**Determining the Facts 3:**

**New Architecture for New Schools**

Americans did not build many schools during World War II. There was not a lot of money to buy school supplies and building materials. Steel, concrete, and lumber were used to support the war. After the war, these materials were available again. Also, more Americans married and had children after the war. More schools had to be built in the 1940s and 1950s because of the "baby boom." Local governments were able to build these schools because there was tax money available to buy building materials and workers available to build them.

Just before the era of the baby boom, school buildings began to copy the new "modern" form of architecture. Before then, schools were usually built out of wood or brick. Many were multi-story. Older schools in rural areas were single story and had only one or two rooms. New schools were usually one-story buildings. Architects used concrete block to construct schools and classrooms in the modern style. The concrete frames of the new schools were covered with brick to improve the look of the school. Older schools had wood frames and sloping roofs. Modern schools had steel beam frames and flat roofs.

The new one-story schools did not need staircases and fire escapes. Classrooms located on one floor provided easy access to the outdoors. Many schools had classrooms that opened directly to the outside instead of a hallway. Architects chose this design because it improved ventilation (air flow) and natural lighting in the classrooms. Lighting and ventilation in older schools was poor. New classrooms had nine-foot ceilings and "window-walls." Rows of windows across the *facade* (the outside of a building) allowed an abundance of light to enter the classroom. Architects used modern-style materials like glass blocks that softened the light in the classroom.

The inside of modern schools did not look like the old ones. Teaching styles changed and the new schools adapted to the new styles. The desks and chairs in older schools were nailed to the floor. This limited the ways that students and teachers could use the classroom. Teachers and students could move their tables, chairs, and desks around the room in modern schools.

South Carolina's schools constructed under the equalization program followed modern architectural trends. The equalization schools are very distinctive in their design and construction. The State Educational Finance Commission required all new schools to be designed by a licensed architect. Architects designed schools with modern materials that reflected the architecture of schools across the nation. Both black and white schools built under this program were similar in design and materials.

One of the first equalization schools built for African American students was the historic Mary H. Wright Elementary School in Spartanburg, South Carolina. The Spartanburg school board used money from the State Educational Finance Commission to fund the construction. Wright Elementary was one of the first equalization schools in South Carolina.

When it opened in 1951, the Mary H. Wright Elementary school's classrooms had bookshelves, windows, sinks, closets, and chalkboards. Some even had their own toilet. The school had a library, nurse's room, cafeteria, kitchen, and indoor bathrooms. Central boilers, not stoves, heated the school. The school's walls were built from painted concrete blocks. South Carolina's politicians built the Wright School to keep segregation alive. It is also an important historic place because it is an example of how school architecture changed after World War II.

**Reading Questions** *(answer on a separate sheet of paper; make sure to title it “New Architecture”)*

**1)** Why were schools not built during World War II? What are some of the reasons that schools were built in the 1950s?

**2)** What are some of the identifying features of "modern" schools built in the middle of the 20th century? How were they different from older schools?

**3)** How do you think the "modern" features improved learning?

**4)** If you were an African American parent in South Carolina, would you be satisfied with sending your children to an equalization school? Why or why not?