

POSITIVE TOMORROWS

NEW SCHOOL FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN



2020 JAMES D. MACCONNELL AWARD SUBMISSION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Positive Tomorrows is Oklahoma’s only tuition-free elementary school and social service agency serving families experiencing homelessness. With roughly 1 in 10 students in the Oklahoma City Public School System facing homelessness, the services Positive Tomorrows provides to the community is vital to breaking the cycle of homelessness and poverty. Formerly housed in a church annex with limited space, Positive Tomorrows turned away nearly 100 students each year. They needed additional space if they were to serve more families. The design team became involved with Positive Tomorrows in 2013 and with funding through a Building Success Campaign in 2017, began designing a new 42,000 SF facility that would triple the school’s capacity and extend the school’s student services to Early Head Start - 8th grade. The new space enhances the structure and stability Positive Tomorrows students and their families need through specialized learning spaces, upgraded safety and security measures, and additional Family Support areas.

The design of the new school for Positive Tomorrows is a response to the unique needs of the Positive Tomorrows staff and the students and families they serve who are experiencing homelessness. The space triples Positive Tomorrows’ capacity and is intentionally designed to support not only the services they provide, but also the school’s **‘High Structure - High Love’** curriculum.

The design team set out to achieve a sense of home rather than an institutional setting and a campus where learning opportunities could happen anywhere. Student involvement and feedback played a large role in successfully accomplishing this during the planning and design phases. The student’s contributions to the design are evident throughout the space. A very literal example is a graphic wall within the Maker Space which features enlarged floor plans that were originally hand-drawn by the students during a sketching exercise.

Positive Tomorrows’ new space fosters stability, considers special circulation needs, and promotes organic, easy to follow routines and procedures for the students. An open-space concept creates a safe atmosphere where students are easily monitored while specialized learning spaces cultivate enriching learning opportunities. Areas like a Food Lab, Maker Space, Literacy Lab, and an art and music classroom are dedicated to experimentation, problem solving, and cultural heritage curriculum ensuring the students are given the opportunity to explore extra-curricular activities that promote life-long learning and curiosity.

Positive Tomorrows’ mission is simple: *Partnering with homeless families to educate their children and create pathways to success.*

SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

POSITIVE TOMORROWS

- Founded in 1989
- Unique Mission and Service-Delivery
- Operates almost entirely on gifted dollars
- Previously turned away 100 students a year
- Over 6,000 homeless children in Oklahoma City
- Over 27,000 homeless students in the State of Oklahoma

THE NEW SCHOOL

- DATE OF COMPLETION: November 14, 2019
- SITE AREA: 3.82 Acres
- SIZE: 42,000 square feet
- CAPACITY: 205 Students
- ACTUAL BUILDING COSTS: \$9,848,684
- ACTUAL SITE COSTS: \$612,000
- ACTUAL FURNISHING COSTS: \$397,491
- ACTUAL TECHNOLOGY COSTS: \$502,509
- TOTAL PROJECT COST: \$11,360,684

MINORITY AND IEP AT POSITIVE TOMORROWS

- 100% Free and Reduced Lunch
- 32% Multi-Ethnic
- 32% African-American
- 23% Caucasian
- 08% Native American or Native Alaskan
- 03% Hispanic or Latino
- 02% Other
- 10% Students with an IEP



The front entry to the school provides a colorful learning experience as the overhead canopy displays the seven colors of the rainbow while the benches remind the students about Positive Tomorrows Seven Core Principals: Confidence, Creativity, Empathy, Hope, Integrity, Respect



SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



students now have an indoor gym that provides the space for physical activity during inclement weather

CREATING AN EQUITABLE COMMUNITY

Positive Tomorrows understands there are many basic human needs that must be met in order for their students to develop academically and socially. Positive Tomorrows works to remove the barriers that families experiencing homelessness may encounter such as transportation, hunger, and other basic needs like clothing and toiletries.

The work Positive Tomorrows has done, and continues to do for their surrounding community, is invaluable. As Oklahoma's only elementary school specifically for homeless children, they give kids stability and a quality education while their parents get the support they need to create a better life. Since 1989, they have filled their scrapbooks with countless success stories, but the need continues and the Positive Tomorrows team is working to expand their services with their new increased capacity. Positive Tomorrows' mission to break the cycle of homelessness and poverty endures and will be strengthened by the much needed support their brand-new building has created.

“I really like the new school because I can run and play outside and do fun things in the gym. My new class is so awesome, and I think I can learn better here, too.”
-Hunter, 3rd Grade

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

STAKEHOLDERS

The team approached this design by prioritizing the student’s needs early on. Students were very involved in the design process through brainstorm sessions that included sketching exercises resulting in very creative and detailed floor plans. The goal was to involve everyone who uses the school and the design team believes this was accomplished better than any other education project of the hundreds the team has designed prior.

Following initial meetings with students, they met with anyone who would use the spaces on a daily basis, prioritizing those who represent their department. The entire design team was involved from the very beginning - Architect, Interior Designer, Furniture Specialist, Construction, Landscape, IT, MEP etc.



Examples of student sketches from a 'Dream Big exercise'. The below image is a student sketch showing a button they can push when they would like food.



student dream big sketching exercise

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

CHALLENGES

One of the greatest issues faced during the design process was the high turnover rate of the students paired with a lack of parental involvement. During the design phase, Positive Tomorrows students, on average, consistently attended school for only 60 days. The students that the design team originally met with will most likely never attend the new school they helped design. However, their guidance and suggestions were integral in the design and set the tone for the overall look and feel of the school. Those students were crucial in helping the design team gain the creative ideas necessary for the new school. Parent groups are typically involved in the education design process, but in this case, there was no parent involvement due to their lack of involvement in the school and/or their children’s lives. We overcame all of this by having design meetings with every student as well as the staff, teachers, student mentors, and the school’s building committee. There is no national model for a school that specifically serves homeless children. So much of the design guidance depended on Positive Tomorrows experience serving the homeless since 1989.

The graph below displays some of the bigger challenges Positive Tomorrows faces on a daily basis. These challenges were brought to the design team’s attention during early programming meetings with students and staff.



SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



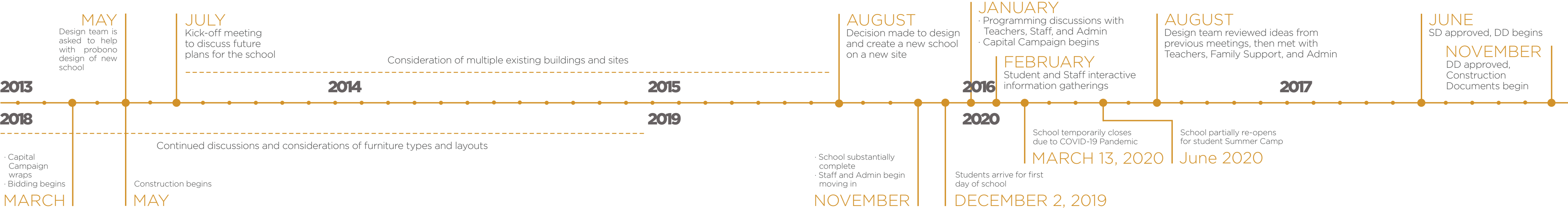
Positive Tomorrows was formerly housed in a church annex running the length of this hallway

VALUE OF PROCESS AND PROJECT

In May of 2013, our firm was approached to do pro bono work for a school for homeless children in Oklahoma City. Little did we know that this project would change our lives and the lives of everyone involved forever. Since Positive Tomorrows is funded solely through donations, no one, including the chief fundraiser for the school, believed that they could raise enough money for a renovated school - let alone a new one. The following timeline reflects many years in which the building committee started and stopped the design process for many different reasons. From 2013 to 2015 we visited abandoned buildings throughout Oklahoma City to see if those facilities would be a good fit for Positive Tomorrows' staff and students. After several years of searching it was determined that due to the specific needs of these students and the school, Positive Tomorrows would be better served with a new school designed for their specific needs. Once that decision was made fundraising began.

From 2016 to 2018 fundraising for the new school became a daily occurrence. The team of architects and interior designers began designing the school with no real end date or final budget in mind. Every decision was dependent on how much money they believed they would receive. With that in mind, the design team took their time meeting with students, teachers, staff, administration, board and community members on numerous occasions to program and design a school that would meet their needs. Finally, in August of 2017, we began design development drawings and completed construction documents in February of 2018. Construction began in May of 2018 and was complete in November 2019.

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT





EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

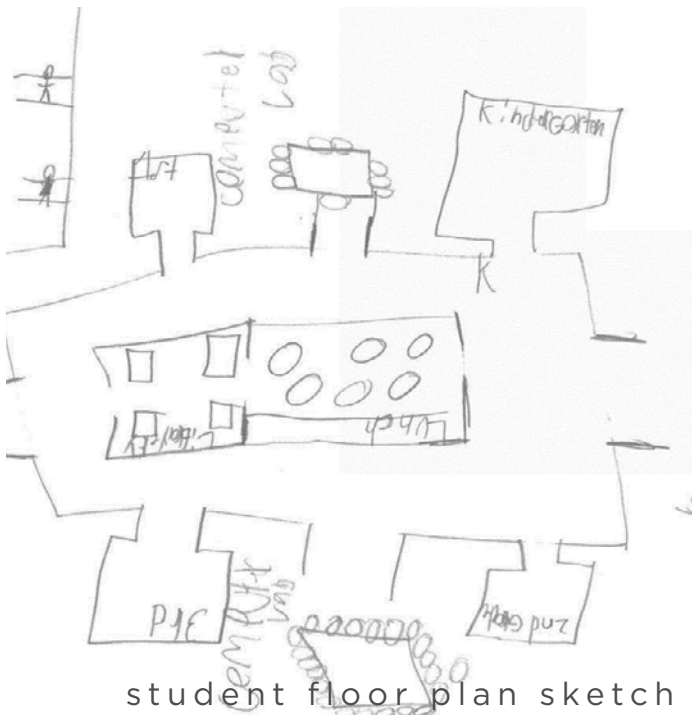
One of two Living Rooms in the school, this is a place where multiple classes can collaborate, individual students can use their cubbies as a reading nook, or hang out with friends.

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

VISION AND GOALS

The design team requested that the first planning meeting for the new school be with the then current students of Positive Tomorrows. At that meeting, students were asked to come up with designs for spaces and ideas that they would like to see incorporated into their new school. Some of those student thoughts and ideas are listed below and reflected in the images to the right.

Students wanted the school to have a “homey feeling” with “warm and colorful” finishes. Natural light was also an important part since the existing school did not have many windows.



“Floating Chairs”

Modern, flexible furniture is incorporated throughout the entire school making it easy to configure relaxed areas for learning. Upkeep and comfort were also highly prioritized when selecting furniture finishes.

“A place where we can build R2D2 and BB8”

This student design idea spurred the creation of a Maker Space. This space allows the students to create their favorite characters with their new 3D printers and more. Shortly after the pandemic hit Oklahoma, Positive Tomorrows joined forces with the local AIA chapter to 3D print over 600 face mask “ear savers” for local EMT and medical personnel.

“A place to sit with friends - No one gets left out”

Multiple spaces throughout the building were configured so that students may sit with their friends in a relaxing setting. The furniture for each space was carefully chosen to be not only comfortable, but flexible and collaborative as well. In most cases, the furniture easily moves so the room can be setup for different functions and uses.



EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



literacy lab



collaboration corridor



clayton's clubhouse reading nook

HIGH STRUCTURE HIGH LOVE

Today, over 90% of Oklahoma City Public School students qualify for free lunch and the number of students living in deep poverty is rising. These students are overwhelmed by trauma and lack resources that traditional classroom constructs are often unable to meet.

With **High Structure - High Love™** training, schools can create character-rich classrooms that teach both the cognitive and non-cognitive skills that allow all students to thrive.

Positive Tomorrows assesses students using a program called the Measures of Academic Progress Assessment Program (MAPs), which focuses on individual student growth. MAPs assessments are given three times during the year for continuing students, and upon entry and withdrawal for students only here a short time. Because enrollment fluctuates considerably at Positive Tomorrows, not all students can be assessed more than once, due to their length of stay.

The vast majority of students who attend Positive Tomorrows lack exposure to experiences and activities that are often commonplace for those who have a place to call home. Considering this reality, it was important to the design team to create a space that fosters programming which introduces students to concepts like “home-made” meals, how to do laundry, and other common practices they may not already be exposed to on a daily basis. Including these practices in the curriculum not only advances each student’s skill set, but even greater, helps them become thriving, successful members of society.

*Source: positivetomorrow.org and Positive Tomorrows 2018/2019 Annual Report

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



FLEXIBLE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Several elements of the school’s “backyard” create opportunities for teaching moments outdoors allowing the students to connect with nature. The garden provides therapy and promotes mindfulness for the user while teaching students about food sources and an understanding of a farm to table process. A needed retaining wall doubles as a rock-climbing space for exciting physical activity opportunities. The building neighbors other social service agencies on its greater campus which inspired a similar exterior design aesthetic.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The kitchen is so often the heart of any home. A “Food Lab” was designed to provide a space where students could gain basic cooking skills. Through cooking exercises, the children are taught lessons in various cultures and cuisine, sourcing of ingredients, experimentation, and problem solving. Cultural heritage, spending time with family, and cooking together are all important themes of this room. As multiple languages are spoken within the school, teaching the kids about their heritage through food is an exciting way for students to gain a better understanding of each other’s cultures.

Families can cook at a standard oven and use the space’s washer and dryer. For many students, the school is the closest thing they have to home.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



The Family Room is the heart of the school

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



“ This would be like going to school at Disney World.”

- School Visitor

AN ENVIRONMENT FOR UNDERSTANDING

The new Positive Tomorrows school is designed to create a home environment rather than an institutional one for the students; especially those lacking a stable home environment and who may be processing trauma. Many of the names used for the spaces are inspired by areas found within a traditional home.

- 01. Entry Benches featuring 7 Core Principals (*Confidence, Creativity, Empathy, Hope Integrity, Respect*)
- 02. Secure Entry
- 03. Family Room
- 04. Family Support Offices
- 05. Donations
- 06. Clothing Closet
- 07. Kitchen
- 08. Kitchen Lab
- 09. Gym
- 10. Backyard
- 11. Literacy Lab
- 12. Maker Space
- 13. Front Office
- 14. Administration
- 15. Elementary School Restroom
- 16. Art and Music
- 17. Special Education
- 18. Outdoor Group Learning
- 19. Elementary School Classroom
- 20. Clayton's Clubhouse
- 21. Classroom/Ampitheatre
- 22. Back Porch
- 23. Living Room
- 24. Front Porch
- 25. Middle School Restroom
- 26. Middle School Classroom
- 27. Student Garden
- 28. Treehouse Collaboration
- 29. Collaboration Corridor
- 30. Shared Courtyard

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

GREATER COMMUNITY IMPACT

This new building is an extension of the stable environment Positive Tomorrows has established for their students. When students feel welcome, safe, and nourished, the likelihood they will succeed academically increases significantly. But the impact this new building creates is not strictly contained within its walls. With this new building, Positive Tomorrows' presence will become more apparent, leading to an increase in awareness both state and nation-wide. As the community becomes more aware of such a unique school, they will in-turn become better educated about homelessness in their city. This increased awareness will result in greater support of the work Positive Tomorrows is doing to break the cycle of poverty and its potential of becoming a nation-wide model.

The new Positive Tomorrows school is connected to ReMerge via a shared courtyard. *ReMerge is a comprehensive female diversion program designed to transform pregnant women and mothers facing incarceration into productive citizens. Oklahoma is currently ranked number one for female incarceration per capita in the United States - a country that leads the developed world in incarcerating it's own citizens.

Nearly 80% of Oklahoma's incarcerated women are non-violent offenders, their presence in Oklahoma Correctional Facilities largely attributable to drug abuse, the distribution of controlled substances, prostitution and property crimes.

Children with an incarcerated mother are also affected, and are five times as likely to end up in prison themselves. Their family life becomes unstable, their grades suffer, and they experience higher rates of depression as they struggle with the truth of their parents' criminalization. Many mothers who take part in ReMerge programs have children who attend Positive Tomorrows. The courtyard connects the two, creating a healing space and an opportunity for mothers to visit their children during the day.

*Source remergeok.org



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



BREAKING THE CYCLE

The school's former building had many tight, dark spaces with little or no natural light. The old space allowed students to hide, often triggering fear induced/depressive episodes. The new school, by design, lacks those same spatial triggers. Special considerations like restrooms in each classroom give staff the peace of mind that each student is safe when they are using those spaces; never needing to leave their classrooms to do so.

Inspired by spaces traditionally found within the home, carefully considered areas of the new school include a family room, living rooms, front/back porches, and a backyard. Understanding the student's unique perspectives helped create a home-like atmosphere, giving homeless children a stronger sense of safety, security, and pride in their space.

The school's interior color palette and graphic applications are inspired by the State of Oklahoma's most beautiful features - its sunsets, great green woods, fields, and prairies.

The space creates a sense of security for the students and inspires and motivates them to dream bigger.

***“I imagine somewhere beautiful,
and then I paint my happy place.”***

***- Jesse, Positive Tomorrows Student
during an art therapy session***

RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT

“I grew up in a similar situation as some of these kids. I’m so happy to know places like Positive Tomorrows exist for them today.”
- Partner Company Employee during a tour



RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT



RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT



The collaboration corridor and the secure entry vestibule to the left. Windows throughout the building provide both student and adults the opportunity to see what's going on in every space.

SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS ACHIEVED

While Positive Tomorrows is privately funded, many of their students live within the Oklahoma City School District. Roughly 6,000 children living in Oklahoma City and attending Oklahoma City Public Schools are homeless. Trauma-informed training for educators is vital in supporting student's mental health.

Trauma-informed decision making was paramount in the design of the school. Although the new space would be bright and naturally lit, the staff had a fear of moving into a larger school five times the size of the previous school. However, after moving into the space, they had the opposite experience. Interpersonal issues caused by a lack of space in the past affected the way they collaborated. In the new space they have room to breathe so there is now intent in their collaboration.

The colorful yet calming interior design makes everyone feel more relaxed, and in a high stress environment that is beneficial. In the original building so much of the staff's day was negatively affected by trying to find additional space. The new building's design was designed where learning, teaching, and meeting could happen everywhere. From the "collaboration corridor" to small, medium and large meeting and collaboration spaces, the building was created so that user connections could be formed. Flexible and collaborative furniture also contribute to the overall feel of being secure in the spaces. These overall steps help create a safer environment for the students and staff.

RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT



RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT



COMMUNITY GOALS ACHIEVED

Safety and security were both a top priority in the design of this school. On average, Positive Tomorrows staff called 911 a couple times per week due to violations of victim protection orders. CPTED principles were employed in the overall design specifically looking at access control and one point of entry with a multi door secure entry vestibule where visitors must be buzzed through two separate doors and badged upon entry. Concrete benches are placed out at the front entry and prominently display the school’s “7 Core Principles” but also act as natural bollards to protect the school from cars hitting it. The administration and Family Support offices were placed at the front entry with each office having a window to the front of the building. This allows staff to see who is approaching the building, allowing them to react quickly to a possible security concern. Interior windows into classrooms and collaboration spaces allow staff and students to see what is going on inside.

Each child has an adult mentor that meets with them weekly so this non-invasive approach to natural surveillance protects everyone involved. The school now has a broader public presence than in the past. A perimeter fence with landscaping helps soften the look of the fence allowing students to go outside and play in the backyard while creating a sense of territoriality for the overall site. Maintenance friendly materials will make it harder for anyone to vandalize the building and will in turn create a space that is easy and less expensive to take care of long-term.

RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT

UNINTENDED RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The design of this space has been critical during the COVID-19 crisis, especially as Positive Tomorrows plans for the upcoming school year. Because the classrooms have a Jack and Jill design, teachers will be able to go between classrooms while maintaining social distancing. The touchdown spaces in between rooms will become critical, and the fact that classrooms have their own bidders, restrooms, and sinks make it possible for classes to be self-contained and limit cross-contamination.

Touchdown spaces between each classroom include wall-height windows. These windows were originally designed so that teachers may closely monitor students during daily routine. These windows remain beneficial in new ways; both by allowing for safe, social distancing, and allowing staff members to step out of their rooms to attend to something while continuing to safely monitor their students.

During the pandemic, Positive Tomorrows has had to spread classes out and use spaces full-time that are normally used itinerantly such as the art/music room and Literacy Lab. The space was originally designed to allow for growth, and even at capacity, allows for 202 sq. ft. per student throughout. The public restrooms have been critical for students since those spaces don't have built-in restrooms. Students can use them safely, and teachers can feel confident that only one age-level group is using them at a time. An exterior door that leads from the gym to the background has been vital, as students spend much of their day outside. One staff member can stand by that door to allow students in and out safely to use the gym restrooms while other staff members can monitor the other students playing.

The school's entry vestibule which typically acts as a security barrier has been a very important point of entry during the pandemic. Masks are deposited there and laundered each day, and temperatures are taken there before entering the rest of the building.



A student washes their hands in the open restroom concept. The design allows privacy at the back of the restroom and safety observations toward the restroom entrance by teachers. This layout has helped alleviate many security concerns that normal restroom designs may create.

RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT



“One of our biggest fears moving into this space was that interdepartmental collaboration would decrease, because departments would be so spread out. In actuality, the opposite has been true. Interdepartmental collaboration has improved and is more intentional.”

- Amy Brewer, Director of Education

The Family Room showing various types of furniture that allows students to sit in groups or individually. An open kitchen window allows students to watch kitchen staff cook. The Food Lab is displayed on the left and is the area where families and students can learn to cook together in a more residential kitchen setting.

EDUCATIONAL VISIONING DOCUMENTS



EDUCATIONAL VISIONING DOCUMENTS

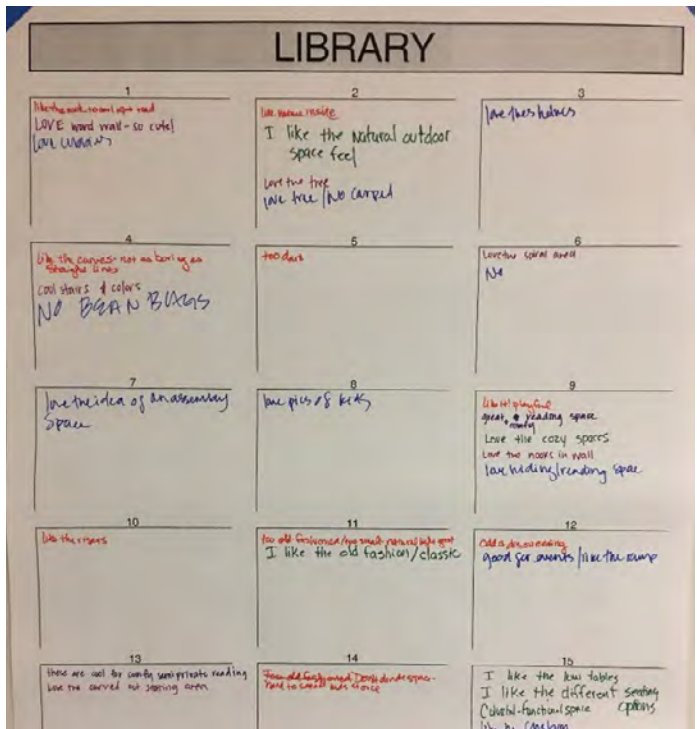
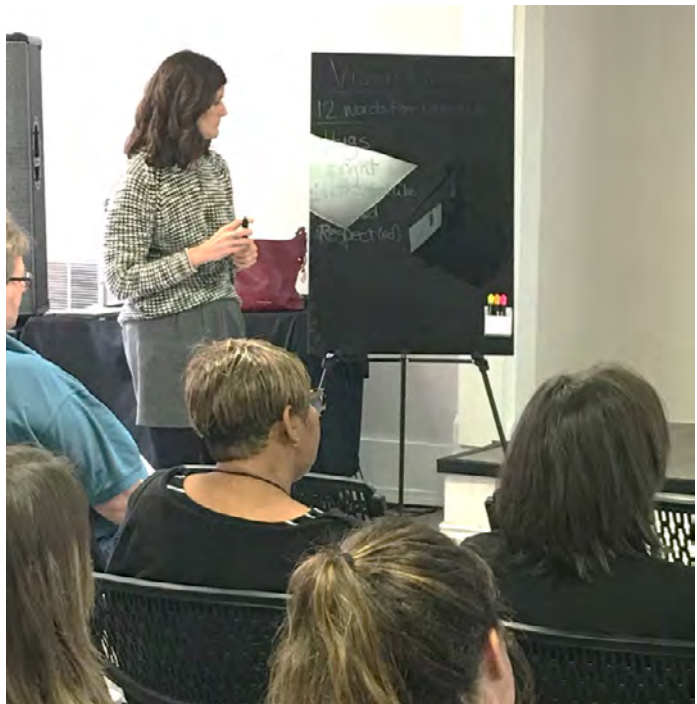
EDUCATIONAL VISIONING

The team approached this design by prioritizing the student’s needs early on. Positive Tomorrows students were very involved in the design process through brainstorm sessions that included sketching exercises resulting in some very creative and detailed floor plans. Due to the overwhelming influx of information and design ideas from various user groups, the design team used Pinterest as a visual collaboration, planning, and organization tool. Pinterest played a large role in allowing the team to organize brainstorming sessions and design ideas with the Positive Tomorrows faculty.

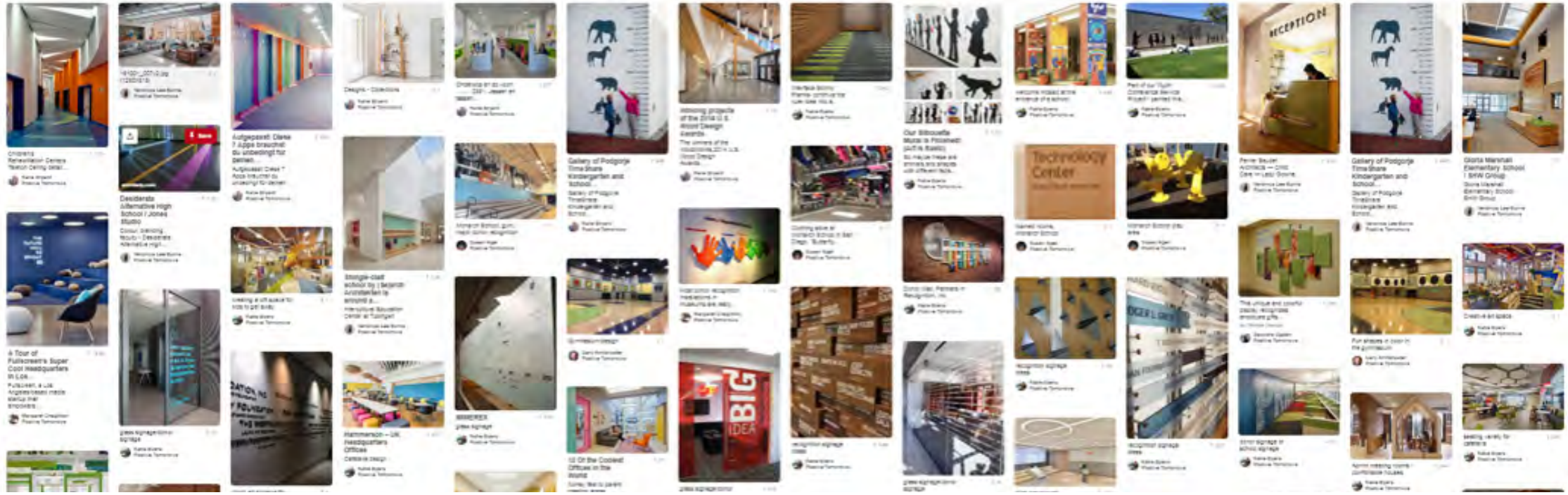
After the Pinterest board ideas were complete, they were printed and organized into 10 categories that fit into different areas of school design such as: Collaboration areas, libraries, classrooms, offices, playgrounds, etc. Three to five groups of staff then visited each design category board, providing feedback on the images. Once that was complete, the hundreds of images were narrowed down to a few that reflected the group’s design intent, influencing the design team’s next steps. The overall goal was to involve everyone who uses the school and the design team believes this was accomplished better than any other education project of the hundreds MA+ has designed prior.

“A colorful school where learning can happen anywhere.”

- Positive Tomorrows Students and Staff



EDUCATIONAL VISIONING DOCUMENTS



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“This place feels like home.”
- Jesse, Positive Tomorrows Student

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