

*Example of store facades on a pedestrian street*



A typical scene . . .

Along the Thomas Street Passage, children in the cafeteria and birdsong in the atrium provide happy background noise for the parents and people who are coming for art and adult education classes who enjoy a coffee or a lemonade at the atrium café. The art shop is hanging new work from its students along the passageways of the streetscape and is pleased about its new partnership with the Puerto Rican Arts Alliance. People are visiting the health and social services and the dental clinic. Posters of the latest play hang alongside those of the evening's movie. The streetscape stays bright and active through the evening, as people congregate in a space the entire community can call its own...

## Thomas Street Passage

The Gerena School, located immediately west of Thomas Street Placita and east of the Chestnut School will serve as the revitalized underground street passageway extending between these two plaza areas. It will also serve as the heart of the campus, managing its flow of people and activities and acting as an “outdoor” public space particularly in the colder winter months. The subterranean school has good quality facilities and diverse spaces, allowing for a unique mix of programs and activities. Presently, the Gerena School functions primarily as an elementary school, although a few community services are located within its lowest level around a naturally-lit central atrium.

The Campus vision strengthens this lowermost level of the school by treating it as a major pedestrian avenue in the North End street network. The vision creates a space that is both an active center of the campus and a passageway between the two sides of the neighborhood. The action plan for the Thomas Street Passage

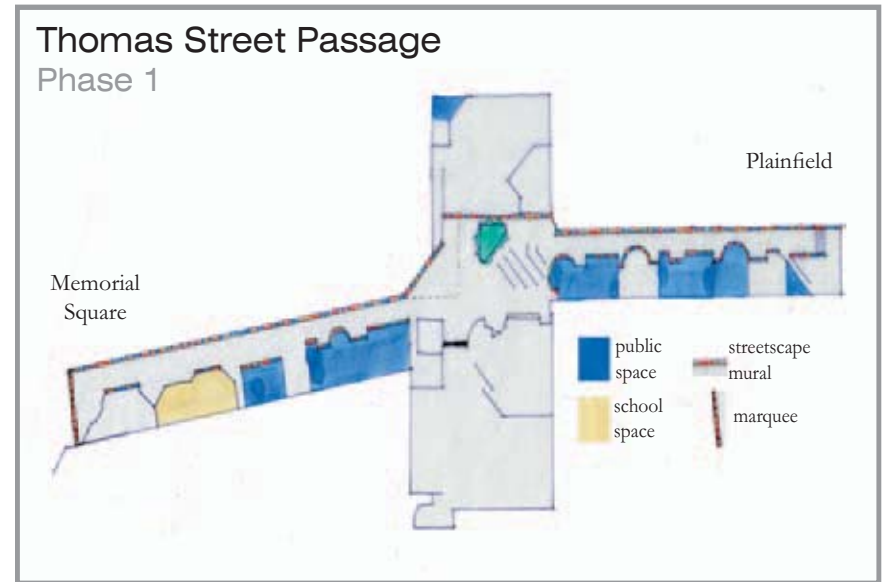


*Pedestrians enjoy the Thomas Street Passage*

through Gerena School will unfold within the first two phases of the Campus development. It will establish the lower level as a community arts and learning space for all ages by inexpensively converting under-used space and making after-hours use of existing educational facilities. Furthermore, by changing the appearance of the interior of the space through creative visual accents along the passageway, Thomas Street will be conceptually extended through the school, as a promenade connecting Plainfield Avenue and Main Street. This plan acknowledges the importance of maintaining a safe learning environment and providing security to the educational areas of the school and providing solutions that are realistic to implement and maintain over time.

### First Steps (phase one)

The first step in the transformation of the Gerena School passage into Thomas Street emphasizes the simulated streetscape continuation through the building. Painting and decorating could incorporate an outdoor theme of storefronts and other external



wall facades, with windows and faux brick and wood finishing. The ceiling could be painted a light blue color and patterned with clouds, to simulate the sense of being outside announcing this as a more open and public space. Additional decorations such as wrought-iron street lamps and benches could line the avenue along with “Thomas Street” street signs.

The southern walls of the passageway, uninterrupted by doors, should be covered with student-painted murals framing changing exhibits of both student and community art work, Puerto Rican culture, photo-essays about community empowerment, and other interests in the community. A more permanent display on the history of the neighborhood and the role of the Gerena School in its vitality might cover the south wall of the western passage.

Color and decoration on the building exterior would make the heart of The Campus more inviting and visible. The addition of color along the new “street” and in public spaces will show that



*Art gallery at entrance to Thomas Street Passage from Memorial Square*

The Campus is playful and vibrant, and also shows care for and responsibility of the building itself. Like the Thomas Street Placita design, a mural or community tile project on the façade of Gerena School would make The Campus visible from Plainfield Avenue.

The first step to be taken by The Campus on a programmatic level is to establish an accessible, visible Campus headquarters. The headquarters would contain both the office of The Campus Coordinator and a lounge to act as a welcoming convening space for people interested in contributing to Campus development. Headquarters hours should span into the evening to accommodate the various schedules of many of The Campus users.

A major component of The Campus concept and the new Thomas Street is reliance upon a well-staffed security team within the school passageway. A team of at least two security officers at all times is required for the success of The Campus. Obtaining funding for these positions should be one of the Campus Coordinator's highest priorities and could possibly be provided through leasing space for organizations and community enterprises. Areas to be patrolled, particularly after school hours, include the two north and south entrances from the Gerena School parking lots, and the second story space leading up from the atrium to the digital storytelling lab, the music room, and the children's art room.



*Successful cafe,  
Cambridge,  
Massachusetts*

The non-profit services that currently exist on the lower floor of the Gerena School should reorient their spaces toward outreach and encouraging drop-ins, while these offices' administrative functions should be shifted to the second story of the building. Unused or underused spaces should be assessed, particularly along the west arm of the Thomas Street Passage, for where youth activity could compliment the active heart of the atrium. More adult educational classrooms for job training and English and Spanish classes could be located toward the Plainfield Gateway. A request for proposals (RFP) should be extended to neighborhood service groups to entice them to fill these needs. These RFPs should laud the tremendous benefit of a location along the pedestrian Thomas Street, while honestly describing the physical limitations of the space in terms of potential water damage and mold. The low-cost rents of these spaces and the lease provisions for tenant cleaning, maintenance and repair should reflect these characteristics.

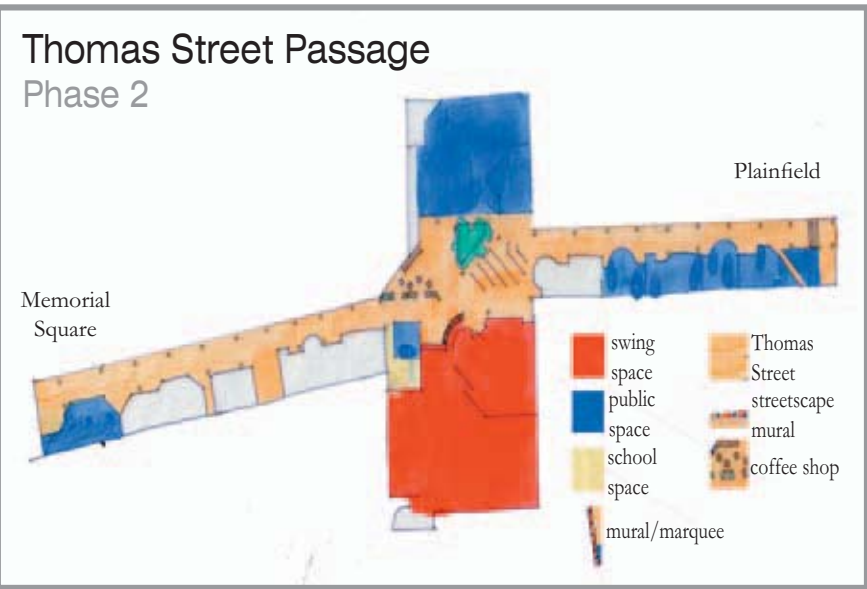


*IBM Atrium,  
New York City*

Concurrent with the re-leasing of space, The Campus headquarters should develop plans for its own business endeavor through the organization of a café cooperative for the atrium. Such an initiative would not only create a more lively space, but also provide a source of Campus revenue, while programmatically focusing management skills and responsibilities and offering job opportunities with strong community exposure. In the first phase of the development, the Campus Coordinator's office might offer entrepreneurship lessons. Alternately, the atrium location could be leased to an outside retailer.



*Cafe and sitting area in Gerena Atrium*



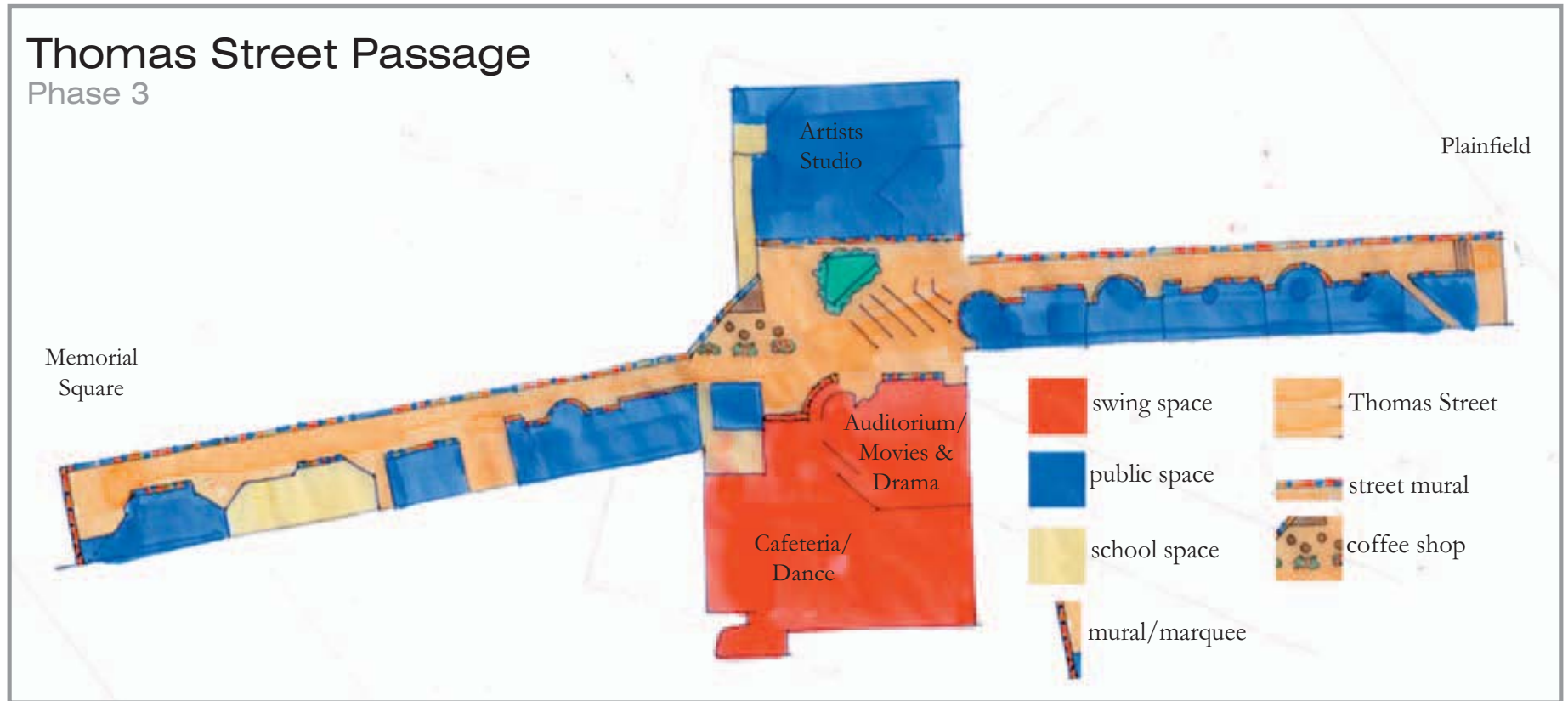
### Growth and Experimentation (phase two)

In the second phase of The Campus development along the Thomas Street Passage, such a café would be fully operational, catering coffee and sweets to several small tables under the skylight. It should be open as often as possible, including during school hours and through the evenings. The café should also partner with similar refreshment vendors in the abutting Thomas Street Placita and Plainfield Gateway.

The incorporation of an entrepreneurial movie house into the existing auditorium, showing movies in both English and Spanish, would compliment the café business in the evenings. The MIT Lecture Series Committee (<http://lsc.mit.edu/>) may be able to provide advice on contacting distributors. This space should be used on alternate evenings by a community drama club. Upcoming movies, plays and school performances should be showcased on the marquees and kiosks in the Placita and in the Plainfield Gateway and advertised in community newsletters and newspapers.

# Thomas Street Passage

## Phase 3



The currently unused large space across from the auditorium could be transformed into a giant artist's studio, large enough to draw people from outside the neighborhood, offering art classes which would be subsidized for North End residents. Linked with the artist studio, the first room upon entry from the Thomas Street Placita should be converted into an art gallery and shop, highlighting the products of the studio while generating income. This space has high visibility and should draw visitors into along the Thomas Street Passage, while creating inspirational atmosphere for the elementary school children. Artists for Humanity (<http://www.afhboston.com>), a Boston-based art program for young people that is financially self-supported and provides jobs and training to at-risk teens, can serve as a model for this proposal to provide art studio space and a cooperative gallery and shop.

The Family Resource Center, located adjacent to the studio, should be designated the responsibility of one of the more active agencies in the neighborhood. The YMCA could activate this space into a well-used lounge for parents and children complete with books, audio-visuals, and a play space.

Ideas for space not claimed during the initial RFP include an exercise room and making the cafeteria space available for dance classes and practice. Once the dental clinic has resumed its operation of free dental service for school children, its capacities may be expanded into the evenings to serve adults at cost.