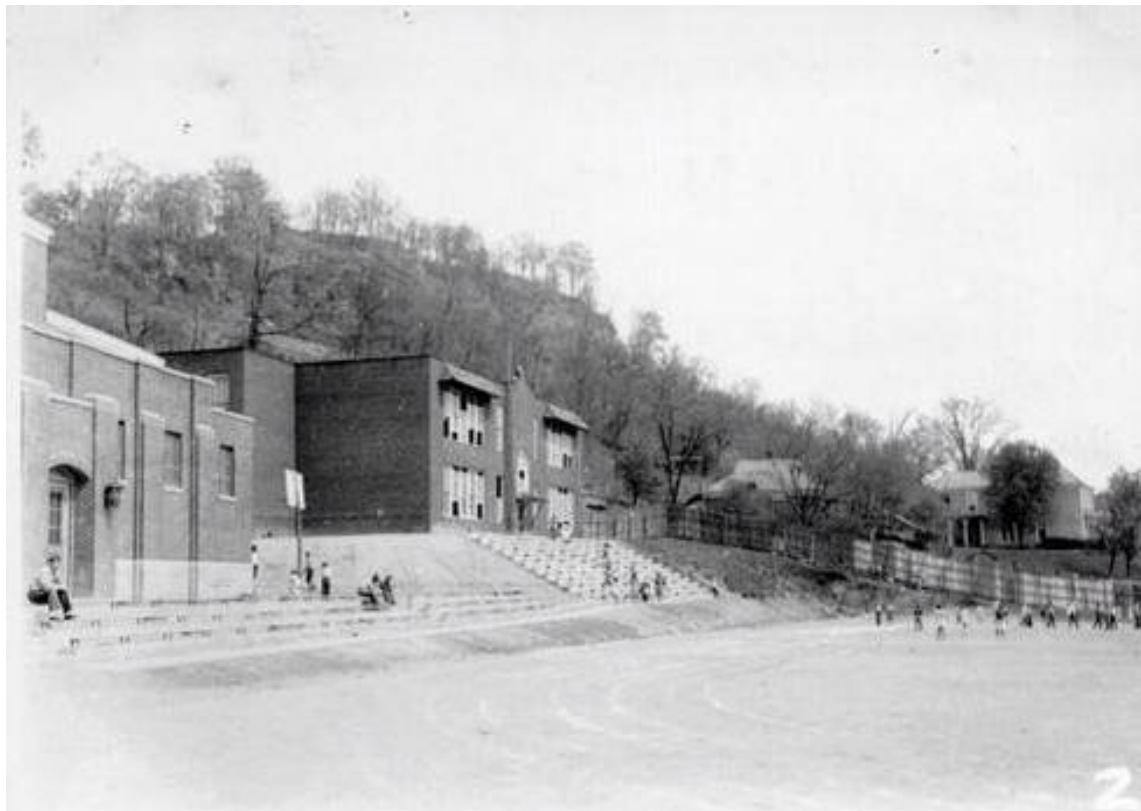
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View of the PWA Gymnasium, ca. 1950. Note that the entryway sits much lower than the rest of the building to accommodate it being built into the bank. The outer doors led to steps to the gym while the center door led to a ticket booth.



View of the PWA Gymnasium to the left and in the foreground, Hatfield Elementary School in the background, and the WPA-built football field, playground, and bleachers to the right and in the foreground.

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It is a common misconception that the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was the only New Deal agency constructing schools during the 1930s and 1940s. In fact, in addition to the PWA and WPA, other agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), the Civil Works Administration (CWA), and the National Youth Administration (NYA) all constructed educational facilities including schools, gymnasiums, athletic fields, and playgrounds, to name a few. Examples of New Deal era educational construction efforts can be found in almost every county in every state in the nation.⁶ The PWA in particular, who is mostly known for their large-scale infrastructure projects aimed at boosting the flailing transportation and construction industries, was very involved in constructing schools across America, especially in rural areas. Between 1933 and 1935, the PWA “allotted approximately \$137,604,560 for school construction all over the country, including erection of new buildings, extensions on older schools, and repairs.”⁷ Moreover, Harold Ickes, the influential director of the PWA advocated for the contemporary movement, especially as it pertained to rural schools and facilities in small towns, stating that “the new rural schools, made possible by good roads, are quite as modern as the best city schools. Where it was necessary to have eight one-room schools in the past, there is now a single eight-room school” and that “the larger and modern building has a marked effect upon the health and attendance and in it is housed far superior equipment, both for education and recreation. Moreover, the consolidated schools serve importantly as a community center for the adult life of the area” where “the same rooms in which the children are taught...can be used to give people of the farms an opportunity for recreational, educational, and cultural activities hitherto denied to them.”⁸ This view was exemplified in the construction of the gymnasium in Catlettsburg and rural schools elsewhere in the Commonwealth.

The site remained largely unchanged for nearly three decades until 1965 when the current school was constructed around the gymnasium and connected to the elementary school. Prior to this, the Catlettsburg Independent School System, which operated independently within the county, had an older building serving its high school needs. The Thomas R. Brown High School, which was a high-style, two-story school building constructed in 1910, was beautiful yet antiquated and the school system’s needs necessitated the construction of a new building. This action was emblematic of the ongoing changes being implemented across the Commonwealth as the older schools, whose design precluded growth, evolution, or innovation, were replaced by newer buildings that embodied the modern educational and architectural philosophies. In an effort to accentuate utility and efficiency, the construction of the Catlettsburg High School incorporated the site’s two existing buildings which were then utilized and incorporated into the new school’s function and design.

⁶ Kennedy, Rachel and Cynthia Johnson. *The New Deal Builds: A Historic Context of the New Deal in East Kentucky, 1933 to 1943*. Frankfort, Kentucky: Kentucky Heritage Council, 2005.

⁷ Ickes, Harold L. *Back to Work: The Story of PWA*. New York: MacMillan Company, 1935:91.

⁸ Ibid:90.

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View of Catlettsburg Elementary School, just after construction when it was still the Catlettsburg High School. Note that Hatfield Elementary School is still standing and attached in the background to the right of the picture. Also note the raised elevation of floor 2.5, visible to the right of the gym.

In 1974, the Catlettsburg Independent School System merged with the Boyd County School System, precipitated by many factors plaguing the Catlettsburg system. One of the agreements of this merger was that there would always be a school building in the City of Catlettsburg. However, in a decision that was contentious at the time, the school that was serving as Catlettsburg High School became the Catlettsburg Junior High School, the first junior high school in Boyd County, and the high school students were sent to Boyd County High School in nearby Cannonsburg.

Serving as the only junior high school in Boyd County, it was difficult for the building, as it was designed and somewhat cobbled together by three very different and somewhat unrelated eras of construction, to adequately meet the growing needs of the county and the demands of modern educational values. While the former Hatfield Elementary School was still being utilized, its age and design was limiting to a growing modern school. As such, it ceased to be used in 1979 to make way for the large-scale 1981 addition. This expansion increased the educational offerings, created a more cohesive rhythm and flow for the school, and solidified the unified style that is present today. Moreover, this expansion maxed out the space allowed by such a restrictive urban parcel in Catlettsburg, a place where space was limited. As has been previously mentioned, the consolidation-era school buildings were designed with the expectation of future expansions. Thus, when the county outgrew the current school, instead of tearing it all down and starting over, since finding a suitable new site for construction was all but out of the question since previous agreements stipulated a school remaining in the city limits where existing adequately-sized parcels were rare, a large-scale addition was the obvious choice.

The school continued to serve as a junior high school until 1993 when it was repurposed as the Catlettsburg Elementary School. Shortly after, in 1996, there was another addition to the building, this time a small-scale hyphen between the 1965 and 1981 portions, designed to add elevators and bring the building up to code.

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As a result of the agreement made at the time of the merger, the Catlettsburg Elementary School building continued to serve the county, as at least one school within the city's limits was required. The choice for schools was unsurprisingly an easy one, as the Catlettsburg Elementary School building was the most recently constructed and was the only facility in the city that met the modern standards of educational architecture and ideology. Moreover, the last of the other original independent schools, Yost Elementary, was closed in 1980, something that further led to the necessity of the 1981 addition. Although several other schools that were previously in the independent school system remained initially, within a few years, they had all been demolished and/or decommissioned. Because of this unique circumstance, the current Catlettsburg Elementary School presents as a more rural consolidated school in the context of the greater county, however it is functionally more of an urban school in terms of parcel size and site utilization. While the 1965 portion of the building was constructed with future additions in mind, the school could not evolve like a counterpart that has endless space, as it had to remain in the city limits and the area was already developed by the early twentieth century.

Despite representing three eras of construction (1937, 1965, and 1981) and having a unique layout thanks to the steep bank on which it was built, the building has a cohesive feel and rhythm. The expansion of the building is a testament to the modern architectural styles being employed in the post-war years and the large addition was done in an appropriate and impressive manner. The addition serves to greatly enhance the school's ability to offer an education to the area's children, but it also did so without compromising the character-defining and stylistic features of the earlier building. Moreover, in addition to increasing the square footage to increase classrooms and the total allowable enrollment, Catlettsburg Elementary School has also expanded their educational and recreational offerings. While the interior layout has been minimally changed over the years, changes in purpose are frequent, especially to bring educational offerings into the twenty-first century.

Over the years since the building was constructed, the Catlettsburg Elementary School has hosted events for the local community and surrounding region in addition to its service as a high school, a junior high school, and an elementary school. The early PWA-funded gymnasium hosted community and regional happenings such as basketball games, plays, rallies, and other events as it was a centrally located facility with ample space and an auditorium. This occurred both before and after the school buildings were added onto the gymnasium with notable events being pageants, Masonic meetings, and other community and civic engagements.⁹ Such activities were intentional, as these schools were intended to serve the local community both as a place for education and as a community center, especially in rural areas.

The site on which the Catlettsburg Elementary School sits symbolizes the growth of public school buildings and educational evolution in Kentucky throughout the entirety of the twentieth century. There once stood a large, architecturally stylistic elementary school dating back to the early decades of the century only to be followed by a New Deal era gymnasium. The site then experienced its first consolidation as a large addition combined the two older buildings with a modern take on educational architecture and educational philosophies. Then, following the

⁹ "Masons of District 32 to Meet at Catlettsburg." In *Licking Valley Courier*. June 4, 1953.

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consolidation of two school districts and the ongoing growth of a community and its needs, the school evolved further. This growth embodies the modern school designs that allow for such additions to fit onto the buildings seamlessly. Lastly, the site was brought into the modern era by adopting technological advances to meet ADA requirements. The school, as a whole, is not only representative of two distinct Property Types, each of which are historically significant and retain sufficient integrity, but it tells the story of educational architecture, its evolution, and the evolution of a single parcel in Kentucky's smaller cities, particularly where property is scarce.

Evaluation of the Significance of the Property within the Historic Context

The Catlettsburg Elementary School is an excellent example of both a New-Deal era gymnasium, constructed by the PWA, and a consolidated school in one of Kentucky's more rural counties. The PWA, specifically, viewed the construction of schools and education related facilities, such as gymnasiums, as essential and a major part of their construction and funding efforts across the country and in Kentucky. This was further intensified for schools in rural counties where modern, functional facilities were lacking, when they even existed at all. This is the case for Catlettsburg. The city reached its peak in population in the 1930s due to its industrial success and location at the mouth of the Big Sandy River, but was lacking the modern educational facilities of the larger cities, of which Catlettsburg was not one. In 1937, in their effort to remedy the educational and recreational shortcomings of the nation's rural counties, especially with facilities that benefited the larger communities as a whole, the PWA constructed the gymnasium that is now a part of the Catlettsburg Elementary School. This gymnasium served the local school district and the city's population, providing a place for recreational activities, an auditorium for gatherings and performances, and as a large meeting space. The gymnasium is almost completely intact and the later additions were completed in a sympathetic manner, allowing for it to continue to serve its original function and purpose. Moreover, as New Deal educational construction placed a large emphasis on the principles of the consolidation movement and the necessity of ensuring that buildings continue to adapt to meet growing needs, the later addition onto this gymnasium can be seen as a further realization of that goal.

As a consolidated school, the Catlettsburg Elementary School is significant locally. Not only was it the only example of the consolidation era in the City of Catlettsburg, that had its own school district until 1974 when a decline in population, funds, and an ever-worsening collection of facilities, led to the district's merger with the Boyd County School District, but it is also a great example of the implementation of such a school in a small town in a rural county. The consolidation movement sought to improve the facilities, educational offerings, and basic amenities by constructing larger facilities that not only offered the space for the needs of the children, but that emphasized a design that prioritized the contemporary educational ideologies over the embellishments of earlier eras. Moreover, a major tenet of the consolidation movement was the recognition that one of the largest shortcomings of the earlier eras of educational construction was the lack of adaptability. Consolidated schools sought to remedy this by not only emphasizing utility and functionality over ornamentation and grandeur, but by also designing the buildings in a way that made future growth and expansion easily achievable. These schools can often be seen in Kentucky's rural and suburban areas, but are also found in the smaller towns, such as Catlettsburg. The Catlettsburg Elementary School is an example of this effort to improve the educational facilities of the city's small school district by building a modern building that

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accentuated the tenets of modern educational construction. Overall, this school, demonstrates the long-standing efforts and aspiration to constantly improve school buildings and allow them to evolve to best serve the students. As such, it is locally significant.

Evaluation of the Integrity Between the Significance and the Property's Physical Condition

The Catlettsburg Elementary School is highly intact. Although the building has been altered over the years, primarily in the additions that occurred after the Period of Significance and the more recent replacement of the windows, these do not detract from the overall integrity of the buildings nor its ability to convey significance as a PWA-constructed gymnasium and as a significant consolidated school, one that is important to the overall educational story of Catlettsburg, and Boyd County as a whole. Despite alterations, which occurred to allow the school to evolve and to continue to meet the ever-growing needs of its students and advancements in school offerings and requirements, the building still retains the key features of a PWA-gymnasium and consolidated school. Moreover, from their inception, consolidated schools were designed and built in a way to allow for future growth and expansion, as this was seen as an inadequacy in the earlier school designs. Therefore, the buildings were designed to have central corridors that are lined with classrooms on either side to allow for ease of movement, large bands of windows to allow for adequate lighting, and were constructed with simple, easily reproduced materials in a style that prioritized utility over ornamentation. These schools were further designed to allow for wings to be added to the sides and rear of the buildings with ease to permit future additions that would not alter the functionality of the original building. As such, these later additions, when they do not alter key features of the original design or the intentional rhythm of the space, they can be seen as fulfillments of the original purpose and need, and not detractions from the building's integrity.

The Catlettsburg Elementary School possesses integrity of **Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Workmanship, Feeling, and Association**. Both location and setting of the school have not changed. The building is still located at its original site, one that has an especially long history with local education-related facilities, and it is also still situated along the city's major thoroughfare, in a densely developed area. While the road and some of the surrounding buildings have changed over the years, as the city has experienced a decline in population and industry and as the corridor has become a major state route, the overall setting remains intact. The building also retains integrity of materials. Most of the building's exterior materials have remained largely unchanged and the materials used on the later additions closely matched the original. Although the windows have been replaced in the last couple years, the fact that the replacements still utilized the original opening instead of infilling or altering it, is of the utmost importance. In fact, conversations with NPS personnel confirmed that the size of the opening is the significant feature of these buildings, which highlighted the need for adequate lighting in the modern consolidated schools, and not necessarily the material of the window. Furthermore, the material integrity of the rest of the school, including throughout its interior and especially in the PWA gymnasium, is immaculate and is almost all original to the building's construction. The material intactness of the gym itself deserves special attention, as when the later additions occurred, the original entryway and all original fixtures of the gym were left, including the bleachers, the arched brick openings, and the auditorium stage.

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The building also possesses integrity of design. The PWA gymnasium still stands just as it did when it was constructed, exemplifying the PWA Moderne design. Moreover, the consolidated school's design is indicative of the larger consolidation movement with its modern style, minimal ornamentation, sprawling layout, emphasis on large windows, central corridors for students, and the inclusion of modern amenities such as a kitchen, cafeteria, etc. The inclusion of the 1981 and 1996 additions further emphasizes the original design, particularly that of a consolidation school that needed to evolve to meet ever-changing needs. The first addition was constructed off the side of the original classroom building and a modern elevator addition, which is a necessary requirement to accommodate individuals with limited mobility, was placed in between the other sections. These additions were done in a sympathetic way that allows for a seamless rhythm inside the school and further accentuates the intended design qualities of consolidated-era modern schools.

The building retains integrity of workmanship, as these schools highlighted a simplistic design that is still visible. Moreover, the significant features of the gym are still intact. Lastly, the building retains a strong integrity of feeling and association. The school, and the components that make up the various eras of its construction, have not changed function since their construction. The school is still easily recognizable, and is an especially good example, of a consolidation-era school building, particularly one that has evolved over the years.

Overall, the Catlettsburg Elementary School retains excellent integrity and is still able to adequately convey its significance as a locally significant consolidated school and a PWA-constructed gymnasium. Its ability to convey its significance is the central principle of integrity one must evaluate when assessing a historic building. As such, this building has been shown to meet this standard as the school's intact features, sympathetic additions, and design characteristics all work along with the significance outlined in the context, to tell the story of two distinct eras of education in Catlettsburg, both of which are locally important.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

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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: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3.8 Acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

1. Latitude: 38.406835 Longitude: -82.601244

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of Catlettsburg Elementary School includes the entire legal parcel on which the school is located. The property is roughly bounded by Louisa Road to the east, Spring Street to the south, undeveloped forested land to the west, and neighboring commercial and residential buildings to the north.

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the entirety of the property historically and currently associated with Catlettsburg Elementary School.

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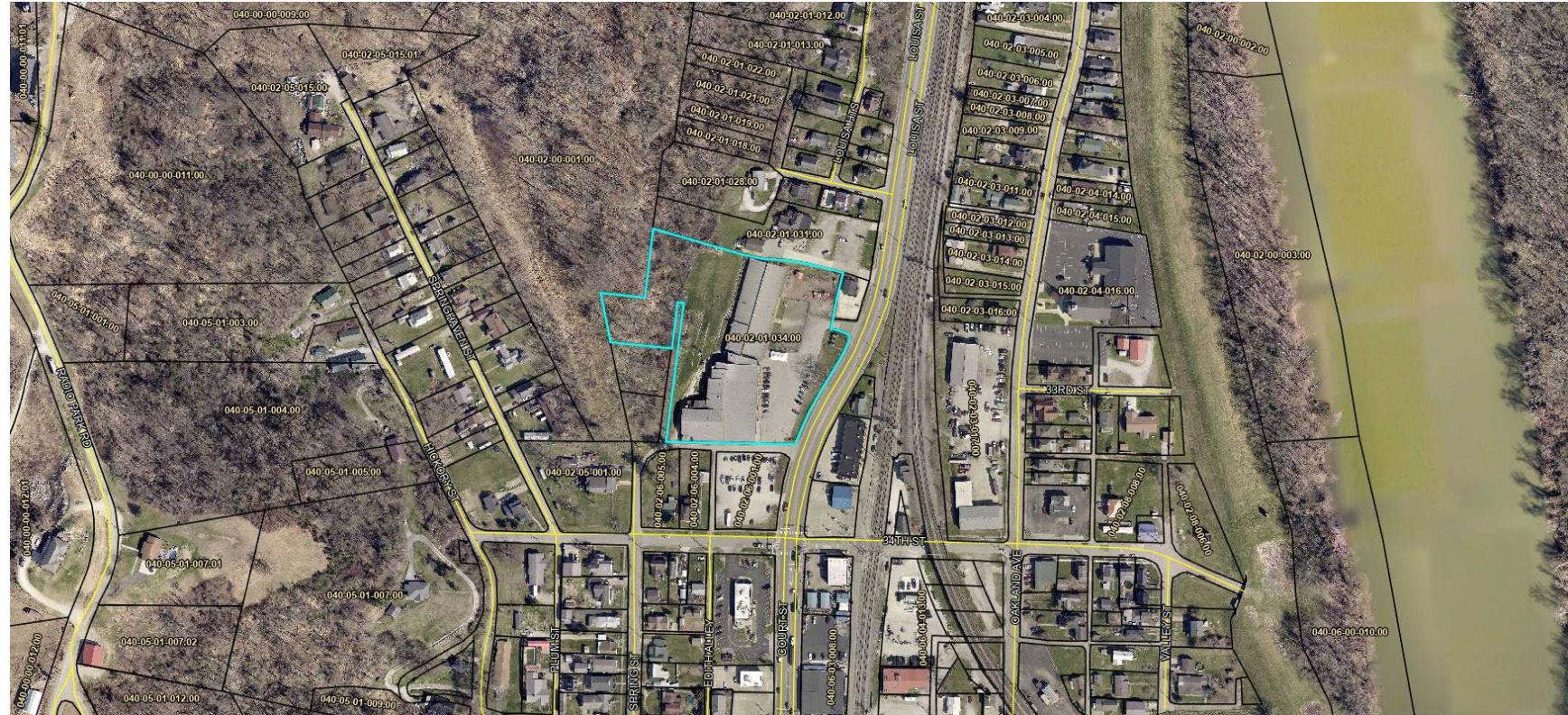


Figure 2. Parcel map courtesy of Boyd County, KY PVA

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Boyd County, Kentucky

Name of Property

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Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Boyd County School District

street & number 1104 Bob McCullough Dr

telephone _____

city or town Ashland, KY

state Kentucky

zip code 41102

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Wes Cunningham, MA, Sr. Principal Investigator History/Architecture, Director
of National Register Nominations & Research

organization: Pinion Advisors

street & number: 1131 Logan Street

city or town: Louisville state: Kentucky zip code: 40204

e-mail: wcunningham@pinionadvisors.com

telephone: 502-807-0575

date: August 2025

Photographs

Photo Log

Name of Property: Catlettsburg Elementary School

City or Vicinity: Catlettsburg

County: Boyd County

State: Kentucky

Photographer: Wes Cunningham

Date Photographed: August 2025

- 1 of 24: View of Catlettsburg Elementary School, facing southwest.
- 2 of 24: View of the south wing of Catlettsburg Elementary School, facing northwest.
- 3 of 24: View of the north wing of Catlettsburg Elementary School, facing west.
- 4 of 24: View of the south façade of Catlettsburg Elementary School, facing north.
- 5 of 24: View of the west façade of the south wing of Catlettsburg Elementary School, facing south.
- 6 of 24: View of the west façade of the north wing of Catlettsburg Elementary School, facing southeast.
- 7 of 24: View of the interior lobby, facing southeast.
- 8 of 24: View of interior stairs from lobby toward gymnasium lobby, camera facing west.
- 9 of 24: View of original gymnasium façade, now an interior wall, facing west.
- 10 of 24: View of gymnasium interior with raised stage, facing west.
- 11 of 24: View of gymnasium interior, facing east.
- 12 of 24: View of interior classroom 1, facing southeast.
- 13 of 24: View of interior classroom 3, facing northwest.
- 14 of 24: View of interior classroom 109, facing south.

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- 15 of 24: View of interior classroom 115, facing east.
- 16 of 24: View of cafeteria, facing south.
- 17 of 24: View of library, facing east.
- 18 of 24: View of computer lab, facing south.
- 19 of 24: View of elevator corridor, facing west.
- 20 of 24: View of Principal's office, facing southwest.
- 21 of 24: View of restroom, facing west.
- 22 of 24: View of restroom, facing north.
- 23 of 24: View of interior stairway, facing west.
- 24 of 24: View of interior corridor, facing north.

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② SECOND FLOOR

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