Camera shutters clicked, capturing the corners and crannies of an aesthetically deteriorating school building. Roger Williams University students cataloged the purple labyrinth of Trinity Academy for the Performing Arts.

At a cafeteria table and on a tour of the three story, two building facility, RWU students got the chance to prompt discussion with Director of Development Tyler Lewis on a professional, peer level. Lewis listed extensive deficiencies in the building, like a lack of phone system or soundproofed music studio — or a roof once caving in, unleashing a black cloud of bats. “We have to make it work,” said Lewis. The school opened four years ago as grassroots startup. The RWU students will draft suggestions on how to improve and better use the space available — weighing aesthetics against function.

On September 22, students enrolled in the Historic Preservation Workshop at Roger Williams University visited TAPA to tour the site. These students will spend the fall 2014 semester partnering with the Community Partnerships Center to conduct a building preservation and rehabilitation plan for TAPA. TAPA’s physical structure, originally an elementary school, has an old brick building charm. Students looked at classroom space, storage, utilities, and the basement — taking in a scope of the whole to fuel their concept of what direction to steer.

While students toured the site, trumpets scatted jazz improv behind classroom doors. Wooden stairs creaked as a stamped crashed down to lunch. In the courtyard, a circle passed around a basketball, playing taps. Swashbucklers ran by on foot. TAPA is a charter junior and senior high school, providing kids with programs in music, theater, film and dance. Students spend their 7th grade year exploring each of the different arts. Pupils subsequently choose one art to pursue for the duration of their stay. Twenty hours a week, TAPA students study their major. Arts and academics are combined, constituting a cohesive, seamless approach to pedagogical methods. Students learn to live in their art form.

“When they’re studying mitosis and meiosis in biology, they’re practicing the ebb and flow of cell division in dance class,” said Lewis.

As RWU students looked over floor plans in the light of the sun, a performer stood on his hands while classmates sat on floor mats. Chatter came out of the cafeteria and energy filled the halls. The spirit of the school was alive.