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Education Construction Starts Off the Charts in 2015: Report



CORNELL TECH CAMPUS PHASE ONE, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT, THE BLOOMBERG CENTER, THE RESIDENTIAL BUILDING AND THE BRIDGE (IMAGE: KILOGRAPH).

BY [LIAM LA GUERRE](#)

School construction projects in the five boroughs made the grade last year—and then some.

The dollar volume for education construction starts of projects that include colleges, universities, elementary and secondary schools (public and private) was \$3 billion in 2015, almost doubling the \$1.6 billion spent in 2014, a [New York Building Congress](#) report released today indicates.

Four major projects initiated by institutes of higher learning were the cause of the spike, according to the findings, which was an analysis of information from **Dodge Data & Analytics**. College and universities accounted for \$1.3 billion in construction starts last year, which is a 343 percent increase from \$379 million in 2014.

“The reason is because there is considerable demand for both public and private schools of higher education and because they have money,” New York Building Congress President [Richard Anderson](#) told CO. “This has been growing since the great recession. This is a culmination of the last few years.”

The large-scale projects that tipped the scale last year includes [Cornell Tech](#)’s **Bloomberg Center** and the 26-story, 350-unit residential building on the Roosevelt Island campus. The Bloomberg Center is the new campus’ first academic building and was named after former Mayor [Michael Bloomberg](#)’s daughters Emma and Georgina for his \$100 million donation to the school last year. It will reportedly cost [\\$800 million](#) to construct, as *The New York Times* reported.



RENDERING OF 525 EAST 73RD STREET (IMAGE: PERKINS EASTMAN/ENNEAD ARCHITECTS).

Rockefeller University also began working on its new 160,000-square-foot laboratory and conference facility over the FDR Drive adjacent to its campus building at **1230 York Avenue**. The new facility involves a platform on top of the FDR Drive for four buildings at a cost between \$425 million to [\\$450 million](#), according to *Crain’s New York Business*.

Last year, [Hunter College](#) and [Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center](#) also started building their joint 1.2-million-square-foot complex on the Upper East Side, which is located off the FDR Drive between East 73rd and East 74th Streets.

And [New York University](#) is transforming the former **Metropolitan Transportation Authority** headquarters at **370 Jay Street** in Downtown Brooklyn into a center for science, technology and media. The 500,000-square-foot, 14-story building will be the home of the school’s **Center for Urban Science and Progress**. (In a side note, NYU has yet to begin construction on its planned 800,000-square-foot building at **181 Mercer Street** between East Houston and Bleecker Streets, which will replace its **Jerome S. Coles Sports Center** with classrooms, theater space, common areas and a new gym facility.)

Although a bit more modest, increases were also found in construction starts for elementary and secondary schools, both public and private, the report indicated.

New York City’s public schools (not counting public colleges) recorded about \$1.5 billion in construction starts last year, up from \$1.1 billion in 2014. Most the work—76 percent—focused on improving and modernizing current buildings, most of which are more than six decades old. Private elementary and secondary schools commenced projects valued at \$240 million in 2015, an increase from the \$149 million in the previous year.

Overall, less than half of the \$3 billion on education starts accounted for ground-up projects. About \$1.3 billion, or 45 percent, were for new construction, up from just \$450 million in 2014. While there are many ground-up projects in the works, Mr. Anderson pointed out that the majority of the money (\$1.6 billion) was for alterations to update current facilities.

“Alterations don’t increase capacity a lot, because it’s not all for accommodating new students,” Mr. Anderson said. “I don’t think this portends a huge increase in students.”

He added later that the astounding jump in dollar volume of construction starts last year may not be repeated this year.

“Construction starts can be exacerbated because you can get a couple of big projects within a year,” Mr. Anderson said. “In 2016 there maybe be a decline, because you may only get two or three [huge] projects.”