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# CASE STUDY

## PROJECT DETAILS

# Nichiha | Case Study

LPW ARCHITECTURE

## FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, MISSOULA, MONTANA

Originally built in 1916, Missoula, Montana’s Franklin Elementary had seen many additions over the years but no major renovations. It was time for a change, and in 2016 the school board decided the facility needed a full makeover.

On the first day of school in Fall 2017, the students found a wonderful surprise.

“The school was in use, but there were some overcrowded spaces – not conducive to learning –that indicated it was time for a new facility,” explained the project’s architect, Dani Grebe, [LPW Architecture](#). Once the education bond passed, Grebe knew exactly which cladding material would fit her vision of the building’s aesthetic: Illumination from [Nichiha USA](#).

Grebe and the project team had a fresh slate for design. While certain parts of the school had to be demolished as they didn’t meet code, other spaces remained and an additional 47,177 square feet of new construction was added to the existing portion of the school.

“I had a vision in mind to use modernized colors of the standard masonry material that remained, so I chose a light, neutral brick and a bold, dark split-face CMU for that portion,” explained Grebe. “Then I wanted to have a dramatic and contemporary material that would contrast between the timeless masonry pieces – something that would reflect the playful and invigorating elementary attitude.

Having heard about fiber cement before, Grebe started her research into different manufacturers. “I knew how rainscreen systems perform. They’re durable and they perform well. They also provide a dimensional option that other traditional materials don’t,” said Grebe. Fiber cement can be integrated with code required continuous insulation which is important in our climate zone – zone 6. I’d seen Nichiha’s name in a few different trade publications and went from there.”

**Architect:**  
LPW Architecture  
Great Falls, Montana

**General Contractor:**  
Jackson Contractor Group, Inc.  
Missoula, Montana

**Location:**  
Missoula, Montana

**Products:**  
Illumination in Custom Colors



## Challenge

LPW Architecture wanted to refresh the exterior of an elementary school under renovation. The goal was to provide a playful and lively aesthetic for students.

## Solution

After researching and requesting samples, the architect chose Illumination paneling from Nichiha USA. The panels were matched to three custom paint colors and applied in a vertical orientation.

## Results

With Illumination enhancing its exterior, Franklin Elementary is completely modernized and inviting. The school board and students have embraced the revitalized facility as a focal point for the community.



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After reviewing the samples, the project team — with help from Nichiha — selected 441, 18-inch wide, 10-foot long Illumination panels installed vertically in three distinct colors. The contractor noted that Nichiha made sense for the job.

“It all ended up working out well. At the start, the rep flew down and spent the day with us to ensure we understood the install,” said Cody Frey, construction manager, [Jackson Contractor Group, Inc.](#) “The architect was able to get the three-color look she wanted, and the long-term warranty on the finishes is very nice.”

Ultimately, Grebe was able to color match the panels to three custom Benjamin Moore® paint colors: Gray, Smoke and Citrus. The result is a staggered, lively look. “I knew I wanted a field of neutrals and a select, vibrant colors,” said Grebe. “I liked the complementary look of light shades of gray contrasting with a bright yellow.”

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— **CODY FREY**

Construction Manager  
Jackson Contractor Group, Inc.

The vertical orientation of the panels helped refresh the school’s exterior. “The building already had some horizontal sprawl to the portions of it that I wanted to clad in Nichiha panels. I chose vertical panels to accentuate the height in those areas,” said Grebe. “That particular neighborhood in Missoula is such a vibrant place that embraces the arts. Of all the communities I work with, I knew they could embrace the color and look of the material.”

Grebe was right — residents, the school board and students were pleased with the new look. “Everyone liked the final product, there’s no doubt,” noted Frey. “The building looks wonderful. Now having experience with the product, we’d definitely consider using it again for the right project.”

## About Nichiha USA

For more than 20 years, Nichiha USA, a subsidiary of the Nichiha Corporation, has pushed the boundaries of product design and performance. Since its founding in 1956 in Japan, Nichiha has fostered a culture of innovation and now boasts over 2,800 employees and 13 plants worldwide. Known for its advanced fiber cement cladding introduced in 1974, the company continues to manufacture precision-engineered products outfitted with built-in rainscreen technology and rigorously tested for durability. With one system that supports 50-plus finishes, Nichiha has a solution to fit your commercial or residential design needs. Visit [Nichiha.com](#) and explore the power of possibilities.

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