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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic Board of Education Building

and/or common N/A

## 2. Location

street & number 21st Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway N/A not for publication

city, town Philadelphia, N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 42 county Philadelphia code 101

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	N/A in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name School District of Philadelphia

street & number 21st Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway

city, town Philadelphia, N/A vicinity of state Pennsylvania

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Hall

street & number Broad and Market Streets

city, town Philadelphia state Pennsylvania

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N.A. has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date N.A.  federal  state  county  local N.

depository for survey records N.A.

city, town N.A. state N.A.

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Board of Education Building, dedicated on February 20, 1932, is constructed of Indiana limestone in the Neo-Classical style. The building consists of a nine-story rectangular main section running east and west, topped by a low two-tiered tower, with two three-story wings projecting on the north side flanking an enclosed courtyard.

Except for the metal panel sheathing added to the penthouse, the exterior remains unaltered. Sculptural elements, both architectural and representational, are an integral part of the design. Articulated joints and a band course with dentils define the first two floors which form the base. For the remaining seven stories of the main section, pilasters between paired windows are expressed and are topped with carved caps. A decorative frieze and simple parapet provide the upper termination. The low tower is integrated into the main section by extending the corners up to the tenth floor, topping these corners with carved eagles which form a parapet and then cutting off the corners at the 11th story to form an eight-sided tower.

The four columns in the center of the south and north faces of the main section fall within this tower and are extended to the 11th floor. In addition, there are four columns above the roof of the main section on both the east and west faces of the tower. These 16 columns are topped by carved heads representing educators and statesmen. On the north side are Daniel Webster, Benjamin Franklin, Thaddeus Stevens, and William Shakespeare. On the south side are Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and John Marshall. On the east side are Robert Fulton, Russell Conwell, Horace Mann and William Penn. On the west side are Isaac Newton, George Washington, Bayard Taylor and Stephen Girard.

Each pair of windows in the tower is topped by a single fan light. The first tier of the tower has a simple carved frieze at the top. The second tier of the tower is set back from the first and is sheathed with metal panels.

The interiors are relatively unaltered and represent many of the various styles popular in the 1920s. Although the majority of the spaces are simple, functional offices, the public and ceremonial areas are fine examples of art deco and eclectic styles. The main corridors on each floor, as well as the auditorium, feature lighting, grilles, and signage executed in the Art Deco style of the day. The Board Room foyer is Neo-Greek in the Ionic style; the Board Room, the Secretary's office, and the Superintendent's office are Neo-Colonial; the President's office is done in the Georgian style; and the 10th floor cafeteria is described as being of the Spanish provincial style.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** Dedicated February 20, 1932 **Builder/Architect** Irwin T. Catherine

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Board of Education Building is significant because of its association, design and setting: It represents the perceived as well as the physical center of public education in the fourth largest city in the United States; it is an excellent example of neo-classicism executed during the Art Deco period of the 1920s and 1930s; and its setting, covering entirely a small city block on the edge of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, is a testimonial to the planning which revitalized this area in the early part of the twentieth century.

The first school board, established in 1818, met in City Hall, then at the southwest corner of Fifth and Chestnut Streets. As the city and its public educational system grew, the administration expanded and was housed in several locations at once, including 1519-25 Arch Street, 19th and Ludlow Streets, 17th and Pine Streets, Pine Street below 12th Street, 1522 Cherry Street, and 1919 Cherry Street. The completion of the Board of Education Building in 1932, permitted the consolidation of fragmented administrative services. For fifty continuous years, the building has provided a fitting visual monument to the public school system.

The design of the Board of Education Building is a fine example of the Neo Classic style executed during the Art Deco period. The use of classical forms and elements in the architecture of the 1920s and 1930s was prevalent. In public buildings this statement was more apparent, perhaps because of location and sheer size. As large and grand as the completed building appears, historical research indicates that the architect, Irwin T. Catherine, hoped to build a much more imposing structure. The first submission made to the Art Jury on October 8, 1928 indicated the same basic building but with a tower that projected 21 stories to a height of 356 feet above grade. The Art Jury established a maximum height of 160 feet above grade for this building on this site adjacent to the Parkway, and the tower was reduced to its present height of 160 feet, before approval to proceed was given. The influence of the Art Deco or Moderne styles during this period is felt in detailing particularly where classical precedent didn't exist, notably in decorative or functional elements such as lighting fixtures, hardware, signage and grilles. The carved stone sculptures that decorate the building are not without controversy, too. Over the east door and the central window on the north elevation of each of the two low wings flanking the Entrance Courtyard there occur bas relief sculptured lunettes representing educational themes. The sculptures were designed from sketches from the architect and cast in plaster by Jules A. Melidon, a French sculptor and instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. According to newspaper reports, there was disagreement between the sculptor and the architect, Mr. Catherine,

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over the stone cutters who were to execute the finished peices prior to Mr. Melidon leaving for France. When he returned, he viewed the finished pieces, denounced them, and promptly sued Mr. Catherine and the school district for \$500,000.

The completion of the Board of Education Building in 1932 provided an important element in the overall planning of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The civic and cultural area stretching from Logan Circle to the Art Museum was a major renewal effort, begun in 1918. The Board of Education Building provides the west edge framing the view toward the museum from Logan Circle and balances the east edge provided by the Free Library. The building's rhythm, scale, texture, and color complement its neighbors which include the Boy Scouts' headquarters, the Franklin Institute, the Free Library, the Rodin Museum, and the Art Museum. The building in its setting is a major piece in the overall composition of this significant part of the city of Philadelphia.

# 9. Major Bibliographical Reference

SEE ATTACHED SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .92

Quadrangle name Philadelphia

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A 

1	8	4	8	5	0	1	0	4	12	23	0	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing							

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE ATTACHED SHEET

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N.A. code N.A. county N.A. code N.A.

state N.A. code N.A. county N.A. code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Theodore T. Bartley, Jr., Partner

organization Bartley, Long, Miranda

date April 26, 1983

street & number 1104 Architects Building

telephone 215/567-6980

city or town Philadelphia

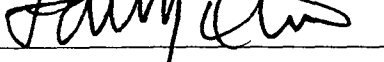
state Pennsylvania 19103

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Larry E. Tise, State Historic Preservation Officer date 7/18/83

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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"Models from Which Ornamental Stone Carvings are Being Made for  
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"Sculptured Groups at Board of Education's New Building Called 'Atrocities'  
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"Demands \$500,000 of School District." Philadelphia Inquirer,  
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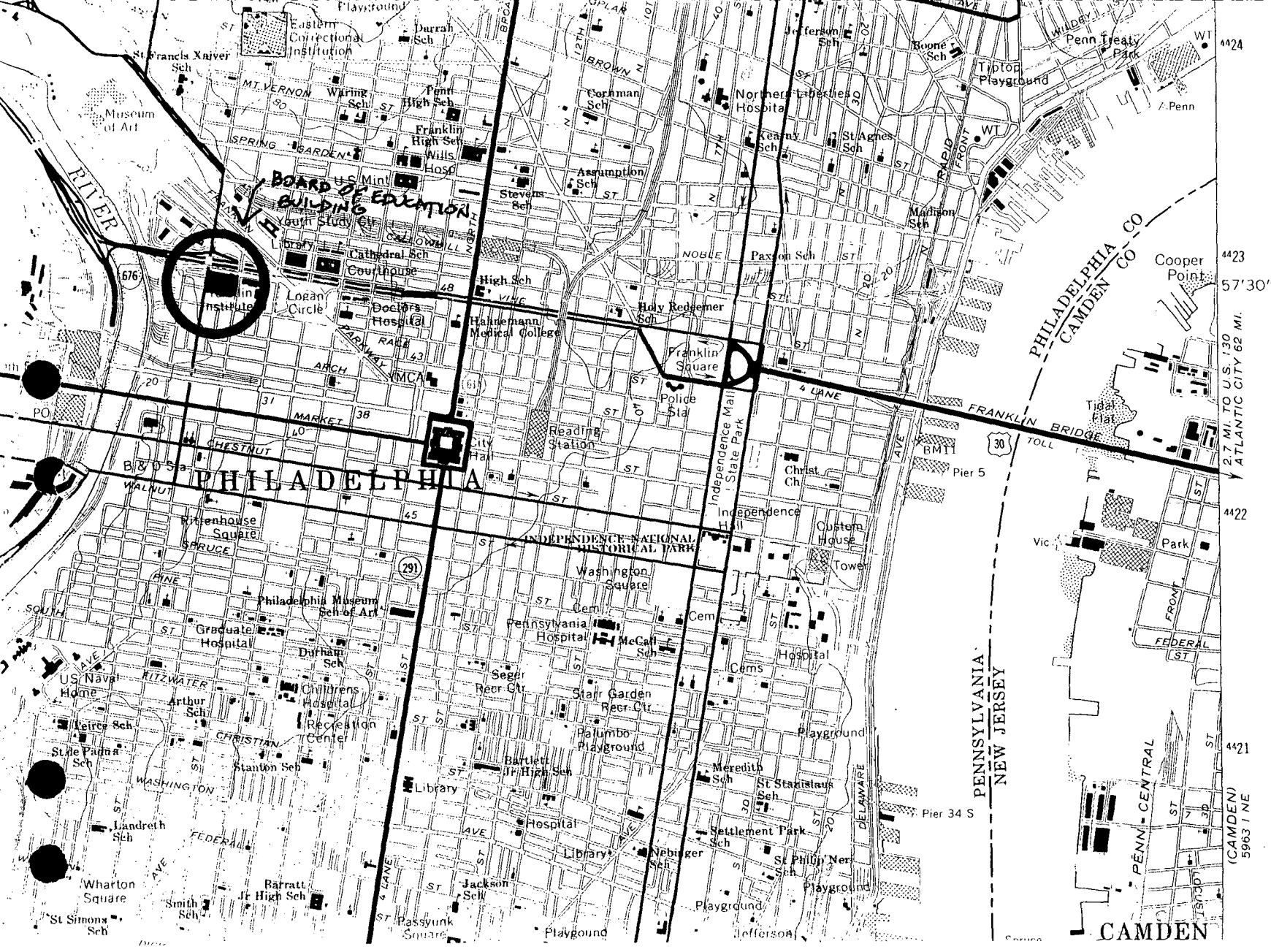
date entered

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Beginning at a point in the West line of Twenty-first Street, as proposed to be widened on the west side ten feet, at the distance of two hundred and five feet southward from the south line of Vine Street in the Tenth Ward of the city of Philadelphia; thence extending Southward along the said revised West line of Twenty-first Street one hundred and seventy-seven feet six inches to the North side of Spring Street; thence westward along the same two hundred as directed to be relocated on the city plan; thence northward along the same on a line parallel with Twenty-first Street, one hundred and seventy-seven feet six inches to a point in the South line of Winter Street as proposed to be widened to ninety feet, thence eastward along the same two hundred and twenty-seven feet to the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

Board  
Philad  
Zone 1



4424

4423

57°30"

2.7 MI. TO U.S. 130

ATLANTIC CITY 62 MI.

4422

4421

4421

Pier 34 S

5963 / NE

(CAMDEN)

CAMDEN