

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name Luis Muñoz Rivera School

other names/site number Escuela Luis Muñoz Rivera

2. Location

street& number 65 Infantería Street corner with M. Dávila Street

 N/A

not for publication

city or town Lajas

 X

vicinity

state Puerto Rico

code PR

county Lajas

code 033

zip code 00667

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this **X** nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property **X** meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national **X** **statewide** **local**

Carlos A. Rubio Cancela

Signature of certifying official

Date

State Historic Preservation Officer

Title

Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
 (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
 (Check only **one** box)

Number of Resources within Property
 (Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
1	0	buildings
0	0	district
0	0	site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
 (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico, 1900-1930

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/ School

Current Functions
 (Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/ School

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Mixed: Beaux Arts, Spanish Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete
walls: Concrete
roof: Concrete
other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

The *Luis Muñoz Rivera School*, located at *65 de Infantería Street*, corner with *Dávila Street* in the Municipality of Lajas, Puerto Rico, is a one-story high, reinforced concrete building. Erected four blocks away from the town’s plaza in a rectangular lot measuring 18,425 square meters, the school originally included 8 classrooms. Many original features remain in place, making the *Luis Muñoz Rivera School* in Lajas one of Puerto Rico’s best examples of government-sponsored institutional architecture during the early 20th century.

Narrative Description

Built in 1926, the *Luis Muñoz Rivera School* is located at Lajas, a municipality in the southwestern coast of Puerto Rico, bordering the Caribbean Sea and several neighboring towns, south of San Germán, east of Cabo Rojo, and west of Guánica. Lajas spreads over 12 wards including *Lajas Pueblo*, the urban area of the municipality where the school stands. *La Muñoz Rivera* was Lajas’ second graded school, as its name at the entrance boasts.¹ It currently serves junior high and high school students.² *La Muñoz Rivera* lies at the core of the town, four blocks (approximately 300 meters) away from the main public square. Placed on a corner site within a trapezoidal plot, the school’s main elevation faces *65 de Infantería Street*, Lajas’ main urban artery. Given such exposure, the property enjoys visual prominence in town. The surrounding context presents contrasting conditions. Private residences, mostly two-story high, are plentiful to the west. Many have been converted into commercial establishments that grant Lajas its heterogeneous scale along *65 de Infantería Street*. These urban conditions are echoed at *Dávila Street*, the school’s northern boundary. To the east, the property looks unto undeveloped land, mostly due to its topographical conditions that, full as it is with greenery, grants a natural background to the school. Private properties occupy larger lots to the south.

¹ In “graded” schools (*escuelas graduadas*) students were grouped according to age and learning level, as opposed to “consolidated” schools where those differences were not taken into consideration for teaching. Consolidated schools were practical for rural remote areas, while graded schools were understood as being more “progressive” given their proximity to more urban areas.

² Some 500 students from nearby wards in Lajas are tended to by a staff of 48 employees including a director, teachers, physical education and special education instructors, facilitators, a secretary, dining hall employees, as well as security and custodial personnel. As informed by Milagros Irizarry Ortiz, interviewed on August 16, 2012.

The lot's zoning designation is DT-G (*Distrito Dotacional General*).³ Nowadays, the school is part of a multi-building campus comprising thirteen buildings. Some of these are modern, but the resource remains unchallenged as the prime architectural icon in campus. The plot embraces a total of 18,425 square meters and is elevated and set back from street level. The site is for the most part flat, with an official Flood Zone Designation "X", being as it is in an area of moderate flood hazard, at least from the main source of flooding in the locality.⁴ Taking into account that the site could be flooded, the design originally concocted by the Division of Public Works in the Department of the Interior raised the school above a low base to account for a possible deluge. By placing the property above ground, direct heat transfer to the floor slab was avoided. This was a concern addressed by most early 20th century building codes in Puerto Rico, adopted for many school buildings.⁵ Original cast iron ventilators have been covered up along the building's base.

Dating from 1926, the *Luis Muñoz Rivera School* is housed within a one story high, U-shaped volume (**FIG. 1**) built in reinforced concrete and eclectic style. It incorporates a rectangular, arcaded patio and an ornate front façade with a portico dressed in profuse neoclassical vocabulary. It includes eight classrooms, one office, one storage area, two restrooms, and corridors, all enclosed within a 120 feet x 115 feet perimeter. (**FIG. 2**) The school building recedes about 30 feet from 65 *de Infantería Street*. This setback enables buses and private vehicles to drop off students away from the adjacent traffic.

An open-air, straight-run staircase built in reinforced concrete reaches the building itself. Fourteen (14) feet wide, the stair's run is articulated into two flights with a landing in between. (**FIG. 3**) The first flight rises seven (7) steps; the second is shorter, with only four (5) steps. With flat, unadorned concrete railings at each side, the stair also includes two (2) tubular handrails in iron that articulate the steps into three areas. Steps and railings further the axial organization of *La Muñoz Rivera* but, nowadays, the main entrance is in use for pedestrian students and visitors. Official vehicular access is now from *Dávila Street*, north of the site, and through the school's courtyard facing east. The front porch still retains all its distinctive, original decorative components. North and south of the open-air steps – to mediate the height difference between the vehicular drop off and the much higher site elevation – stands a 5'-0" high retaining wall in reinforce concrete. The wall lacks any articulation. For security reasons, another five feet have been added to it in chain link fence with barbed wire on top. Between the retaining wall and the front façade remain about 7'-0" planted with grass, shrubs and small trees.

The overall disposition of the building and its components is symmetrical. Laid out longitudinally from west to east, all spaces are organized in reference to a central axis along which entrance steps, the portico, the vestibule, corridors, classroom wings, restrooms and patio are organized. The hierarchical volume is rectangular, measuring nearly 72'-0" along its longitudinal axis (in parallel to 65 *de Infantería Street*), and nearing a height of 24'-0". The side volumes recess nearly 3'-0" and measure 24'-6" wide and rise to 24'-0" from ground level. Both of them are 33'-6" deep.

³ Puerto Rico Planning Board, Geolocalizador. Cadastre number 358-041-081-08.

⁴ *Federal Emergency Management Agency Map*, Panel 1570H (Revised November 18, 2009)

⁵ The impact of turn-of-the-century building codes and regulations has been discussed by Jorge Rigau in "La posible felicidad del país: Optimismo, pragmatismo y responsabilidad social en la reglamentación finisecular puertorriqueña relacionada a la construcción", *Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña*, Núm. 98, 1991; also in *Puerto Rico 1900: Turn-of-the-century Architecture in the Caribbean* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992).

The school's main façade (facing west) is organized in a tripartite composition, displaying a central volume flanked by slightly receding, identical lateral wings. **(FIG. 4)** Horizontality characterizes the main façade, a perception underlined by the relatively flat appearance of the building's volume and the diverse elements "stringed" from north to south: a parapet cap, several moldings, a prominent cornice, a frieze highlighted with triglyphs⁶, rectangular terracotta inserts, window groupings in landscape manner, protruding sill moldings, and the previously mentioned building base above ground floor level. Within the overall façade composition, the portico stands out literally and figuratively. Configured to resemble a small Doric temple, this element protrudes some six feet from the façade; it is crowned by an entablature, including an architrave, a frieze, and a pediment with angled cornices. Referred to as a "porch" in official project correspondence and other school projects of the period, the portico emphasizes the axis of symmetry already established by the school's three-part composition, at the same time embellishing the building's otherwise sparse front.

Flanked by two round Tuscan columns, the porch displays Spanish revival features⁷. Next to the columns, solid, plain piers support the entablature on which two pairs of triglyphs appear in frieze-like manner. The continuity of the frieze is interrupted by the school's name at what architects refer to as a *table*: *Escuela Graduada Luis Muñoz Rivera*, engraved in bas-relief manner, at center.⁸ A paneled soffit underscores the underside of the flat arch. Left and right of the triglyphs at each end of the front portico, a molding/cornice starts its run north/south along the rest of the façade. Symmetry is further underlined by the subtle placement of raised circular panel medallions placed above, left and right, of each Tuscan column. **(FIG. 5)**

The portico is crowned with a pediment; its horizontal cornice and the raking ones incorporate dentil moldings.⁹ The tympanum is decorated with an oval cartouche with a convex profile. One *dancette*¹⁰ molding is placed over an oblong tablet¹¹ topped with scroll. Ornamental brackets resembling flowers, stems and leaves frame the cartouche. The roof is covered with terracotta clay tiles, the ridge projecting into the façade in the shape of a small Greek acrotera. Inside the portico, the space is flanked by two recessed wall niches on each side; on the floor a series of inlay bricks provide a transition from exterior to interior. A Roman arch frames the entrance. The double door gateway is highlighted with an ornamental surround, a semicircular transom and a projecting, non-functional keystone. The transom includes a delicate fan-shaped iron grille installed when the building was originally erected. One raised circular panel medallion flanks each side the arched transom at a 45-degree angle. On the ceiling, a contemporary lighting fixture provides illumination at night.

⁶ A key ornamental feature in neoclassical architecture, triglyphs are often featured in Doric friezes as projecting blocks having on their face two parallel vertical glyphs or grooves and two half grooves or chamfers at either vertical end.

⁷ The Tuscan order has a rather plain design in comparison with other Greek and Roman orders. With a plain shaft, and an uncomplicated capital, base, and frieze, it constitutes a simplified adaptation of the Doric order by the Romans. A non-fluted, smooth shaft and a capital with a plain astragal or *taenia* that ringed the column beneath its plain cap characterize the Tuscan order. The Tuscan column has a simpler base, circular rather than square, and looks more solid.

⁸ In architecture, a table consists of a raised or sunken rectangular panel on a wall distinctively treated or ornamented with inscriptions, paintings, or sculptural elements.

⁹ Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR), Fondo: Obras Públicas; Serie: Edificios Escolares; Caja: 1119, Leg. 155, Exp: 1. Letter from the Lajas's School Director Hector Urrutia to the Commissioner of Education Juan B. Huyke, dated February 6, 1925. The aforementioned archival reference applies to all subsequent documents quoted here from the AGPR collection.

¹⁰ In architecture a *dancette* is an ornamental zigzag, as in a molding.

¹¹ In architecture, a *tablet* is a slab or plaque having a surface suitable for or bearing an inscription, carving, or the like.

While the stairs and portico emphasize verticality, the building's base, ledges and cornices, windows included, endorse horizontality. At each side of the portico, the façade extends north and south uninterruptedly as a plain surface, until reaching the classroom wings that lie north and south. At these ends, the main elevation steps back, but all linear, decorative elements, as well as all window groupings extend to the recessing volumes. Four equally spaced, rectangular, vertical window openings are located at either side of the portico. A cartouche above each set establishes local symmetry at these sections of the façade. **(FIG. 6)** The acknowledgement of local symmetries within an overall building composition was common in designs inspired by the *École des Beaux Arts*. Somewhat oversized, the escutcheon overlaps a thin, linear molding, both contrasting effectively against the relatively plain surfaces. The slightly convex shield surface with ornamental scrollwork contains a bas-relief oval shape central panel and a diagonal sash or *banderole* in low relief. At its sill, each window opening includes a ledge that projects forward twice, once as a broad band, another as a thin strip below the wider one. Above all windows here, but also around the building, in alignment with them, four faux grilles in terracotta ornamental incorporate a curvaceous geometric pattern, reminiscent of Moorish decorative art, all enclosed by a minute congé molding.

Higher up in the building - in all of its elevations - a lean molding strings together triglyphs and metopes. Triglyphs sport four (4) *shank femurs* each; their *guttae* appear below the continuous molding. Above them all, a wide, sculptural cornice runs west, north and south of the building. Said cornice, in turn, is capped by a molding that echoes its route all around the uppermost parapet of these three façades. Articulation of the building's base, windows used in groups, ceiling ventilators, and Beaux Arts motifs (except the cartouches) continue in similar manner along the north and south sections of the main elevation. Symmetry, as expected, pervades. Exposed electrical equipment and conduits, air conditioning condensing units, as well as some plumbing pipes, adhere to or run along the main elevation, but without great architectural consequence. The roof's configuration or building material cannot be ascertained from the *65 de Infantería Street*.

North and south elevations include many details from the main façade: an articulated building base; rectangular, vertical windows with ledges; moldings and ventilators; also a section with triglyphs and metopes; as well as the uppermost cornice and the capped parapet. The linear, decorative elements reach the eastern end of both façades (north and south), turning the corner for two feet unto the east elevation, where they abruptly end. No neoclassical details appear as such in this section of the building. Compositional and fiscal emphasis on the more public faces of institutional buildings was a common practice at the time of construction. Changes in the two lateral façades include the addition of security iron grilles for security and the reduction of a window opening. Window openings included a roman arch on the top, which has been filled to provide rectangular opening for the the aluminum, operable, jalousie type.

Past the 10'-6" high entrance arch, a rectangular 10'-0" wide x 24'-0" deep vestibule is reached. Its ceiling, in concrete, reaches 13'-0" high. Another arch culminates the vestibule space. It provides a transition to the school's patio and to the gallery from where the school's open corridors extend to reach the classrooms and restrooms. The original polished concrete floors, patterned in a square grid are still in place. One step above, the crossbar, parallel to the west, contains two classrooms. The north wing includes, from west to east, three classrooms, a special education facilitator's office and a bathroom; in the same direction the south wing holds a classroom, a storage area, two additional classrooms and a restroom. The asymmetrical floor plan composition (when comparing north and south wings) can be traced back to a request made by then Interim Commissioner of Education, Gertrude Liggett: "*The three interior spaces on the left side of the building will be divided with folding doors partitions, so that at any time, they could easily be*

converted into a large room proper for conferences, parties school, etc".¹² Regarding other spaces, it should be added that every classroom is alike, measuring 24'-0" x 30'-0"; the bathrooms dimensions are 12'-0" x 25'-0"; and the storage area occupies an area measuring 10'-0" x 25'-0". The main corridor, a wraparound arcade, connects all the interior spaces. This arcaded gallery is roofed over by a concrete slab. The arched openings are 7'-5", and the columns 1'-6" x 8". A 4'-0" high railing at each arch closes off the hallways which open up into the school's courtyard.

"U" shaped and measuring 50'-0" x 80'-0", this open space provides corridors and classrooms with natural light and ventilation, claiming hierarchical importance. This is where everyone gathers. From the court, trees and other school buildings are visible. Around the perimeter of this concrete paved patio, seven long benches, five 2'-0" long planting strips and the arcaded corridors become key transition elements between the school's exterior and interior spaces. **(FIG. 7)** The wrap around arcade comprises 24 Roman arches. Six face west, nine to the north and another nine face south. Most arches do not extend in full length to the floor. A concrete balustrade, bas-relief panels and an extruded handrail in concrete close them off at waist level. Only two arches are fully open, allowing access to the courtyard. These are located at center of the north and south wings. Concrete ramps have replaced the original steps that connected the corridor and the patio. Patio level was elevated as well. At the patio's façade facing west, an old bell is displayed as symbol of the school's extended service to the community. **(FIG. 8)** At its tail ends, the building presents facades that are predominantly solid, with a stepped parapet and a single, square window opening placed at center of the wall's elevation. Exposed electrical equipment and conduits, security cameras, fluorescent lighting, water cisterns as well as plumbing pipes are visible along the courtyard's different facades.

All walls, floors, corridor, roof, ramps and stairways are of reinforced concrete. Exterior and interior walls and ceilings are float finished¹³ and painted. The floors are in smooth, polished concrete with v-groove expansion joints in a gridded pattern at the entrance vestibule. Bathrooms have ceramic tiles. Classrooms and exterior spaces have fluorescent lighting. All classroom and restroom doors are single acting, in solid steel plate, reinforced by a black and galvanized rectangular tubing frame, incorporating a double cylinder deadbolt. Solid steel plates installed on a steel tubing frame have substituted original door transoms. Some of these display a black and galvanized rectangular tubing grille. Doors are combined with security gates also made of black and galvanized rectangular tubing arranged vertically welded to cross members at the top, middle and bottom, also with double cylinder deadbolt. At some classrooms, an aluminum frame with clear plastic panels has been provided to control air conditioning.

The Impact of Time

Since it was built 86 years ago, the Luis Muñoz Rivera School has been used as a public educational facility for junior high and high school students. This has proven to be a blessing. That it still serves its original purpose has limited any drastic transformation of the property unrelated to its initial reason for being. And it has succeeded in grafting the school in the collective memory of many people from the Municipality of Lajas (and nearby locations) who have attended it. Luckily, so far, the property has managed to retain its architectural character, as inevitable, timeworn inflictions have not yet affected permanently the building's integrity, although the same cannot be said for the surrounding grounds. The school's site, once open and ample, is now shared with other academic

¹² AGPR: Letter to the Commissioner of the Interior from Gertrude Liggett, Interim Commissioner of the Interior, dated December 10, 1925.

¹³ In construction, float finish is a fine-texture finish obtained by smoothing a fresh concrete, plaster, or stucco surface with a wood float.

buildings, and has been somewhat cramped with ancillary buildings added throughout the years to fulfill expanded program offerings. Either one-story or two-story, all of them feel too close to each other for comfort. This echoes similar conditions around the Island, where the local Department of Education has tried to make best use of its originally generous lots, now insufficient to accommodate unforeseen growth. Limited frontage has also been a by-product of progress at the *Luis Muñoz Rivera*, whose main elevation patio was diminished by engineering improvements to 65 Infantería Street.

In the school's front façade (west), changes can be said to have been of relatively minor impact. Wooden windows have been substituted by metal jalousies, easily removable. Minor damage and poor paint jobs impinge now upon several architectural finishes. The original entrance doors are gone. Electrical conduits and panels are now exposed to the right side of the main facade. For security reasons, exterior lighting has been installed. Widening 65 Infantería Street altered the site level from the street. Consequently, an original property fence in concrete was demolished and substituted by a chain-link enclosure. A staircase was added.

Inside, the spatial flexibility originally granted by Fidel Sevillano's design has been challenged. As specified by the architect, three classrooms were to be provided with folding door partitions, so that they could easily be converted into a large assembly room. Later changes were enacted (at an uncertain date) to provide permanent wall divisions and substitute the folding doors that originally allowed spatial and academic integration of the different rooms. The original adaptability was thus sacrificed.

Throughout the decades, however, essential changes have been related to the substitution of all wood components of the building, including floors, the roof, and most fenestration. Originally, the school was raised on 10" x 10" concrete piers, holding 2" x 10" wooden girders that, together, held the floor above them. Although molded reinforced concrete was the primary construction material for the overall project, roofs were originally erected in wood rafters and joists. Sizes used were 2" x 6" and 2" x 10" for rafters; also 1" x 6" for purlins. Wooden plugs were used to anchor the roof to the purlins, aided by galvanized iron screws. The roof was covered with corrugated galvanized iron, and provided with flashing and counter flashing. Ceilings installed in tongue and groove assembly ("*machihembrado*"). Gutters and downspouts were in cast iron. Baseboards and wall moldings were used in traditional manner, as were picture and ceiling moldings. Wooden floors at classrooms were oiled; wooden fenestration was stained. Doors were paneled, crowned with ventilation transoms.

The roof, originally in single-slope wooden construction and corrugated galvanized iron, is now a flat slab in concrete, reaching as high as the lowest part of the original roof, and projecting a timid eave in the courtyard (east) elevation. Because a parapet originally shielded the roof from viewers, this change is unnoticeable from 65 Infantería Street. In contrast, when viewed from the east, the parapet rises awkwardly, higher than expected, missing, as it is, its original roof counterpart. Illumination is now of the fluorescent type, where it used to be incandescent. Much of the electrical and plumbing systems has been repaired or replaced.

On the north and south façade, to accommodate an aluminum jalousie window, the opening of the original fenestration was filled. Exposed electrical conduits are plentiful, running across the building and vertically towards the roof. Several air conditioning units are visible. As in the rest of the building, all windows originally in wood have been substituted by aluminum louvered ones. Nevertheless, the proportions of the original openings have been retained, except for the walled up

roman arches. Because the whole building is raised above grade and reached through steps, complementary ramps were added to account for prevailing regulations regarding the American with Disabilities Act of 1990. These ramps are located in the courtyard's north and south façade. The original steps were forfeit to accommodate the ramps.

In general – as it stands today – the *Luis Muñoz Rivera School* evidences a rather benign impact of time, when compared to many other buildings of its own period or claiming a shorter life: several air conditioning units are visible; concrete walls face the ordeal of scattered hammering and perforations; careless plastering has added unwanted scars; and insistent, yet non rigorous paint application challenges an otherwise beautifully textured building skin. All in all, however, the school has weathered well its existence of almost a full century.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- 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.

Period of Significance

1926-1962

Significant Dates

1926

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- 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.

Architect/Builder

Sevillano Espinosa, Fidel

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance of the property starts when the building was constructed in 1926, and closes at the 50-year cut-off date (1962).

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary) N/A

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

The *Luis Muñoz Rivera School* is significant statewide under *Criterion C* (Architecture). Because of its architectural design, *La Muñoz Rivera* constitutes a distinguished example of how the *Beaux Arts* and *Spanish Revival* vocabularies were combined and reinterpreted in Puerto Rico at the time of its construction, endorsed as it was as a legitimate stylistic venue for highly-representative, institutional buildings. The nominated resource continues to play a key, contributing roll to the social and cultural development of Lajas.

Narrative Statement of Significance (provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance)

The *Division of Public Works of the Puerto Rico Department of the Interior*, then headed by Rafael Carmoega, a most noted architect of the period, was entrusted the design and construction of *Luis Muñoz Rivera School*. Construction documents from 1923 acknowledge Puerto Rican Fidel Sevillano as project designer. The school was built by contractor Bernardo Balbuquet, of Aguadilla, and it cost \$24,185.77.¹⁴ All things considered, while *La Muñoz Rivera* is the quintessential school model of the early 20th century, it also stands for the weight of a designer's idiosyncrasy in establishing the particular architectural identity of a building. Profile and volumes of the property maintain their original definition. Applied ornament, most of it well preserved, underscores the overall design at key surface locations, while also accentuating craftsmanship and workmanship methods pursuant to the period. Architectural integrity and the extended – up to the present - use of the property as a school, jointly elicit feeling and association from any one experiencing the building, its spaces, and the immediate context. Regarded as an enduring symbol of the public effort to erect school buildings in Puerto Rico during the early 20th century, Luis Muñoz Rivera School remains, to this day, relatively well preserved physically and in the town citizens' memory.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

The formal history of construction of *Luis Muñoz Rivera School* began on December 12, 1922. On said date, the Municipal Council of Lajas authorized its local Commissioner of Education to request through Puerto Rico's Education Commissioner that an engineer from the Department of the Interior be sent to town to make the necessary preliminary studies for the erection of an eight-room school to be located in the urban area. Its estimated construction cost of \$28,000 would be paid

¹⁴ Archivo General de Puerto Rico (AGPR), Fondo: Obras Públicas; Serie: Edificios Escolares; Caja: 1119, Leg. 155, Exp: 1. Letter from Juan Ortiz Toro, Mayor of Lajas, to the Commissioner of the Interior, dated July 22, 1924. The aforementioned archival reference applies to all subsequent documents quoted here from the AGPR collection.

through government debenture loan of \$30,000 for which bonds had been sold just the day before. Qualifying municipalities were awarded these loans for the construction of civic buildings.¹⁵

Juan J. Flores, Municipal Secretary, signed the council's resolution to that effect, referring a copy of it to Gertrude Liggett, Acting Commissioner of Education.¹⁶ The town's request was promptly tended to. On January 3, 1923 – in less than a month – Fidel Sevillano, a designer on the Department of the Interior's roster, visited Lajas and identified two possible sites for the school to be built. One was promptly selected, hoping construction could start as early as March, underlining the need to complete the facilities by Fall 1923.¹⁷ Plans were expedited (maybe they had been in the making or were reused) for by December 10 of the same year, Ms. Liggett, the Acting Commissioner of Education, was returning them to the Department of Education with a list of objections. The main one was related to the assembly room. Created by opening folding doors separating two classrooms, Ms. Liggett wanted this meeting area to be larger, incorporating another classroom and a second folding partition. Minor plan changes were necessary to implement this recommendation.¹⁸

Six months later, the project went up for bids. On July 14, 1924, the Municipal Bidding Board opened up proposals from 5 contractors, identifying Bernardo Balbuquet as the lowest bidder for the amount of \$24,188.90.¹⁹ Balbuquet was from Aguadilla, where he built the Amparo Roldán House at 14 Progreso Street, Aguadilla, his hometown. Also known as "*La casa de piedra*", this residence from 1875 was incorporated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986. After official approval of Bidding Board's decision by Lajas' Municipal Legislature, Juan Ortiz Toro, town mayor, urged the Commissioner of the Interior to expedite all contracts related to the school's construction, being... "*a project we are in great need for*".²⁰ Batter boards, however, were placed on site on mid-September.²¹ The next month, Isidoro Ramos Vélez was designated project inspector.²²

Five months later – with the school nearing completion – Héctor Urrutia, School Director of Lajas, wrote Juan B. Huyke, then Puerto Rico's Commissioner of Education, to communicate a most particular concern. Aware that the project was about to be finished, Urrutia argued to his superior that the addition of a portico at the main entrance was "*indispensable*" to add further beauty and presence to the building: "*Our desire is that a portico be built to include two half-columns rising against the wall and two full columns facing to the front, with an overhang covered by American tile.*" The school director advised Commissioner Huyke to refer this design suggestion to the Department of the Interior

¹⁵ *Debenture loans* are not secured by physical assets or collateral, but by the general creditworthiness and reputation of the issuer. Governments frequently issue this type of bond to secure capital. Bond buyers generally purchase debentures trusting that the bond issuer is unlikely to default on the repayment.

¹⁶ AGPR: Certification signed on December 14, 1922, by Juan J. Flores, Municipal Secretary, attesting to the Municipal Council's decision to authorize the town's Commissioner of Education to request the technical support from the Department of the Interior.

¹⁷ AGPR: Letter from José N. Tomei, Municipal Commissioner of Public Service, stamped as received by the Department of the Interior on January 10, 1923.

¹⁸ AGPR: Letter from Gertrude Liggett as Interim Commissioner of Education to the Commissioner of the Interior, dated December 10, 1923.

¹⁹ AGPR: Resolución de la Junta de Subastas del Municipio de Lajas. Luis Perocier was the runner up, quoting \$27,121.05. Engineer Perocier had a successful career as a designer and builder in the southwestern region of Puerto Rico, particularly in the towns of Mayaguez and Sabana Grande, where he promoted his expertise in building in reinforced concrete

²⁰ AGPR: Letter from Juan Ortiz Toro, Mayor of Lajas, received on July 24, 1924, by the addressee, Puerto Rico's Commissioner of the Interior.

²¹ AGPR: Letter from architect Rafael Carmoega to Bernardo Balbuquet, dated September 11, 1924.

²² AGPR: Letter from architect Carmoega to unknown addressee, dated October 9, 1924.

and, simultaneously, to request from said agency that plans be drafted in time for the contractor to execute them before his construction contract expired.²³

Urrutia's appeal was not ignored. The Department of the Interior complied quickly with a new portico design, submitted to the Mayor of Lajas in April, 1925.²⁴ The contractor quoted the portico at \$750; Rafael Carmoega recommended cost approval to the Commissioner of the Interior.²⁵ In April 27, Bernardo Balbuquet was awarded a two-months' time extension on his contract, acknowledging delivery delays of miscellaneous building products and components like doors and windows, hardwood flooring, and terracotta appliques.²⁶ Project Inspector Isidoro Ramos Vélez was removed from his job on August 31st, 1925, as construction was finished by then.²⁷ However, the Department of the Interior officially accepted the project as completed on November 12, 1926.²⁸

To this day, *La Muñoz Rivera* remains well preserved and retains architectural and historic integrity. The resource still claims relevance within its urban landscape. In terms of design, the school retains the original volumetric composition and all of its intricate ornamental components, whose original materials have been preserved, and are highly illustrative of the craftsmanship and general workmanship of the period. Architectural integrity and permanence regarding function nurture feeling and association from users, alumni, and visitors, in general. Infrastructure improvements, minor repairs, internal spatial redistribution, and the construction of additional educational buildings in close proximity to the original one fueled changes to the school during subsequent years, but its urban bearing and historical preeminence remain undiminished. Having performed efficiently as a social fulcrum, it is valued as an identitarian icon for Lajas. In particular, the school also attests to the mixed use of architectural vocabularies that characterized much of early 20th century design. Architects removed from metropolitan centers where academic tastes could be more formally enforced - and faced with more restricted budgets –nonetheless, came to terms rather successfully with the challenge of granting their less privileged buildings a dignified institutional bearing. *La Muñoz Rivera* bears witness to it. Its horizontal determination still prevails in spite of changes in the surrounding landscape, against which it still cuts proudly its profile. The well-crafted, well-preserved frontispiece together with its complementary ornamentation constitutes an example of eloquent local workmanship. Being still in use for the purpose for which it was built adds program integrity to the property's architectural integrity. One has added to the other for almost a century, in an association not missed by locals and visitors to which townsfolk tell proudly their deeply felt stories of their years at la Luis Muñoz Rivera.

²³ AGPR: Letter dated February 6, 1925, from Héctor Urrutia, School Director, to Juan B. Huyke, Commissioner of Education.

²⁴ AGPR: Letter from architect Carmoega to the Mayor of Lajas, dated April 27, 1925.

²⁵ AGPR: Memorandum from architect Carmoega to the Commissioner of Education, dated 1925; Memorandum to the Commissioner P/C Superintendent of Public Works from architect. The document states: "the contractor submitted the fixed price of \$ 750.00 for the implementation of the portico".

²⁶ AGPR: Memorandum from architect Carmoega to the Commissioner of Education, dated April 29, 1925.

²⁷ AGPR: Letter from architect Carmoega to the Mayor of Lajas, dated August 27, 1925.

²⁸ AGPR: Letter from the Subcommissioner of the Interior to the Mayor of Lajas, from November 19, 1926.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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

Primary Sources

Archivo General de Puerto Rico

Fondo: Obras Públicas; Serie: Edificios Escolares; Caja: 1119, Leg. 155, Exp: 1.

Federal Emergency Management Agency Panel 1570H - Map number 72000C1620J, revised November 18, 2009.

Puerto Rico Planning Board, *Geolocalizador: Interactive Map of the Land Registry*, <http://gis.jp.pr.gov/GeoLocalizador/Internet/> for plot number –358-041-081-08

Secondary Sources

Carley, Rachel. *The Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, LLC, 1994)

Rigau, Jorge. *Puerto Rico 1900: Turn-of-the-Century Architecture in the Hispanic Caribbean, 1890-1930*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1992).

Vargas, José Luis. *Lajas: Notas para su historia* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Oficina Estatal de Conservación Histórica, 1986).

Magazines/ Articles

Jorge Rigau. "La posible felicidad del país: Optimismo, pragmatismo y responsabilidad social en la reglamentación finisecular puertorriqueña relacionada a la construcción", *Revista del Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña*, Núm. 98, 1991.

Revista de Obras Públicas

Figures

Archivo General de Puerto Rico

Alex Martínez

Jorge Rigau

Interviews

Milagros Irizarry Ortiz, August 16, 2012

Luis Martínez Sepúlveda, August 16, 2012

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been Requested)
 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 # _____

Primary location of additional data:

State Historic Preservation Office
 Other State agency
 Federal agency
 Local government
 University
 Other
Name of repository: _____
Municipality of Lajas _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre (.22)
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>19</u>	<u>705447</u>	<u>1996532</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

The boundaries are indicated on the accompanying base map, and are shown as the dotted line on the accompanying map. See continuation sheet, section 10.

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The nominated property includes the entire lot historically associated with the Luis Muñoz Rivera School.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Arq. Jorge Rigau, FAIA
organization Jorge Rigau Arquitectos date December 17, 2012
street& number #67 calle Los baños, 1er piso telephone (787) 982-0002
city or town San Juan state Puerto Rico zip code 00911
e-mail rigau@jorgerigau.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**

- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

1. Luis Muñoz Rivera School
2. Lajas, Puerto Rico
3. Eduardo Miranda
4. October 24, 2012
5. Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico
6. West elevation, looking northeast. Main facade existing conditions in the town of Lajas, Puerto Rico. The school's main façade (facing west) is organized in a tripartite composition, displaying a central volume flanked by slightly receding, identical lateral wings. Entrance resembles a small Doric temple.
7. #1

1. Luis Muñoz Rivera School
2. Lajas, Puerto Rico
3. Eduardo Miranda
4. October 24, 2012
5. Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico
6. West elevation, looking east. An open-air, straight-run staircase built in reinforced concrete reaches the building itself. Fourteen feet wide, the stair's run is articulated into two flights with a landing in between up to the school's main façade entrance portico.
7. #2

1. Luis Muñoz Rivera School
2. Lajas, Puerto Rico
3. Eduardo Miranda
4. October 24, 2012
5. Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico
6. Detail view, looking east. The portico is crowned with a pediment; its horizontal cornice and the raking ones incorporate dentil moldings. The tympanum is decorated with an oval cartouche with a convex profile. One dancette molding is placed over an oblong tablet topped with scroll. Ornamental brackets resembling flowers, stems and leaves frame the cartouche. The roof is covered with terracotta clay tiles, the ridge projecting into the façade in the shape of a small Greek acrotera.
7. #3

1. Luis Muñoz Rivera School
2. Lajas, Puerto Rico
3. Eduardo Miranda
4. October 24, 2012
5. Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico
6. Close-up detail view, looking east. A cartouche above each set establishes local symmetry at these sections of the façade. A lean molding strings together triglyphs and *metopes* and below a line of *terracota ventilators*.
7. #4

1. Luis Muñoz Rivera School
2. Lajas, Puerto Rico
3. Eduardo Miranda
4. October 24, 2012
5. Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico

6. East interior elevation, looking west. U-shaped patio, in Lajas Puerto Rico. The open space provides corridors and classrooms with natural light and ventilation. From the court, trees and other school buildings are visible. Around the perimeter of this concrete paved patio, seven long benches, five 2'-0" long planting strips and the arcaded corridors become key transition elements between the school's exterior and interior spaces. The wrap around arcade comprises 24 Roman arches. Six face west, nine to the north and another nine face south.

7. #5

1. Luis Muñoz Rivera School
2. Lajas, Puerto Rico
3. Eduardo Miranda
4. October 24, 2012
5. Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico
6. Interior view, typical classroom. Every classroom is alike, measuring 24'-0" x 30'-0 with polished concrete floors. Roofed over by a concrete slab and post and beam construction. All classrooms have four windows except the corner rooms that have three additional fenestrations. Classrooms have fluorescent lighting. All classroom doors are single acting, in solid steel plate, reinforced by a black and galvanized rectangular tubing frame, incorporating a double cylinder deadbolt. Solid steel plates installed on a steel tubing frame have substituted original door transoms. Some of these display a black and galvanized rectangular tubing grille. Doors are combined with security gates also made of black and galvanized rectangular tubing arranged vertically welded to cross members at the top, middle and bottom, also with double cylinder deadbolt. At some classrooms, an aluminum frame with clear plastic panels has been provided to control air conditioning.

7. #6

1. Luis Muñoz Rivera School
2. Lajas, Puerto Rico
3. Álbum de Obras Municipales, Puerto Rico 1919-1928
4. Accessed on March 09, 2012
5. Archivo General de Puerto Rico
6. West elevation, looking northeast. Main facade during construction in the town of Lajas, Puerto Rico. Original steps, iron-grill ventilators and arched windows are visible in photo.

7. #7

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Luis Muñoz Rivera School

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Early XXth Century Schools Puerto Rico,
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10. Geographical Data

The boundaries are indicated with gray shading. Map shows the contributing resource. The limits were obtained from the official boundaries map provided by the Puerto Rico Planning Board.

LUIS MUÑOZ RIVERA, LAJAS, PUERTO RICO

Location: Calle 65 Infanteria Esq Davila Lajas, Puerto Rico 00667
UTM Reference: 19, 733947, 1993658
Acreage of Property Less than one acre (0.22 acre)



JORGE RIGAU
ARQUITECTOS



- ◀ Contributing resource
- Property boundary

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10. Geographical Data

The limits of the plot were obtained from the official boundaries map provided by the Puerto Rico Planning Board. The boundaries of the nominated resource are identified by an outline. Image taken from Google Earth.

LUIS MUÑOZ RIVERA, LAJAS, PUERTO RICO

Location: Calle 65 Infanteria Esq Davila Lajas, Puerto Rico 00667
UTM Reference: 19, 733947, 1993658
Acreage of Property Less than one acre (0.22 acre)



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List of Figures.



FIG. 1: The Luis Muñoz Rivera School west elevation, looking northeast, in Lajas Puerto Rico. *La Muñoz Rivera* was Lajas' second graded school, as its name at the entrance boasts; the porch displays Greek revival features and the design is inspired by the *École des Beaux Arts*. Notice original entrance steps flanked by flagpoles. Fence and entrance gate has since been removed. Photo: Unknown. Source: Lajas: Ayer y Hoy. <http://www.lajasayeryhoy.net/images/LuisMunozRiveraHigh.jpg>.

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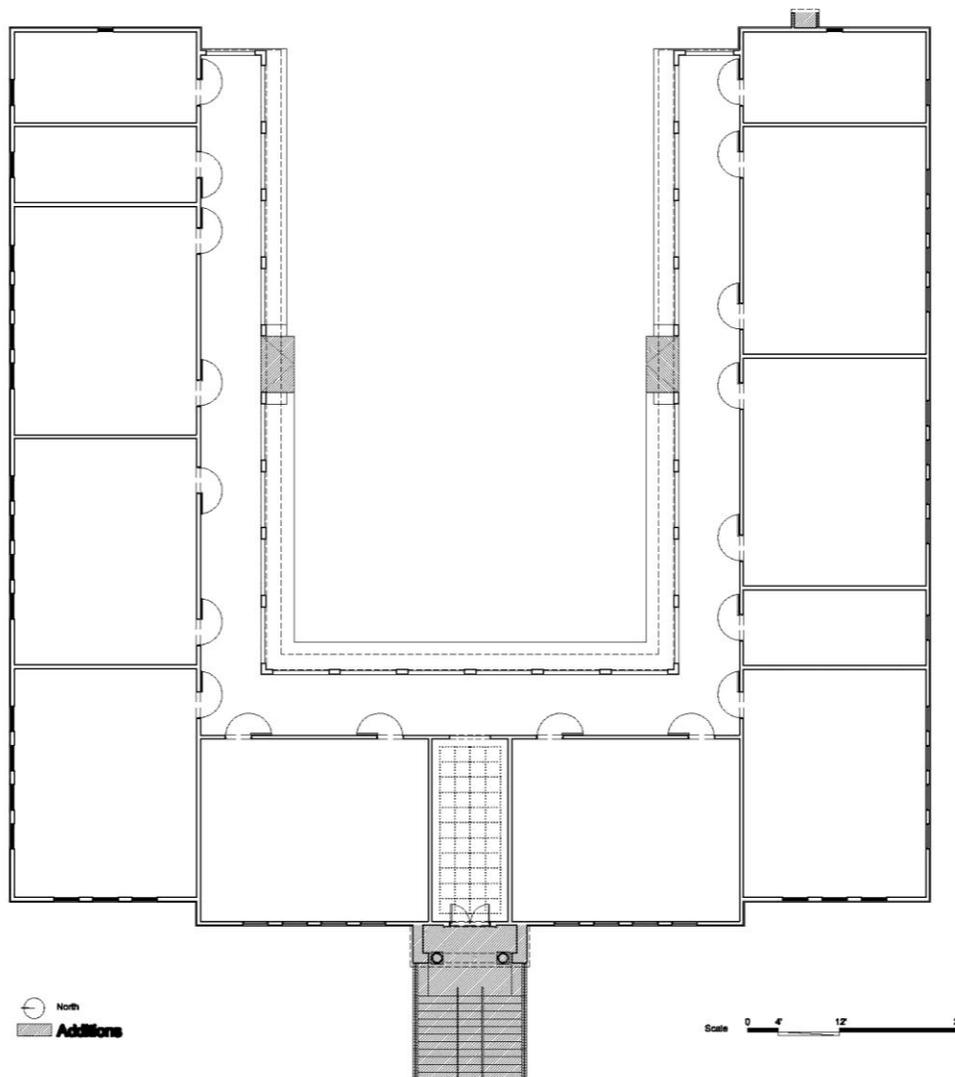


FIG. 2: Luis Muñoz Rivera School, in Lajas Puerto Rico, U-shaped volume. It includes eight classrooms, one office, one storage area, two restrooms, and corridors, all enclosed within a 120 feet x 115 feet perimeter. Drawing: Eduardo Miranda, August 25, 2012. Source: Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico.

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FIG. 3: Luis Muñoz Rivera School west elevation, looking east, in Lajas Puerto Rico. An open-air, straight-run staircase built in reinforced concrete reaches the building itself. Fourteen feet wide, the stair's run is articulated into two flights with a landing in between. Photo: Eduardo Miranda, October 24, 2012. Source: Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico.

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FIG. 4: Luis Muñoz Rivera School west elevation, looking northeast, in Lajas Puerto Rico. Main façade existing conditions. The school's main façade (facing west) is organized in a tripartite composition, displaying a central volume flanked by slightly receding, identical lateral wings. Entrance resembles a small Doric temple. Photo: Eduardo Miranda, October 24, 2012. Source: Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico.

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FIG. 5: Luis Muñoz Rivera School west elevation, looking northeast - portico detail, in Lajas Puerto Rico. The porch displays Greek revival features. Next to the columns, solid, plain piers support the entablature on which two pairs of triglyphs appear in frieze-like manner. The continuity of the frieze is interrupted by the school's name at what architects refer to as a *table*: *Escuela Graduada Luis Muñoz Rivera*, engraved in bas-relief manner, at center. Left and right of the triglyphs at each end of the front portico, a molding/cornice starts its run north/south along the rest of the façade. Symmetry is further underlined by the subtle placement of raised circular panel medallions placed above, left and right, of each Tuscan column. Photo: Eduardo Miranda, October 24, 2012. Source: Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico.

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Luis Muñoz Rivera School

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FIG. 6: Luis Muñoz Rivera School west elevation, looking northeast - portico detail, in Lajas Puerto Rico. Four equally spaced, rectangular, vertical window openings are located at either side of the portico. A cartouche above each set establishes local symmetry at these sections of the façade. A lean molding strings together triglyphs and metopes and below a line of terracotta ventilators. Photo: Eduardo Miranda, October 24, 2012. Source: Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico.

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FIG. 7: Luis Muñoz Rivera School east interior elevation, looking west – U-shaped patio, in Lajas Puerto Rico. The open space provides corridors and classrooms with natural light and ventilation. From the court, trees and other school buildings are visible. Around the perimeter of this concrete paved patio, seven long benches, five 2'-0" long planting strips and the arcaded corridors become key transition elements between the school's exterior and interior spaces. The wrap around arcade comprises 24 Roman arches. Six face west, nine to the north and another nine face south. Photo: Eduardo Miranda, October 24, 2012. Source: Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico.

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FIG. 8: Luis Muñoz Rivera School detail view, looking west, in Lajas Puerto Rico. At the patio's façade facing west, an old bell is displayed as symbol of the school's extended service to the community. Photo: Eduardo Miranda, October 24, 2012. Source: Jorge Rigau Arquitectos, San Juan Puerto Rico.