



June 24, 2012

Dr. Christine J. Anderson, Superintendent
Palm Springs Unified School District
980 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Suite 101
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Dear Dr. Anderson,

We have had an opportunity to review in detail the "Historic Resources Assessment Report" prepared by Pamela Daly of Daly & Associates on the Palm Springs High School (PSHS) Administration Building (Wexler & Harrison, 1957) for the Palm Springs Unified School District. The assessment, to its credit, draws liberally from documentation we provided to you, but the preparer's additional research is incomplete and rife with errors.

Palm Springs Preservation Foundation board member Patrick McGrew (who meets the professional qualification standards for evaluating historic resources as defined in 36 CFR Part 61) began a peer review of the document but found the task to be prohibitively time-consuming due to the report's numerous errors. Instead, McGrew rewrote the relevant Primary Record (DPR 523A) which can be found at attachment (1) to this letter. We invite you to compare it to the Primary Record completed by Daly.

Perhaps the most glaring shortcoming contained in Daly's report is her assertion that "Research did not reveal any direct relationship between persons important on a national, state, or local level and the...Building." McGrew's revised Primary Record corrects that shortcoming. Daly & Associates could have benefitted by consulting with local experts and the authors of the books *Donald Wexler: Architect* and *Steel and Shade: The Architecture of Donald Wexler* during the course of her research. She might have also reported that Wexler is the architect of Palm Springs' seven Steel Development Houses (1962), one of which is the city's most recent addition to the National Register of Historic Places. Daly even cites a real estate blog as one of her research sources, but this is only one of many "red flags" in her report.

It is challenging for any outside consultant to become familiar with our city's complex history in just a few weeks or even months. However, since this report is part of a larger, more important, historic resources assessment of the buildings under your stewardship, we trust there will be close scrutiny of this consultant's taxpayer-funded work product. Unfortunately, as presently constituted, Daly's historic resources assessment suffers from numerous research omissions, as well as erroneous conclusions.

The foundation can be contacted at (760) 837-7117 or by email at info@pspreservationfoundation.org.

Respectfully,

Ron Marshall
President

Attachment: (1) Revised Primary Record (DPR 532A) for PSHS Administration Building

Copy to:

President, Board of Education (Attn: Mr. Richard Clapp)
Desert Sun (Attn: Ms. Mariecar Mendoza)
The Planning Center/DC&E

Attachment (1)

State of California The Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF PARKS AND RECREATION
PRIMARY RECORD

Primary #
HRI #
Trinomial
NRHP Status Code 4D

Other Listings
Review Code

Reviewer

Date

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*Resource Name: Palm Springs High School Administration Building

P1. Other Identifier: Ramon Academy Administration Building

*P2. Location: ☐ Not for Publication ☒ Unrestricted *a. County: Riverside
and (P2c, P2e, and P2b or P2d. Attach a Location Map as necessary.)

*b. USGS 7.5' Quad: Palm Springs Date: 1996 T 4S; R 4E; SE ¼ of SW ¼ of Sec 13 B.M.

c. Address: 2248 East Ramon Road City Palm Springs Zip 92264

d. UTM: Zone: 11:0544296mE/ 3741938mN (G.P.S.)

e. Other Locational Data: Elevation: 406 feet absl.

*P3a. Description: (Describe resource and its major elements. Include design, materials, condition, alterations, size, setting, and boundaries)

See Continuation sheet 3

*P3b. Resource Attributes: HP-15 Educational Building

*P4. Resources Present: ☒ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Object ☒ Site ☐ District ☒ Element of District ☐ Other (Isolates, etc.)

P5a. Photograph or Drawing (Photograph required for buildings, structures, and objects.)



P5b. Description of Photo: (view, date, accession #)

*P6. Date Constructed/Age and Source: ☒ Historic
☐ Prehistoric ☐ Both

*P7. Owner and Address:
Palm Springs Unified School District
980 East Tahquitz Canyon Way
Suite 202
Palm Springs, CA 92264

*P8. Recorded by:
Palm Springs Preservation Foundation
c/o Patrick McGrew
674 South Grenfall Road
Palm Springs, CA 92264

*P9. Date Recorded: June 2012

*P10. Survey Type: (Describe)
Reconnaissance

*P11. Report Citation: (Cite survey report and other sources, or enter "none.")

*Attachments: ☐ None ☐ Location Map ☒ Continuation Sheet ☒ Building, Structure, and Object Record
☐ Archaeological Record ☐ District Record ☐ Linear Feature Record ☐ Milling Station Record ☐ Rock Art Record
☐ Artifact Record ☐ Photograph Record ☐ Other (List):

BUILDING, STRUCTURE, AND OBJECT RECORD

Page 2 of 5 *NRHP Status Code 4D

*Resource Name Palm Springs High School Administration Building

B1. Historic Name: Palm Springs High School Administration Building

B2. Common Name: Ramon Academy Administration Building

B3. Original Use: Offices B4. Present Use: Offices

*B5. Architectural Style: International style

*B6. Construction History: (Construction date, alterations, and date of alterations) Built: 1958; Altered 1992 & 2000.)

*B7. Moved? ☒No ☐Yes ☐Unknown Date: n/a Original Location: n/a

*B8. Related Features:

B9a. Architect: Wexler & Harrison b. Builder: Cal Construction Company / San Bernardino

*B10. Significance: Theme Education Area: City of Palm Springs
Period of Significance 1958 Property Type: Building

Applicable Criteria: National Register A, B & C / California Register 1,2 & 3

(Discuss importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope. Also address integrity.)

See continuation sheet 4

B11. Additional Resource Attributes: (List attributes and codes)

*B12. References:

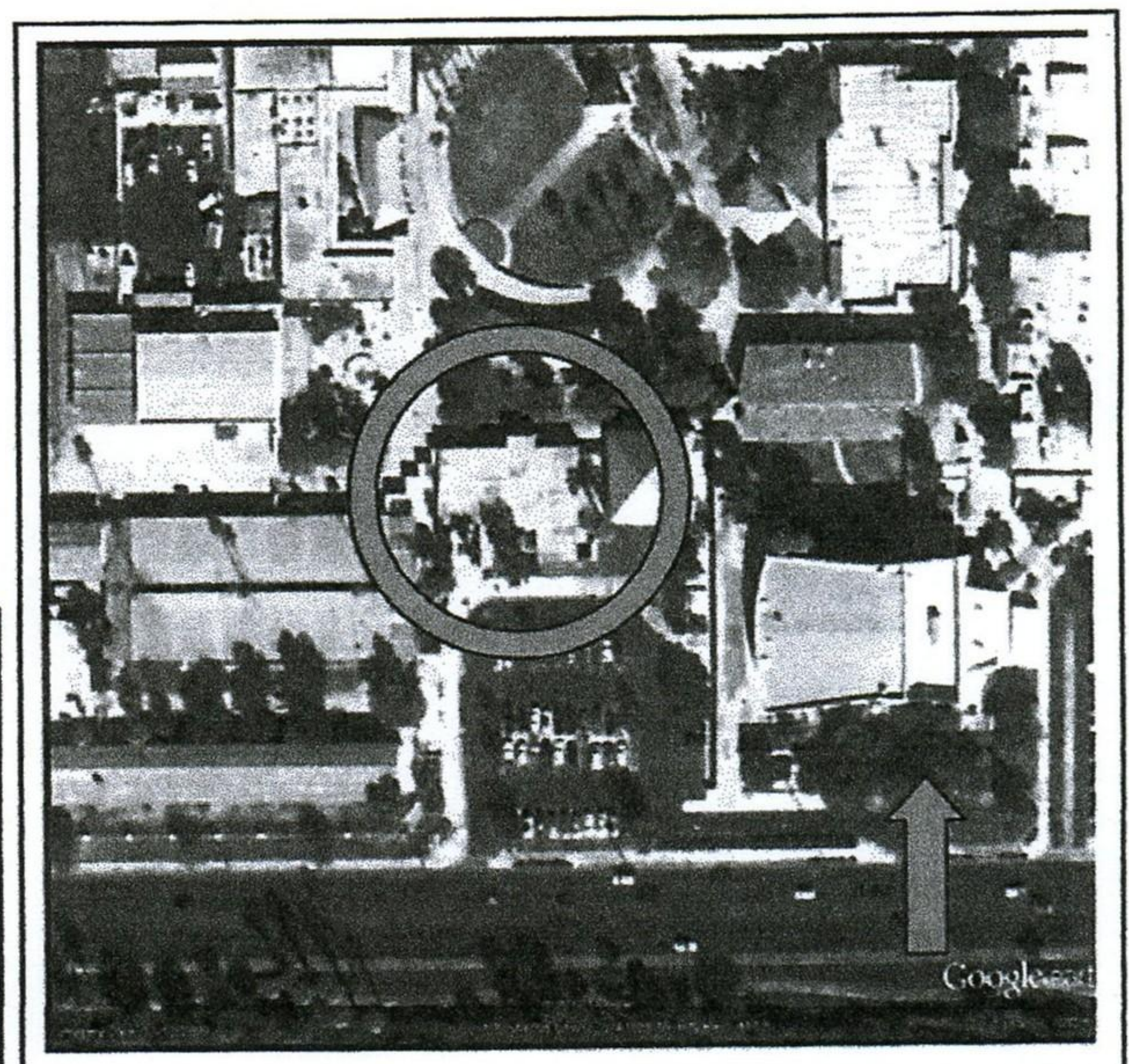
B13. Remarks:

*B14. Evaluator: Patrick McGrew

Palm Springs Preservation Foundation

*Date of Evaluation: June 2012

(This space reserved for official comments.)



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*Recorded by: Patrick McGrew *Date June 2012 ■ Continuation ☐ Update

P3a: Description: The subject building was built as the Administration Building of the Palm Springs High School Campus and houses a lobby with an information desk, administrative offices, nurse's office and restrooms. Designed by local architects Wexler & Harrison in 1956, the building was completed in 1958. It originally contained 5,654 square feet in a single level. Flat-roofed, the building may be described as being rectangular in mass; it is approximately 105 feet wide and 75 feet deep. The structural design of the building created simple spans with no interior columns that allowed infinite reconfiguration of the interior spaces as uses within the building evolved without compromise to the building's integrity. Two courtyards open to the sky, one each on the north and south sides of the building, create a modified "H" shaped floor plan with asymmetric extensions to the west. The roofless interior-facing courtyards provided light and air to the interior offices without sacrificing privacy for the occupants. The open-air entryway to the building is expressed as a cutout in the southwest corner and is partially shaded by a lightweight steel canopy.

The building bears the stylistic markers of a regional variation of the International Style, as reinterpreted for its desert setting. Among the stylistic markers is a horizontal emphasis in the overall design. Extension of vertical planes into the landscape to support slim roof overhangs designed to provide shade to full-height glass walls. As is typically the case with International Style buildings, the building materials are essentially simple, often utilitarian and/or machine-made and consist mostly of steel, glass and concrete masonry units. The interiors had terrazzo flooring.

Integrity: The building underwent minor, easily reversible alterations beginning in 1992 when Wexler was commissioned to do some minor alterations to the building. In 2000, the Board went in a different direction and hired local architect Jim Cioffi for more minor alterations. Among his changes were the filling in of the north light well, modifications to the entryway storefront system, covering of the original terrazzo with vinyl tile and a reconfiguration of the Lobby. All of these changes are readily reversible.

Setting: The Administration building is among the earliest of a group of modernist buildings constructed on the Campus. Included were the: Adult Education Building, 333 South Farrell Drive (E. Stewart Williams), the Stadium, Field House, Locker & Shower Building (1965, Don Wexler); the Auditorium and Music Building Complex, (1957, Williams, Williams & Williams, with Clark, Frey & Chambers); the Cafeteria (Williams, Williams & Williams); the Library and two 10-room Steel Classroom Buildings, (1957, Wexler & Harrison). When taken together, this extraordinary modernist complex was as significant architecturally as any modernist compound ever built in Palm Springs and has the potential for listing as an historic district.

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*Resource Name: Palm Springs High School Administration Building

*Recorded by: Patrick McGrew *Date June 2012 ■ Continuation ☐ Update

Building, Structure and Object Continuation Sheet: Discusses importance in terms of historical or architectural context as defined by theme, period, and geographic scope, as well as integrity.

B10 Historical Or Architectural Context As Defined By Theme, Period, And Geographic Scope:

Theme: California Schools

Nicholas Olsberg, renowned architectural historian, curator and author has written about California schools: "At dusk on March 10, 1933, during one of the harshest periods of the Great Depression, a great earthquake struck underwater to the west of Long Beach. Among the many casualties — including over a hundred dead — were at least a score of the region's brick and mortar schools, in which thousands of children might have perished had the trembler hit a few hours earlier. New rules on school construction - favoring single-story, lightweight construction, and easy egress in an emergency — appeared within months of this nearly catastrophic event. A rapid program of school building followed, to which the economy and speed of modern techniques and materials were essential. California schoolchildren, in consequence, were among the first to inhabit truly modern buildings as a part of their everyday lives. In these low-slung, transparent, lightweight pavilions, free of doorways, vestibules, stairwells and halls, life flowed easily from classroom to playground, from activity, and between sheltered and open worlds. Scaled down to near domestic proportions, the new schools became models for the new light-filled open plan school development that followed throughout California. Richard Neutra, who developed the most inventive of them, portrayed his first experimental unit, at the Corona Avenue School in Bell, in drawings that picture the convergence of solitary space and common ground, teacher and child, group and community, indoors and out. It came to be a loosening of the boundaries, physical, visual, and cultural — between activities...[Neutra] became the standard-bearer for West Coast ideas of the modern expressed elements central to the diverse reinvention of the and home [and school — ed.] that California architects were to make in the twenty-five years to come. Space within, outside and between the buildings and their surroundings became continuous. Borders and boundaries became fluid. Each space would adapt to many activities. There would be no ceremonial rooms. Light, motion and vista would be the principles around which architecture would be planned." Donald Wexler, who apprenticed with Richard Neutra - who ranks among the greatest International Style designers of the 20th century - was instrumental in bringing these new school concepts to the desert. It is within this context that Wexler & Harrison and others would create the 1950s campus and buildings of Palm Springs High School. The result was a modernist campus comparable to the town's best modernist works, including the Civic Center.

Integrity

Integrity: The building underwent minor, easily reversible alterations beginning in 1992 when Wexler was commissioned to do some interior alterations to the building. In 2000, the Board went in a different direction and hired local architect Jim Cioffi for more minor alterations. Among his changes were the filling in of the north light well, modifications to the entryway storefront system, covering of the original terrazzo with vinyl tile and a reconfiguration of the Lobby. All of these changes are readily reversible. The building's major character-defining features such as its form, massing, recessed entrance, and indoor-outdoor relationships are intact. It continues to convey its original design intent, architectural style, and original finishes, and therefore has integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. The building retains integrity of association with its original use as an administration building, and retains its integrity of feeling as a mid-century modern structure. The original concrete masonry units used in both the Administration Building and the Auditorium complex were finished with a light sandblast and sealer to expose the aggregate and emphasize the color of the cement used to fabricate the block. It has been stated that at one point the block was painted white, and then again sandblasted to restore the original finish. Normally, sandblasting is prohibited as a treatment for historic properties, but in this case such a prohibition is moot.

Criterion A/1: (Events) The Palm Springs High School Administration Building appears to be significant as a clear, high-quality example of the oldest (along with the Auditorium Complex) largely intact example of the pattern of events that saw fundamental changes in the way Palm Springs schools were designed and built. Influenced by the revolutionary concepts of Richard Neutra as referenced above, it was through Wexler's apprenticeship with Neutra that the concepts of the modern school favoring single-story, lightweight construction, and easy egress in an emergency came to Palm Springs. Locally a rapid program of school building followed that embraced the economy and speed of modern techniques and materials. Through the work of Wexler & Harrison and the other modernists who built Palm Springs High School, local schoolchildren were among the first to inhabit truly modern buildings as a part of their everyday lives. The emergence of Desert Modern architecture — a regional variation of the International Style — was pioneered locally by architects such as William Cody, E. Stewart Williams, Clark & Frey and Wexler & Harrison. Through their work, the idea of "California living" came to Palm Springs high school students. Simple silhouettes, large expanses of glass, open floor plans, a

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*Resource Name or # Administration Building

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blending of indoor and outdoor spaces and the use of inexpensive machine-made materials like concrete block, glass, steel became commonplace. The Administration Building exemplifies many of those mid-century modern design principles and may be viewed as emblematic of this important pattern of events during Palm Springs' evolution to modernism. For this reason, the Administration Building qualifies for listing on the California and National Registries under this criterion.

Criterion B/2: Persons

According to Neutra biographer Thomas Hines, three factors are determinative in shaping architecture: time, place and client. For the Administration Building, the client was the Palm Springs School Board. Composed of local citizens with shared values, the composition of the board in the 1950s was very progressive, as evidenced by its willingness to break with tradition and commission a radically modern educational compound. Among the Board's most notable and progressive members was Dr. Hugh Stephens (1915 -1984), the son of a Kansas City insurance agent. After completing his formal education, Stephens began his professional career in Santa Barbara but soon relocated to Palm Springs where he became one of the desert's earliest year-round physicians. Related by marriage to Prescott 'P. T.' Stevens, Colorado cattleman turned Palm Springs developer, the entire family is noted for their civic involvement. Prescott Stevens stabilized the public water system, developed the first golf course, and was a principal backer of the El Mirador Hotel. When the Hotel became a hospital, Dr. Hugh Stephens became its first president. Both the office building and home commissioned by Hugh Stephens for his own use were designed by early modernist John Porter Clark, the latter being a designated Class 1 site in Palm Springs. For properties associated with several community leaders or with a prominent family, it is necessary to identify specific individuals and to explain their significant accomplishments. Board member Stephens' involvement with the selection of Wexler & Harrison and the other early modernists who designed Palm Springs High School qualifies the Administration Building for listing on the California and National Registries under this criterion.

Criterion C/3: Architecture

Distinctive characteristics are the physical features that commonly recur in individual types, periods, or methods of construction. As previously described, the building's International Style characteristics, including its form, proportion, structure, floor plan, style, and materials define it as a true representative of its type, period, and method of construction. As the earliest surviving example on the campus, it emerges as an important example (within its context) of building practices of 1950s educational architecture in Palm Springs. Other important examples of the style and type by Clark & Frey, Donald Wexler as well as by Neutra himself, have already been demolished, further highlighting the significance of this important extant example. Without question, architect Donald Wexler is a master architect whose long career in Palm Springs has established him as the surviving elder statesman of Palm Springs modernism. He is regularly recognized for his exceptional work in the architectural profession, known widely for his consummate skill, distinguishable from his peers by its characteristic style and quality. The property expresses the early phase of his educational design career, an aspect of his work that spanned three decades. As one of the firm's oldest surviving educational commissions, it is a design which well represents the firm's contributions to the field of Desert Modernism and educational building design in the mid-twentieth century, and qualifies the Administration Building for listing on the California and National Registries under this criterion.