

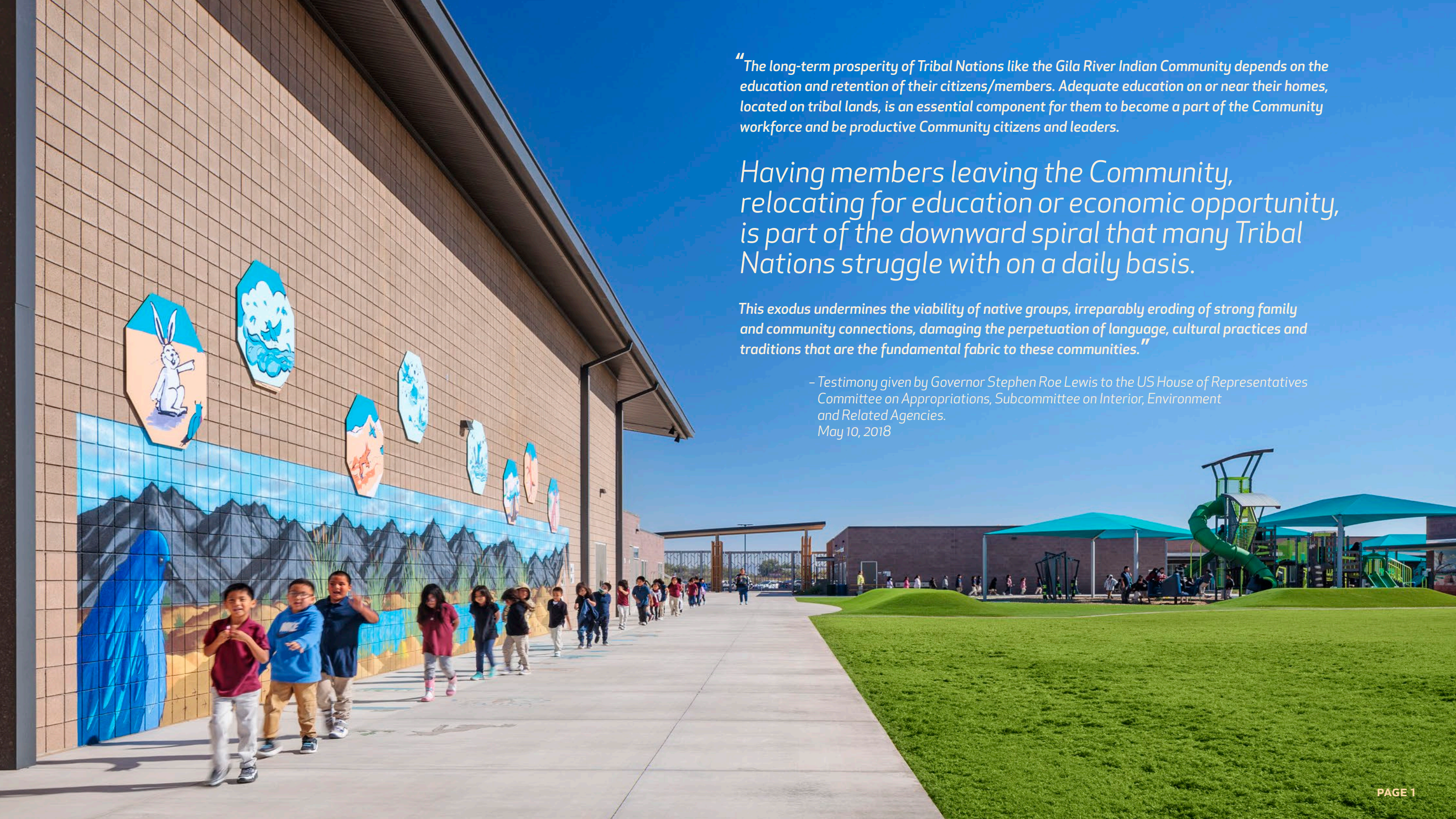
THE GILA RIVER
INDIAN COMMUNITY

Casa Blanca

COMMUNITY SCHOOL



Association for Learning Environments 2023 JAMES D. MACCONNELL AWARD



"The long-term prosperity of Tribal Nations like the Gila River Indian Community depends on the education and retention of their citizens/members. Adequate education on or near their homes, located on tribal lands, is an essential component for them to become a part of the Community workforce and be productive Community citizens and leaders.

Having members leaving the Community, relocating for education or economic opportunity, is part of the downward spiral that many Tribal Nations struggle with on a daily basis.

This exodus undermines the viability of native groups, irreparably eroding of strong family and community connections, damaging the perpetuation of language, cultural practices and traditions that are the fundamental fabric to these communities."

*- Testimony given by Governor Stephen Roe Lewis to the US House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies.
May 10, 2018*

Preface

The Gila River Indian Community (GRIC or Community) is home to members of the Akimel O’otham (Pima) and the Pee-Posh (Maricopa) tribes.

The Community currently has 20,717 enrolled members, with approximately 13,000 living across 584 square miles of Reservation lands.

Working to address fundamental objectives around self-determination, cultural preservation, social equity and economic resiliency, the Gila River Indian Community’s Casa Blanca Community School was intended to be an educationally vibrant and inclusive environment, designed to support and educate students of all abilities.

This project was the product of a groundbreaking agreement spearheaded by the Community and negotiated with the US Department of the Interiors Bureau of Indian Affairs/Bureau of Indian Education (BIA/BIE). This model may be a pathway to solving the crisis in school construction in Indian Country and the multi-generational failure of BIA schools to provide appropriately for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations.

The Gila River sought a dynamic place to welcome and engage students, families and the broader Community; a school with programmatic offerings of educational and cultural significance; and a place that will honor and preserve the language, stories and traditions of the Community. GRIC leaders engaged with the elders and artists to create a place that embodies their desire to uplift and strengthen their community through the education of their children.

PROJECT VISION: Prepare students for global readiness, maintaining the Community’s Akimel O’otham Ńeo’ok and Himdag cultures.
KEY QUALITIES: Welcoming, Inspiring, Connected, Unique, Culturally Aware, Flexible, Dignified, Awesome



Executive Summary

The Casa Blanca Community School is the second new educational facility completed by the The Gila River Indian Community and serves residents from District 5, which is primarily made up of Akimel O'otham. The school was enabled by leveraging an unused 1988 amendment - Section 105(l) - to the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (ISDEAA), PL 93-638. This amendment provides the ability for tribes and tribal organizations to lease tribal facilities to the Secretary of the Interior for the operation of programs contracted under ISDEAA.

From 2017-2019, the Gila River Indian Community began discussions and successfully negotiated an agreement with the BIA for the GRIC to self fund construction of a new elementary School, the Gila Crossing Community School, and to achieve reimbursement through a lease (facility operation cost) agreement. This arrangement allowed the Community to remove students from a structurally, environmentally and educationally unsound building a decade before funding would have been in place through BIA/BIE channels (potential 15-20 years before any construction would have taken place). This groundbreaking agreement enabled the GRIC to have agency and control over all aspects of planning, design and construction of the Gila Crossing School.

This model may provide a pathway to solving the crisis in school construction in Indian Country and the multi-generational failure of BIA schools to provide for these vulnerable populations.

The Casa Blanca Community School addresses the unique context of the Gila River Indian Community, a Tribal Nation located in the desert southwest. It creates a sustainable, ecologically sensitive and culturally appropriate environment that educates learners of all abilities. The school, designed in respectful collaboration with the Community and with a high degree of reverence for the land, ecosystem and resources, utilizes a program inspired by agriculture and the natural environment to deliver a robust program of interdisciplinary and hands-on learning to students. All spaces and places in the school, whether indoor or outdoor, are available and active parts of the learning environment.

The school's organization, form and features draw inspiration from practices and traditions that have sustained the Tribe in this place over millennia.

The school embodies the values and priorities of the Community and was designed to empower their efforts to chart their own path of resiliency and self-determination.

Working around the challenge of a May 2020 project initiation, multiple design charrettes and sustainability workshops were held with a range of stakeholders. Due to pandemic restrictions, these were structured as both socially distanced in-person activities and fully virtual workshops. The project's vision, desired qualities and overall inspiration were set during these meetings and remained the fundamental guide for decision making throughout. A process of ongoing engagement with a smaller group of stakeholders, including elders, helped ensure the school represented the voices of not only the current Community but of ancestors and future generations.

The Community's prior project, the Gila Crossing Community School, is a PreK-8 serving 700 students that was designed and delivered within 12 months by the same architectural team. Lessons learned and the trust and respect established among team members on Gila Crossing became the foundation for making prudent and balanced decisions that kept the project on schedule AND put the Community and student's needs first.

Completed for the 2021/2022 school year, the school was only partially occupied during it's first year of operation. Having been heavily impacted by COVID-19, many GRIC families chose to have their children educated remotely. The school reopened for the 2022/23 school year and welcomed all students back for in-person learning.

Scope of Work (summary)

CASA BLANCA COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Bapchule, Arizona

SCOPE OF WORK

- TYPE New Construction
- SIZE 102,400 square feet
- DELIVERY METHOD Construction Manager at Risk
- SCHEDULE TYPE Fast track
- BUDGET Owner requires that all financial data be withheld

STUDENT POPULATION

600 students, Grades K-6
District 5 on the Gila River Indian Community, primarily Akimel O’otham (Pima)

SITE AND CONTEXT

10 acres of undeveloped reservation lands
36 miles from downtown Phoenix
Desert climate, rural location

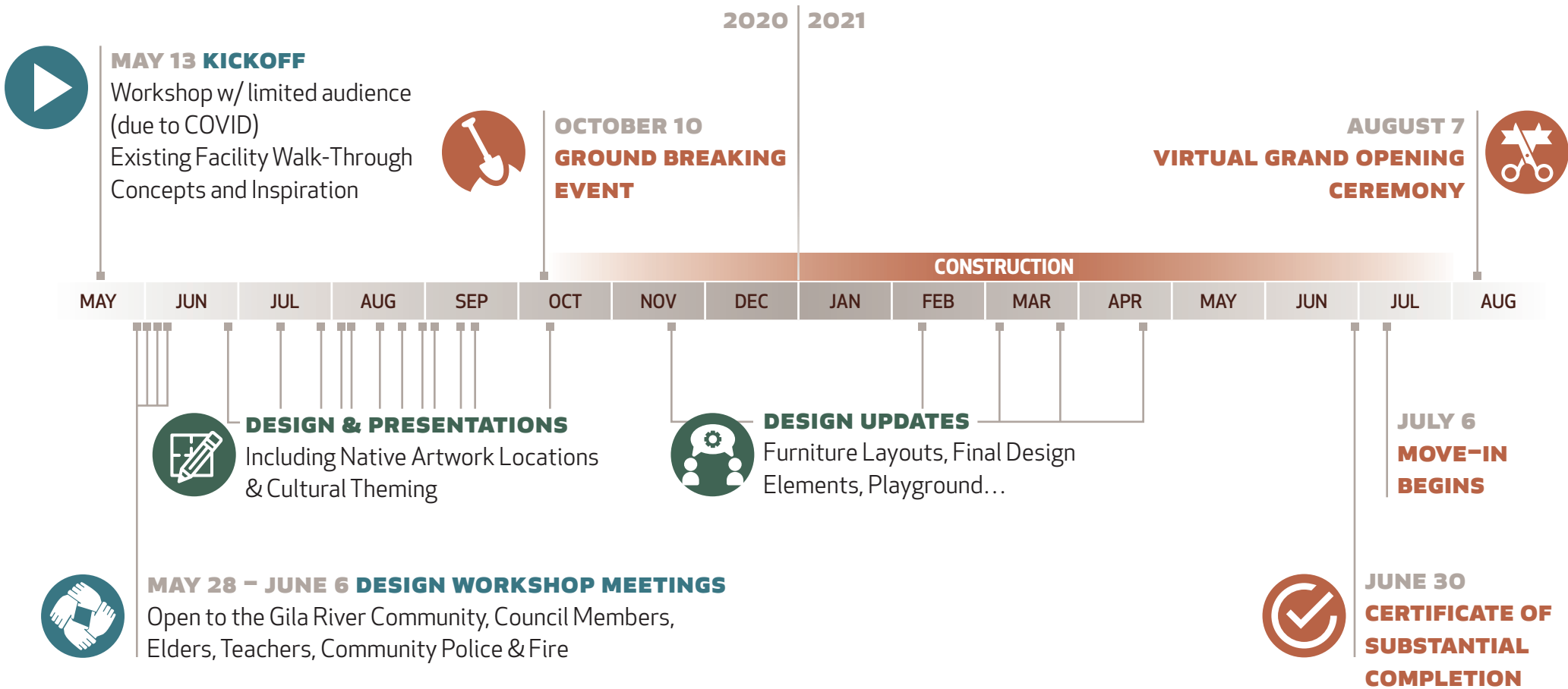
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Virtual and in person (meetings were held in keeping with CDC guidelines and Tribal Health Policies) with School Board, members of Tribal Council, elders, teachers, administrators and public safety officials)

SUSTAINABILITY

- LEED Silver (pending)
- EUI 34.6 kBtu/sqft/year
- PV POWER avg. 30% of demand
- Habitat conservation, biodiversity, preservation of all native existing planting. All site storm water managed (collected, treated and reused on site)

Project Schedule





AI/AN communities have innate strengths and resilience rooted in tribal culture and traditional ways of life.

The economic, social, educational, and health inequities affecting these groups are rooted in the long history of harmful Indian policies that included uprooting communities from homelands and disruption of social structures; bans on cultural practices and language; forced removal from tribal lands and relocation to government mandated reservations.

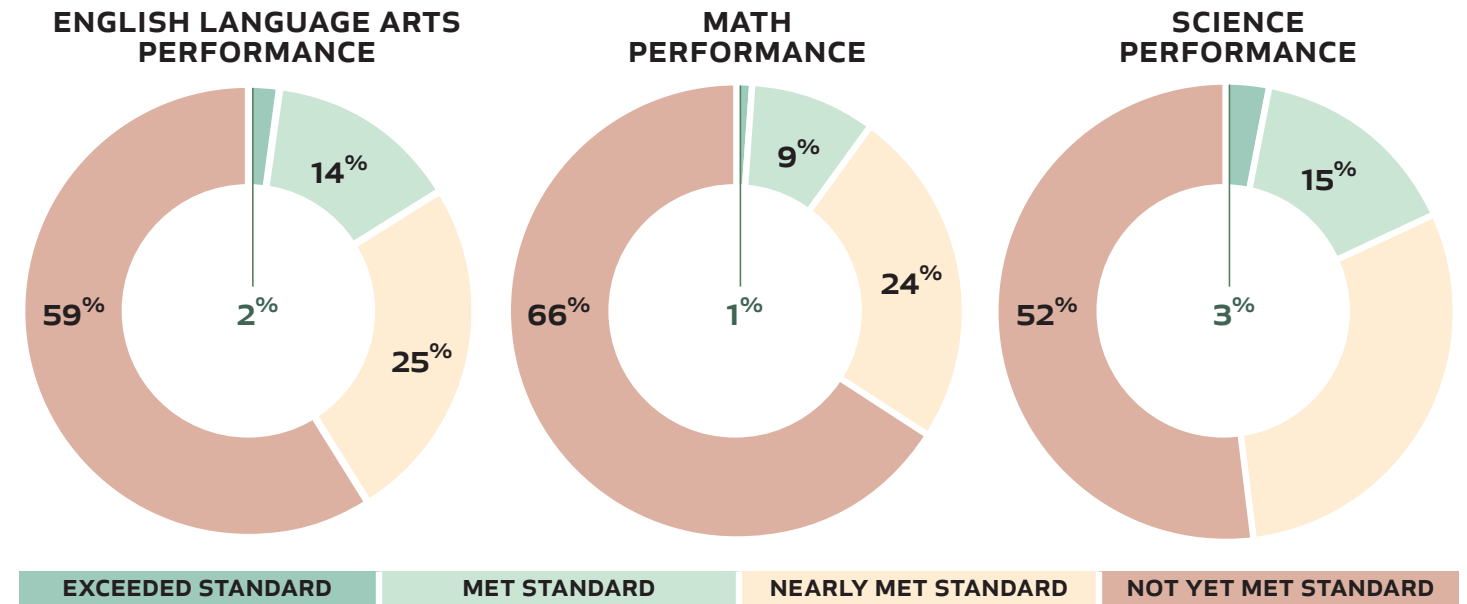
The Indian Civilization Fund Act of 1819 ushered in one of the most notorious of the U.S. government's assimilation policies, the Indian boarding-school era, which lasted from 1810 until 1969. Indian children were taken from their families with the intention of stripping them of their culture, language and identity.

These facilities, 408 schools over 37 states, implemented a systematic and military style program of cultural erasure including the use of physical, sexual, cultural and spiritual abuse and neglect. It is presently unknown how many children died while under the government's care. Many of those who survived live with chronic physical disease, depression and unresolved grief.

The results of these policies across American Indian/ Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities have been profoundly destructive, including undercutting of Tribal sovereignty and disempowerment of Tribal governments; disconnection from cultural knowledge, identity and culture; and devaluing Indigenous ways of knowing.

IMAGE: Students outside the headmaster house, Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA , 1888

Indian Education under the BIA/BIE



Despite the urgent need for school construction funding, budgets do not even begin to meet the needs across Indian Country.

The Bureau of Indian Affairs is one of the eleven bureaus under the jurisdiction of U.S. Department of the Interior. The BIA provides service to 574 Federally recognized tribes serving a population of approximately 2.5 million.

The 1972 Indian Education Act was intended to establish a comprehensive approach to meeting the unique needs of AI/AN students. Under the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the BIA implements federal Indian education programs for roughly 46,000 students at 183 schools across the United States. Of these schools, 86 are in poor condition and 73 do not currently have funding for replacement or repair. The current deferred maintenance backlog is in excess of \$825 million.

While approximately 95% of all AI/AN students are educated in public schools, BIE schools are the only option for many rural communities.

The BIA is the only education system in the country that hasn't implemented a plan to hold schools accountable for student performance. The school dropout rate for AI/AN 16- to 24-year-olds has consistently been the highest of any ethnic group in the nation. The U.S. Department of Education has been issuing warnings to the agency since 2007 that it is under performing.

METRICS: U.S. Bureau of Indian Education
Annual Bureau Report Card School Year 2018–2019
Enrollment: 22,611 students / On-Time Graduates: 68%

The Gila River Indian Community



The Gila River Indian Community reservation, located south of Phoenix, Arizona, is organized into seven geographic areas, called Districts.

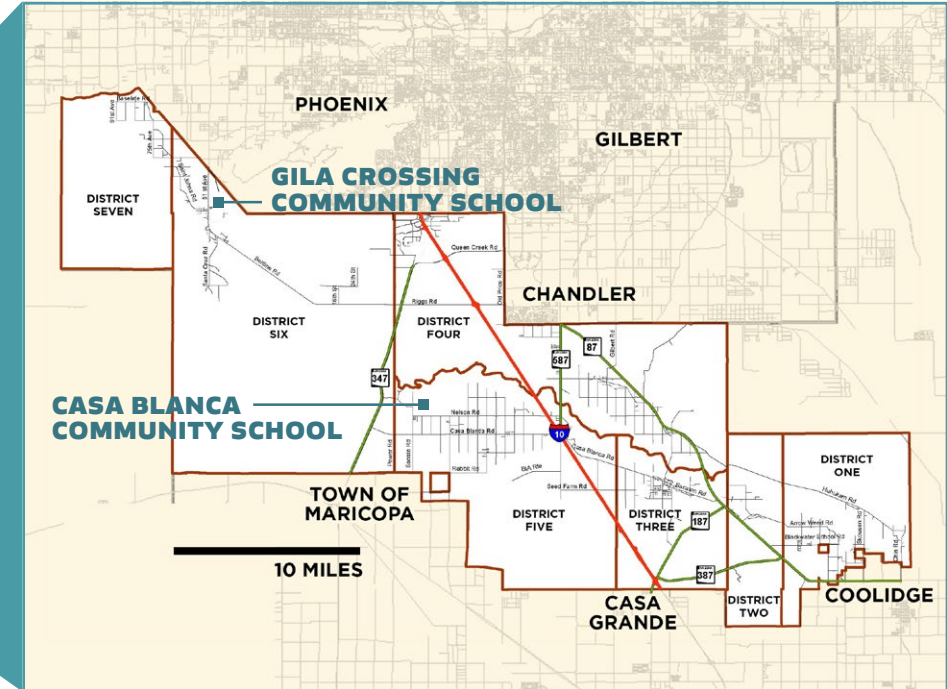
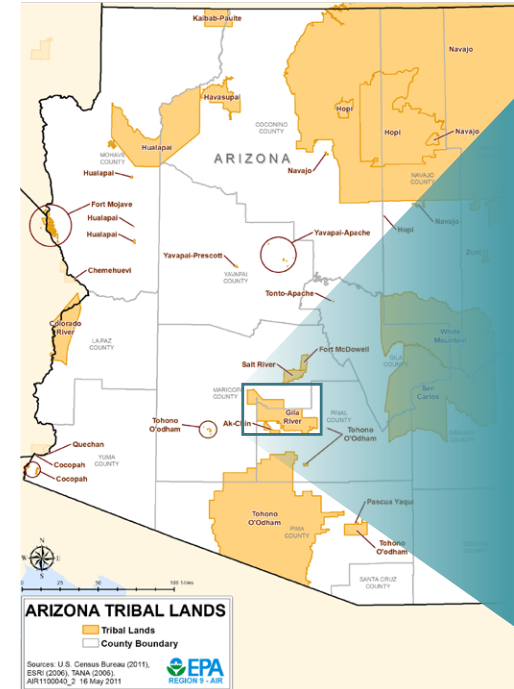
The GRIC have developed successful commercial interests over the last 20 years, including tribal gaming enterprises. These ventures have enabled the Community to provide significantly improved services to their tribal members. With financial, organizational and political resources in place, tribal leadership reached consensus that investments around education would become a strategic avenue to address a range of issues within the Community.

In January 2017, the GRIC approach the Bureau of Indian Education on possible alternative funding mechanisms to replace BIE-funded schools not currently on the construction priority list. By November, the first discussions were held around potential scenarios, with the Community putting the

Gila Crossing Community School (GCCS) forward as an ideal candidate for consideration.

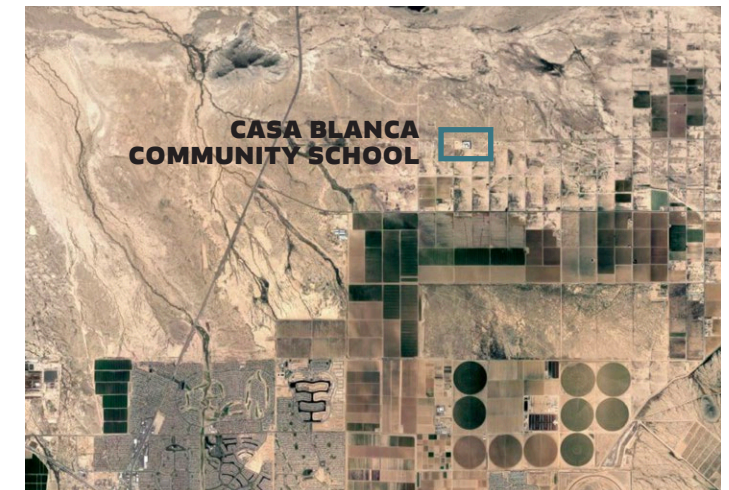
The Community's advocacy resulted in an agreement for the GRIC to fund the cost of construction on replacement of Gila Crossing and to lease back the facility to the BIE through a non-traditional lease arrangement. Development on this model, based on Section 105(l) of the ISDEAA, provides a pathway for other recognized AI/AN communities - with adequate financial resources of their own - to undertake tribal service projects.

Losing no time, the Community retained a team to deliver the new GCCS within a 12 month schedule and using a Design/Build delivery methodology. The project design team led a multi-day, on-site programming process that included engagement and consensus building with Community officials, educators, students, parents, first responders, elders and artists.



Despite the highly accelerated planning, design and construction process, the owner, stakeholders and design team were to build a significant level of trust and mutual respect. After completion, in July 2019, the GRIC began to quickly consider urgent needs related to the Casa Blanca Community School.

In April of 2020, with COVID beginning to impact communities across the globe, the GRIC made the determination that they would move forward with the project and decided to bring on board their architect from Gila Crossing. With 1 month to mobilize, the design team organized the first series of meetings that would lay the groundwork for establishing the specific requirements, context, vision and objectives for the project. The team would have 14 months to meet expectations for full delivery of the project.



"The Community has one BIE school that is on the school construction priority list, however, it is still projected to take years before that school construction will be completed. While that process continues, two other BIE-funded schools in the Community, Gila Crossing Community School and Casa Blanca Community School, remain in disrepair with no plan to address the construction deficiencies of these schools.

Delays to the replacement of structurally-deficient BIE schools has created a dangerous environment that threatens the ability of our students to receive the 21st century education that they deserve. The long-term prosperity of the Community depends on the education and retention of our citizens.



CASA BLANCA COMMUNITY SCHOOL 2018 EXISTING CONDITIONS



GILA CROSSING COMMUNITY SCHOOL 2018 EXISTING CONDITIONS

The long-term prosperity of the Community depends on the education and retention of our citizens.

Recognizing the reality that the Community faces, much like the rest of Indian Country, the Community has vowed to make education a priority. We are committed to finding a solution to this pervasive problem of lack of school construction dollars and propose in this testimony a path forward for our Community that can also serve as a model for other tribes to replicate."

– Governor Stephen Roe Lewis
May 10, 2018

Community Engagement



INITIAL ENGAGEMENT

The project commenced on May 13 2020, during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak. The project kick off and charrette process employed virtual and socially distanced workshops with select stakeholders, including officials, elders, administrators, educators, artists and first responders. The team adapted tools and methods to maximize the quality and value of these interactions.



The following is a sample agenda for the June 8th stakeholder workshop:

MORNING ACTIVITIES

PRESENTATION ON NEXT GENERATION SCHOOLS AND 21ST CENTURY LEARNING to establish a common understanding on best practices and environments that support contemporary teaching and learning.

VIRTUAL SITE WALK

Discuss opportunities and challenges, potential for development and possible placement of various program components. Information shared about environmental, historic and cultural concerns.

TOUR OF GILA CROSSING COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Stakeholders view the newly completed school in order to ask questions and understand the qualities of the space and features of the campus.

AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES Moderated discussion on culture of the existing school, aspirations for the new school, experiential qualities for students, teachers and parents and to how best support teaching and learning.

WORKING SESSION Initial discussion around cultural considerations turned into review of site and building planning diagrams. Feedback and direction on early concepts including site characteristics, programmatic relationships, core/shared spaces, building orientation and traffic flow, and community access.



What Three Words Describe Your Vision for a new school campus?

A formal educational specification was not provided to the team, however the 2019 Casa Blanca Community School Program Request User Document helped to create context and a foundational for consideration and further dialogue. Many of the aspects identified as priorities were directly reflected and incorporated into the school's design. The document described elements for which the existing school was known: parent engagement; commitment to GRIC culture, language, history and government; a strong Gifted Education program; and a determination to provide an outstanding and family inclusive special education program.

Information included current and projected enrollment data, delineation of existing core and non-core programs, and future/desired core and non-core programs. The document provided additional insight with a stakeholder visioning matrix, which summarizing interests and priorities of the school board, administration, staff, students and parents.

CASA BLANCA COMMUNITY SCHOOL STAKEHOLDER VISIONING (MULTIPLE VOTES)	School Board	Administration	Staff	Students	Parents
All Signage, building names etc. should be in O'otham first and larger than English Subtitles. All gardens and play areas will be named in O'otham.	X	X	X		X
Parent Center with cooking and traditional arts area	X	X	X		X
Additional Culture and Language Classrooms	X	X	X	X	
Traditional Singing and Dancing/Performance Area	X	X	X	X	X
Multiple Teacher/Staff meeting areas w/ integrated technology for webinars and online training	X	X	X		
School Board Meeting Room w/ audio / visual capability similar to Sacaton Dist. w/ chairs for community	X	X			
Sensory sidewalks and hallways	X	X	X		
A school with Windows; bay windows at the east & west	X	X	X	X	X
Family and Child Education Center w/ parent meeting space, Preschool, Adult Education computer lab for 20 Adults and FACE staff offices located near kindergarten	X	X	X		X
Classrooms with: windows, sinks, display areas, smart boards and storage	X	X	X	X	
A quiet reflection space where staff/students can sit quietly (Grieving Room / A Place to Think)	X	X	X	X	X
Intervention room for students with an area for in-school suspension and lunch detention	X	X	X		

Research, Ongoing Consensus Building and Engagement



WORKSHOP AND TOUR AT THE EXISTING CASA BLANCA COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Strong engagement with the GRIC's Cultural Resources team, Elders, Educators, and Tribal Staff helped establish early consensus the project's key priorities and helped the team gain insight into the practices and traditions that have sustained the Akimel O'otham over generations in this place. The design team had the benefit of recent involvement with many of these groups during work on the Gila Crossing School. This platform of common experience and mutual respect helped owner and team to efficiently navigate an early design - supporting resolution on desire vision and experiential qualities, completion of the site master plan and rapid prototyping of the campus' organization.

The shape and characteristics of the Casa Blanca campus, the relationships of interior and exterior spaces, and the types of visual and experiential qualities grew from the specific priorities established in the planning/programming process. The earnest desire on the part of stakeholders was clearly expressed in the key qualities they chose as the measure of the project's



WORKSHOP AND TOUR AT THE EXISTING CASA BLANCA COMMUNITY SCHOOL

success: welcoming, inspiring, connected, unique, culturally award, flexible, dignified, awesome. While the team embraced the challenge to express tribal values and knowledge, and to make the school very much of its place, they were also mindful of the mandate to create a Next Generation School for 21st Century Learning.

the team gain[ed] insight into the practices and traditions that have sustained the Akimel O'otham over generations in this place.

Engagement with a select group of stakeholders, including elders, continued throughout the project to ensure that the school represented the voices of the current community of the ancestors and future generations. The ongoing input of these stakeholders was of special importance as the non-Native design team endeavored to be aware of unintended bias in design of the school.



WORKSHOP AND TOUR AT THE NEW GILA CROSSING COMMUNITY SCHOOL

By questioning assumptions around organizational, functional and aesthetic selections, the team worked to listen deeply and respond to the specific visual, spatial and environmental sensibilities of the Community and the Akimel O'otham.

For native children, placing value on their identity, seeing themselves as part of a continuum of time, place and culture becomes a way to build self-esteem and belonging. The team worked to not presupposed solutions and make assumptions about the design of this school but instead to continually listen, learn, consider, absorb and then, respond.

Project Vision: Prepare Students for global readiness, maintaining the Community's Akimel O'otham Ñeo'ok and Himdag cultures.

"Akimel O'otham is the name the people of Gila River call themselves.

Ñeo'ok is the word for language and the meaning language carries. It is the power of words to create the world in which we exist. The language carries more than just information. The language is the vehicle for Himdag.

Himdag is the way of being in the world. What is valued and precious. The way of life. In English we would say culture. But it carries a much deeper and more philosophical meaning. Himdag includes all relationships a human may have... with family, the desert, the animals, the crops, the weather, water, food. It grounds a child in how to live in the world, expressing generosity, gratitude, care for others. It describes who and what are family and what that means. It is all the roles and relationships and guides how those interactions should take place. It is the history, the stories, that are used to ground a child.

To maintain these cultures and identity is to build resilience. Resilience is key to Gila River overcoming historical and economic trauma and being the thriving, sovereign people they are."

– Kim Franklin
Principal, Casa Blanca Community School

Educational Environment



It was determined that the Casa Blanca School's educational vision would be realized through a curriculum of hand-on and interdisciplinary learning that features instruction in traditional agricultural practices. These learning opportunities would become the platform to help promote social and emotional development, 21st century skills and awareness of cultural identity. Among the school's most urgent priorities was to welcome and support all learners; to develop positive peer-to-peer and broader intergenerational connections; and to encourage students on a pathway of self-discovery; and to support greater Community resiliency. The team worked to activate all areas of the campus and make every space a place for teaching and learning.



The project programming, research and engagement process yielded resources and information with direct implications for design. The Vision Statement finely articulates the need for an approach that considers and balances multiple needs and priorities. The project's Key Qualities becomes a tool for considering the different experience of students, teachers, administrators, families and Community members. Each of these audiences was to be represented in the design and decision making process, each needed to have spaces of welcome, to be inspired and become connected. The vision and key qualities became a guide for how many aspects of the school needed to function and the ways in which the campus environment must support fundamental educational goals.



Many of the school's spaces were required to accommodate multiple functions and so a high degree of flexibility needed to be incorporated. As the only significant community building in the area, the school would be design with sustainable power and outfitted with the ability to feed, house and cool the community in times of need.

Among the school's most urgent priorities was to develop positive peer-to-peer and broader intergenerational connections, to encourage students on a pathway of self-discovery and to support greater Community resiliency.

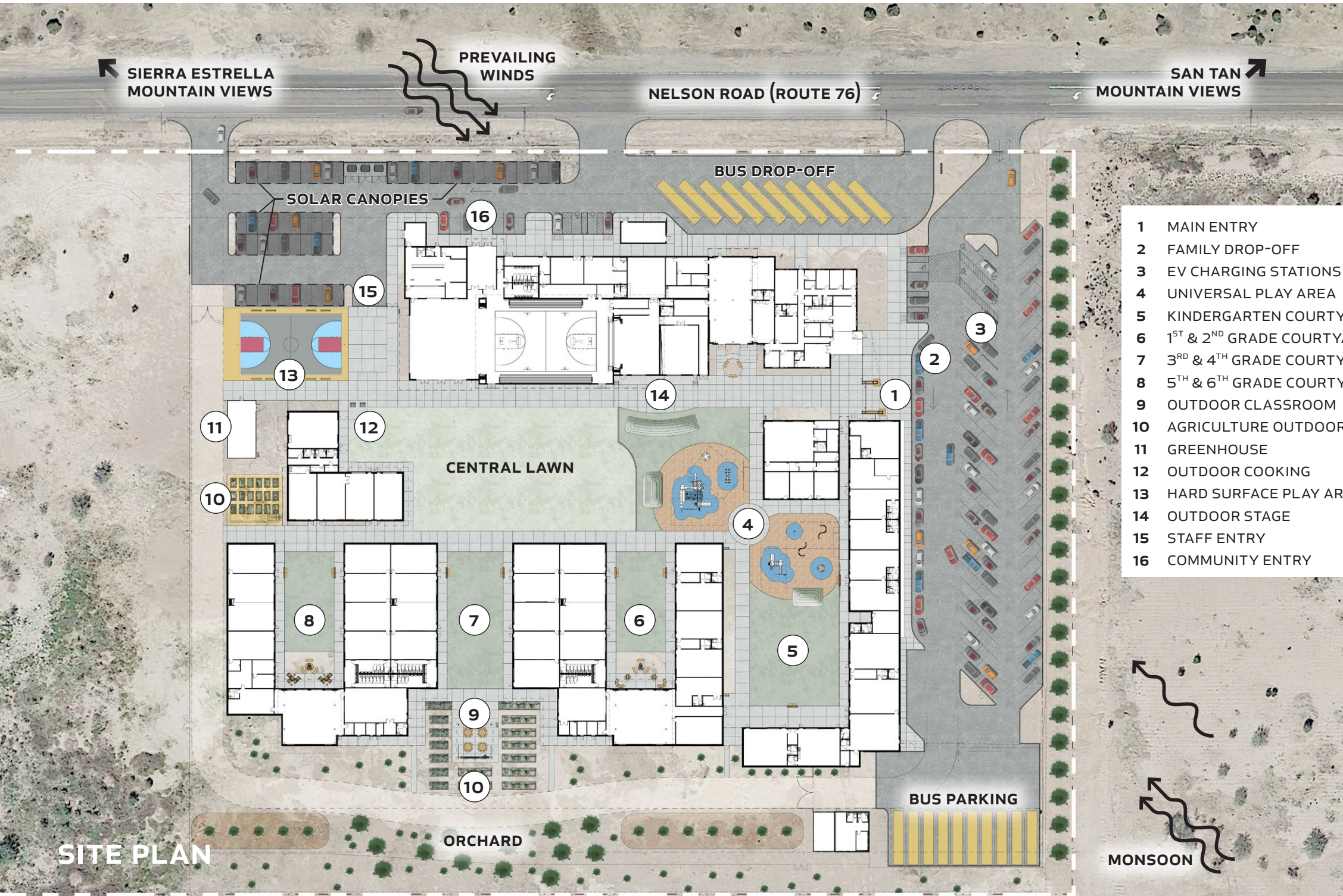
CULTURE BUILDING PLACES

- Gathering space for traditional music and dance
- Immersion language camps
- Space for traditional arts including baskets, rattles, jewelry and sewing
- Facilities for traditional cooking and eating
- Night time storytelling and fire area

FAMILY FOCUSED, SPECIALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS

- Central location, with a variety of room types
- Sensory/sensory integration classroom
- Speech and language rooms
- Occupational therapy/physical therapy
- Parent Meeting and resource

Physical Environment



- 1 MAIN ENTRY
- 2 FAMILY DROP-OFF
- 3 EV CHARGING STATIONS
- 4 UNIVERSAL PLAY AREA
- 5 KINDERGARTEN COURTYARD
- 6 1ST & 2ND GRADE COURTYARD
- 7 3RD & 4TH GRADE COURTYARD
- 8 5TH & 6TH GRADE COURTYARD
- 9 OUTDOOR CLASSROOM
- 10 AGRICULTURE OUTDOOR AREA
- 11 GREENHOUSE
- 12 OUTDOOR COOKING
- 13 HARD SURFACE PLAY AREA
- 14 OUTDOOR STAGE
- 15 STAFF ENTRY
- 16 COMMUNITY ENTRY

The Casa Blanca Community School is a campus that sits on a level, 10-acre site within desert surroundings. Using a village-inspired organization, the school is composed of a series of individual buildings that face inward and surround a central green space. The school's core spaces are contained in a single structure and classroom buildings, organized by grade level clusters, open to a series of smaller outdoor rooms that provide multi-functional spaces for learning, gathering and play. Outdoor spaces were designed to support formal and informal educational encounters and creation of a vibrant learning community.

Design focused largely on targeting resources to create the highest benefit for students and teachers. The project's compressed schedule necessitated use of readily available local materials such as a bearing wall system using locally produced CMU. Important gathering places were signified by the introduction of wooden wall and roof details and were intermixed with simplified building forms.

Concrete masonry units, wood and steel compose the primary materials of the campus. Steel-frame canopies attached to the CMU structures provide shade along walkways within and between the classroom blocks.



Floor Plan



- 1 MAIN ENTRY
- 2 COMMUNITY ENTRY
- 3 ADMIN/MAIN OFFICE
- 4 LIBRARY/MEDIA CENTER
- 5 MUSIC
- 6 GYMNASIUM
- 7 DINING
- 8 FACES - FAMILY AND CHILD EDUCATION PROGRAM
- 9 SENSORY CLASSROOM, SPED RESOURCE AREAS
- 10 OCCUPATIONAL AND PHYSICAL THERAPY
- 11 KINDERGARTEN
- 12 FIRST GRADE
- 13 SECOND GRADE
- 14 THIRD GRADE
- 15 STEM / SCIENCE
- 16 COMMONS
- 17 FOURTH GRADE
- 18 FIFTH GRADE
- 19 SIXTH GRADE
- 20 OUTDOOR LEARNING
- 21 OUTDOOR LEARNING PAVILION
- 22 LANGUAGE, CULTURAL ARTS & APPLIED ARTS CLASSROOMS
- 23 AGRICULTURE CLASSROOM
- 24 GREENHOUSE

Grade level Student Commons feature exposed wood timber roof construction, butterfly roofs and custom clerestory glass windows, with overhead garage-style doors that open to outside courtyards and educational gardens.

Designing every space for learning was a key element to augmenting available program area and maximizing long-term value. Robust technology and covered outdoor spaces, allow all areas of the campus to be utilized for teaching and learning. Incorporating flexible fixtures and furnishings and emphasizing physical connection and adjacencies enable spaces to serve multiple uses, including providing opportunities to gather as a wider Community.

The school incorporates traditional forms and techniques. The Outdoor Classroom Pavilion is reminiscent the front porch of a Vathos , an ancient building form, and all raised planting beds utilize techniques from Sandwich Panel Housing. Cultural traditions informed the layout of the campus; building forms and scale were carefully considered in order to relate to students. Intimate interstitial spaces and friendly areas for rest and repose were provide for the school and to welcome visitors, including extended families and elders.

CENTRAL LAWN
PROVIDES GATHERING SPACE AND RECALLS CENTRAL LAWN FROM THE EXISTING SCHOOL. ADJACENT SPACES SUPPORT GATHERING BY THE GREATER COMMUNITY FOR FESTIVALS AND EVENTS.

CULTURE BUILDING
TAKING PRIDE OF PLACE, AT THE CENTER OF CAMPUS. FOUR CLASSROOMS SUPPORT INTEGRATION OF LANGUAGE, CULTURE, ART AND AGRICULTURE.

OUTDOOR CLASSROOM
CAMPUS DESTINATION WITH DESIGN INSPIRED BY VATHOS STRUCTURE. TRADITIONAL PLANTING METHODS SURROUND THE STUCTURE AND FRAME VIEWS TO THE SOUTH TOWARD LANDS UNDER CULTIVATION.

COURTYARDS
ENCOURAGE GATHERING AND SOCIAL INTERACTION. LEARNING CAN HAPPEN EVERYWHERE. ARTIFICIAL LAWN CONSERVES WATER.

MOBILE HEALTHCARE
PAD WITH ACCESS TO POWER AND WATER TO ACCOMMODATE MOBILE DENTAL CLINIC. MEETING THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOL TO SERVE FAMILIES AND THE WHOLE CHILD.



OUTDOOR COOKING
ADJACENT TO AGRICULTURE CLASSROOM

CORE SPACES
ARRAYED ALONG STREET EDGE AND PROVIDING ACCESS TO FACILITIES BY THE COMMUNITY. SEPARATE PARKING AND CONTROLLED ENTRY.

EAST / WEST AXIS
RESPONDING TO CULTURAL REQUIRIEMENT FOR EAST FACING ENTRY AND WEST FACING VIEWS TO SIERRA ESTRELLA MOUNTAINS.

PLAYGROUND
UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE WITH DEVICES THAT RESPOND TO CHILDREN ON THE AUTISM SPECTRUM

BOLD ARTISTIC STATEMENTS
LIMITED PLACEMENT OF OUTWARD FACING WINDOWS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE AND SAFETY/ SECURITY CONCERNS. INTEGRATION OF BASKET PATTERNS INTO CMU RELIEVES SEVERITY AND PROVIDES AN IMMEDIATE CULTURAL EXPRESSION.

THE SCHOOL'S ENTRY
WAS DESIGNED TO EXPRESS A WARM SENSE OF WELCOME
AND REPRESENTS AN EXCITING GATEWAY TO LEARNING



INTEGRATED BENCHES
AND GENEROUS CANOPY WELCOME
ELDERS AND FAMILIES AND
ENCOURAGES GATHERING

OPERABLE GATES
OPENED FOR MORNING/AFTERNOON
ACCESS TO THE CAMPUS. INSPIRED BY
CORN, A TRADITIONAL O'OTHAM CROP.

MAIN OFFICE
GLASS CUBE PROVIDES
VISIBILITY FOR
APPROACHING VISITORS

PRIMARY SCHOOL SIGN
ONE OF THREE CUSTOM
MOSAICS PRODUCED BY
COMMUNITY ARTISTS

WOOD FEATURE
RECALLS TRADITIONAL
OCTILLO FENCING

CANOPY
DELINEATES THE MAIN ENTRY
AND PROVIDES AREA OF SHADE



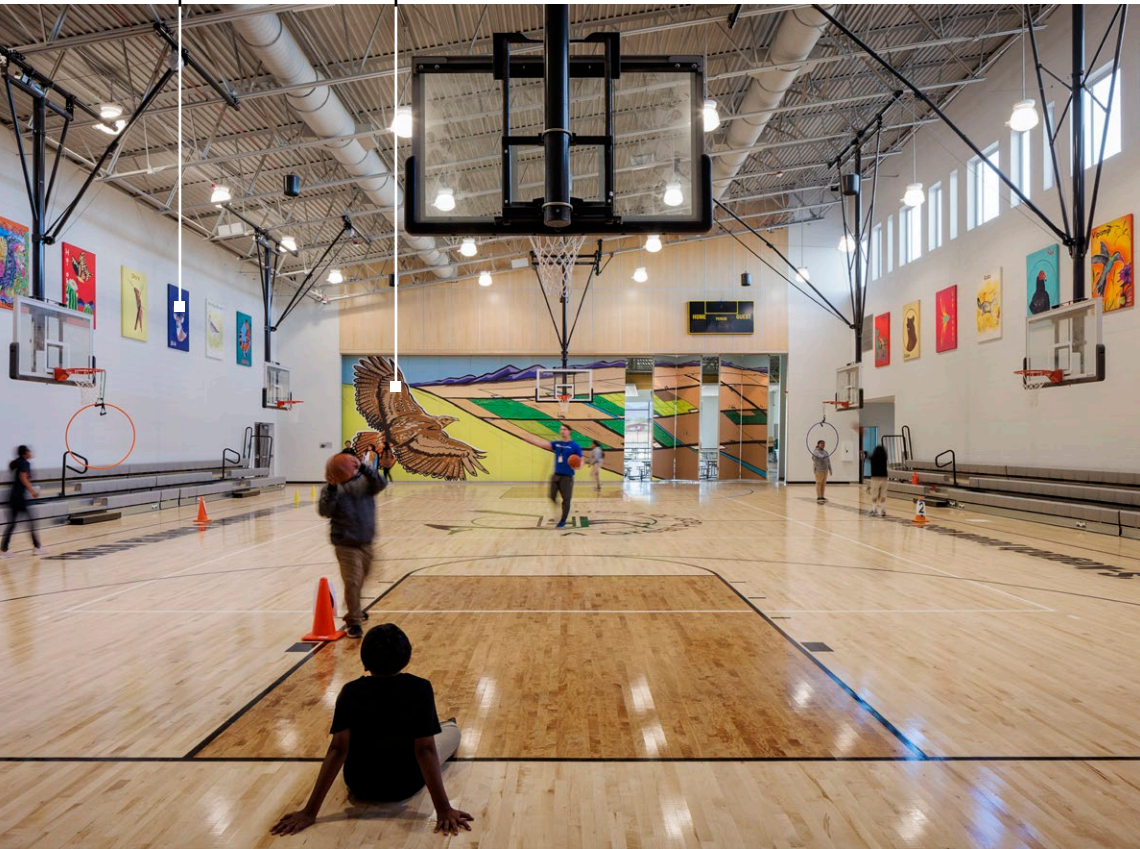
FACES PROGRAM AREA
LOCATED IMMEDIATELY ADJACENT
TO MAIN ENTRY

ARTWORK
FEATURES MOTIFS THAT REPRESENT
THE COMMUNITY, AGRICULTURE AND
THE DESERT ENVIRONMENT

COMMUNITY BUILDING
CREATES FLEXIBILITY FOR COMMUNITY EVENTS AND GATHERING AND
ENABLES TO SCHOOL TO HOUSE THE COMMUNITY DURING TIMES OF CRISIS.

ACOUSTICAL PANELS
WRAPPED WITH ARTWORK, PANELS FEATURE
NATIVE SPECIES AND O’OTHAM LANGUAGE.

MURAL
REPRESENTING DISTRICT 5 AND AGRICULTURAL TRADITIONS.
SURFACE ACTIVATES OPERABLE PARTITION BETWEEN
CAFETERIA AND GYMNASIUM.



SCHOOL STAGE
(BEHIND / OUT OF FRAME)

OUTDOOR STAGE
FACING PLAYGROUND BERM. OPERABLE
OVERHEAD DOORS PROVIDE ACCESS TO
THE MUSIC ROOM AND STAGE.

RAINWATER CAPTURE
INTEGRATED SYSTEM TO CAPTURE RAIN
DURING MONSOON, CELEBRATING AND
CAPTURING THIS PRECIOUS RESOURCE.

BUTTERFLY ROOFS
AND SPECIALIZED USE OF WOOD
SIGNIFY CORE SPACES. CLERESTORY
WINDOWS BRING IN NATURAL LIGHT
AND MINIMIZES GLARE AND HEAT GAIN.



SENSORY WALKS
CAMPUS WALKWAYS CONTAIN ARTWORK BY
LOCAL TRIBAL ARTISTS THAT TELL TRADITIONAL
STORIES. USED BY TEACHERS TO ENCOURAGE
STUDENT MOVEMENT AND SUPPORT FOCUS.

STORYTELLING CIRCLE
INCLUDES NATIVE
PLANTS AND SYSTEM FOR
CAPTURING RAINWATER

VIDEO STORYTELLING WALL
PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES
TO SHARE NEW AND DYNAMIC
CULTURAL CONTENT

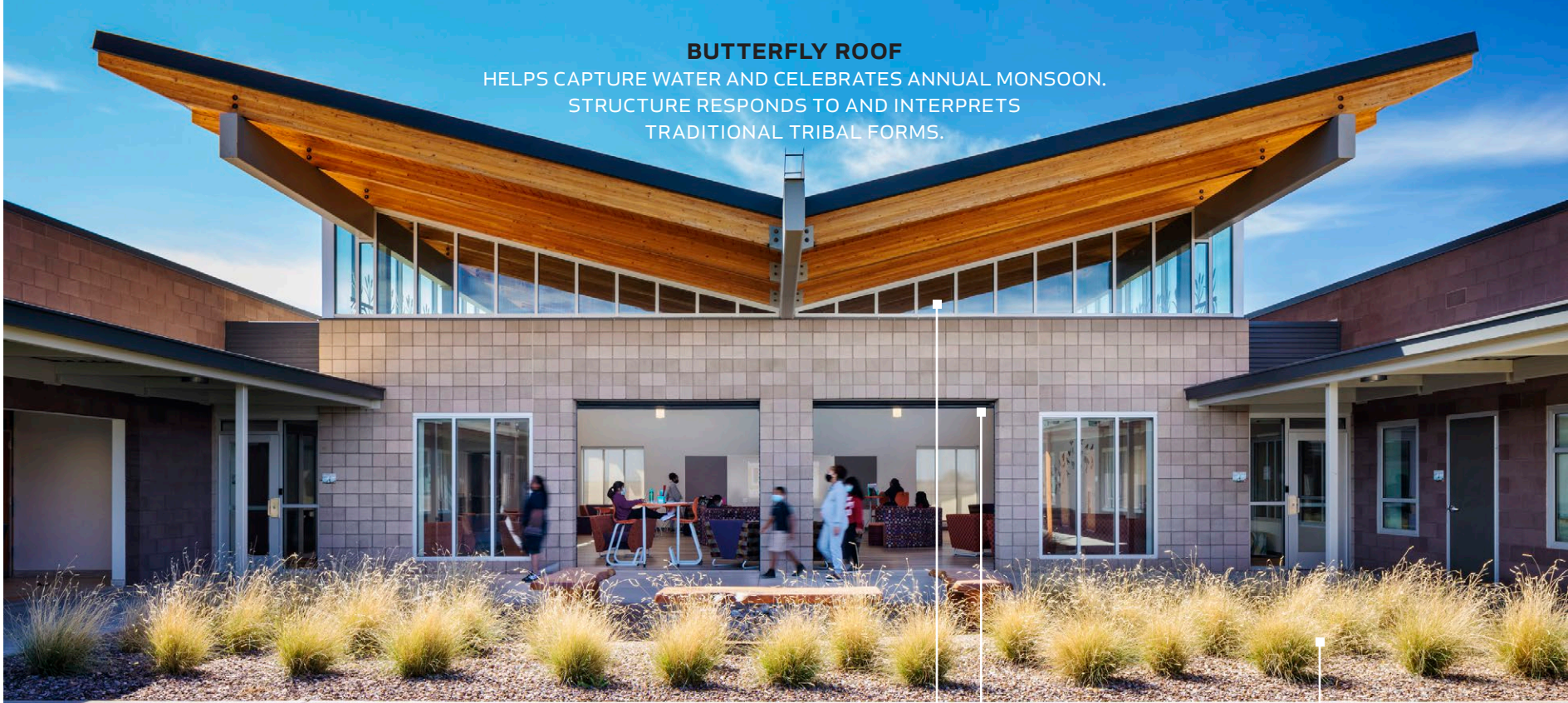
NATIVE PLANTINGS



COVERED WALKWAYS
 COLORED CODED TO SUPPORT
 EACH COURTYARD'S CULTURAL
 THEME AND PROVIDES SUBTLE
 WAYFINDING CUES

INTEGRATED ELEMENTS
 OCOTILLO FENCING WITH RAINCHAIN
 AND BENCH. CREATING PLACES OF
 WELCOME, RESPITE AND GATHERING.

ENAMELED PANELS
 COMMUNITY ARTIST'S REPRESENTATIONS FEATURE
 ANIMALS OF SPECIAL CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE



BUTTERFLY ROOF
 HELPS CAPTURE WATER AND CELEBRATES ANNUAL MONSOON.
 STRUCTURE RESPONDS TO AND INTERPRETS
 TRADITIONAL TRIBAL FORMS.

ARTIFICIAL LAWN
 MINIMIZES WATER CONSUMPTION AND PROVIDES A CONSISTENT AND
 COMFORTABLE SURFACE FOR STUDENTS TO SIT.



OVERHEAD DOORS
 ALLOWS ACTIVITY TO SPILL
 TO THE OUTDOORS

RAIN GARDEN
 WITH NATIVE
 PLANTINGS

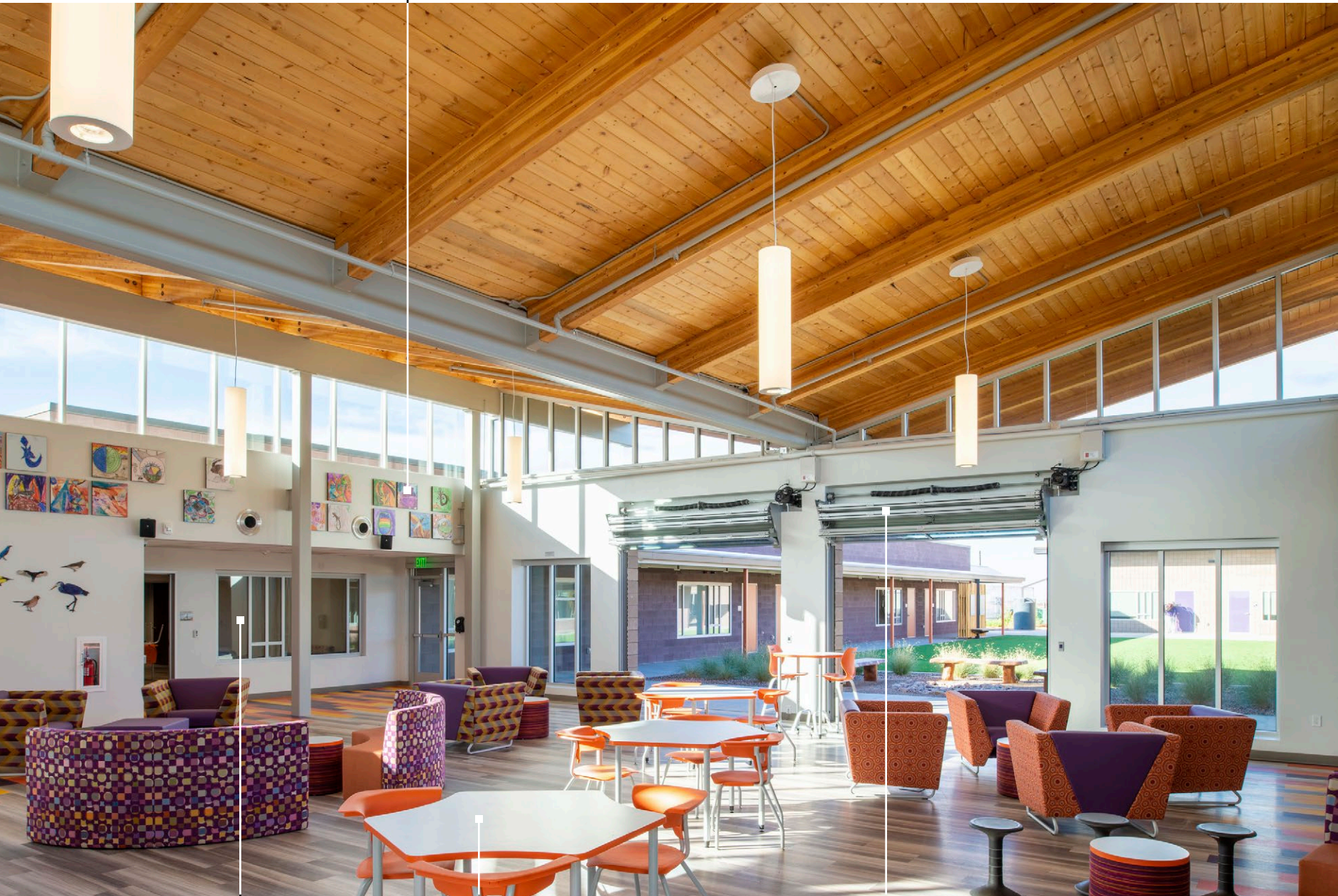
CLERESTORY WINDOWS
 ALLOW DAYLIGHT TO PENETRATE INTERIOR
 SPACES WHILE MINIMIZING SOLAR GAIN

SCHOOL SIGNAGE
 PRIORITIZES THE USE OF O'OTHAM LANGUAGE FIRST,
 WITH ENGLISH SECOND.

COURTYARDS
 AN INTEGRATED PART OF THE TEACHING
 AND LEARNING, PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES
 FOR ACTIVE AND PASSIVE LEARNING.

FLEXIBLE SPACES
SUPPORT TEAM TEACHING AND
PROJECT BASED LEARNING.

STUDENT ARTWORK
ON DISPLAY



TEACHER ROOM
WITH VISIBILITY
TO COMMONS

FLEXIBLE FURNITURE
CREATES AN AGILE SPACE THAT RESPONDS
TO THE IMMEDIATE AND CHANGING NEEDS
OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

OVERHEAD DOORS
ALLOW LEARNING TO MOVE
SEAMLESSLY FROM INTERIOR
TO EXTERIOR SPACES



**ROBUST & UBIQUITOUS
TECHNOLOGY**
SUPPORTS BOTH VIRTUAL
AND IN PERSON TEACHING
AND LEARNING.

CUSTOM METAL SCULPTURE
FILTERS LIGHT FROM
CLERESTORY WINDOWS.
STUDENT ARTWORK
CREATES A STRONG
VISUAL BAND AND DRAWS
THE EYE UPWARD.



MAKER AND STEM CLASSROOM
OPERABLE DOORS CREATE SEAMLESS CONNECTION BETWEEN COMMONS,
STEM CLASSROOM AND AGRICULTURE CLASSROOM. OVERHEAD POWER AND
FLEXIBLE FURNISHINGS. SOLAR TUBES MINIMIZE THE NEED FOR LIGHTING.

OUTDOOR SPACES
PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CULTURALLY RELEVANT,
HANDS ON LEARNING

OPERABLE GARAGE DOOR
TO SCIENCE AND MAKER SPACE



STRUCTURE INSPIRED BY TRADITIONAL VATHOS
STRUCTURE PROVIDES SHADE. TABLES, CHALK BOARD,
WATER FOUNTAIN AND WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY CREATE
A FULLY FUNCTIONING EDUCATIONAL SPACE.

TRADITIONAL WAFFLE BEDS
PROVIDE HANDS ON EXPERIENCE WITH
TRIBAL AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES

AGRICULTURE AREA
MAINTAINED USING
RECAPTURED
RAINWATER

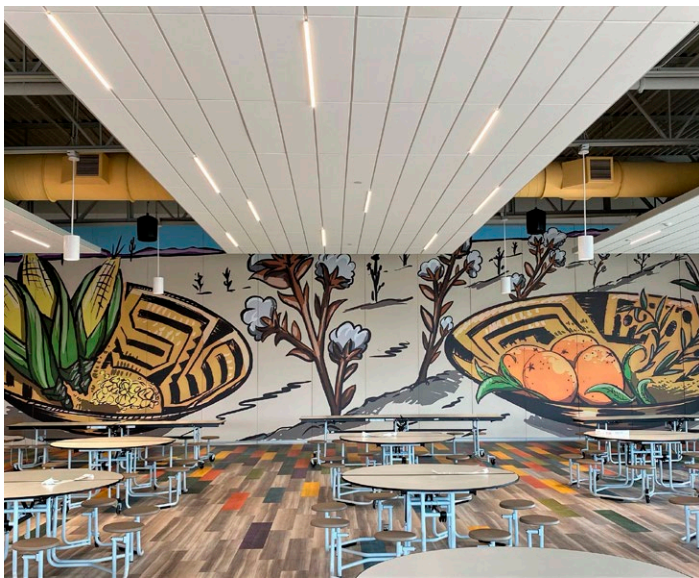
AGRICULTURE CLASSROOM
EAST AND WEST OVERHEAD DOORS
PROVIDE CROSS VENTILATION. STUDENTS
MOVE FREELY BETWEEN CLASSROOM,
GREENHOUSE AND PLANTING AREAS



RAISED BEDS
BASED ON SANDWICH HOUSE CONSTRUCTION.
DESIGNED BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS USING MUD.

**ALL GROUND LEVEL AND RAISED
BEDS HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO
ALLOW FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS**

Cultural Integration and Artwork Program



Artwork came from over 20 Community artists and incorporate a wide variety of mediums. The program was highly integrated into the project's design and deliberately curated to create a range of experiences and moments across the campus.

The design team collaborated with the Community's Cultural Committee and Community Elders on development of a meaningful program of storytelling and visual expression. Artwork came from over 20 Community artists and incorporate a wide variety of mediums The program was highly integrated into the project's design and deliberately curated to create a range of experiences and moments across the campus. These ubiquitous expressions serve to root students in this place connect students to generations before and generations who are yet to come.



Traditional structures - the outdoor learning pavilion is a destination for shade, gathering and learning with form that interprets the traditional vatho structure.



Drawings and ceramic tile displays by students, teachers, and families are displayed alongside the work of the professional tribal artists.

Laser-cut oculi representing traditional basket patterns cast shadows at key pedestrian intersections, connecting students to the natural cycle of the planet and their own cultural heritage.



Artists mosaics - each unique and exquisitely crafted - are featured in three prominent locations around the campus, including the main entry.

Animal Species of Cultural Significance

to the community are symbolically assigned to each of the five distinct learning areas on campus, drawing inspiration for material selections from each animal's distinct habitat.



Traditional Pima & Maricopa Indian Basket Patterns

are expressed on large expanses of masonry wall and in oculi that are open to the sky.



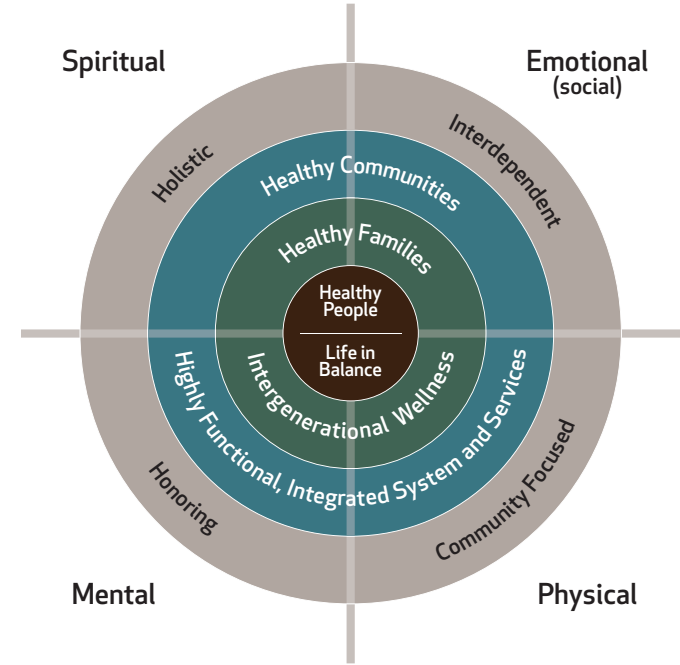
Murals, mosaics, sculptures, and metalwork immerse students in the stories, language and accomplishments of their culture.



Health and Wellness

In general, AI/AN people experience a greater range of health challenges when compared to other Americans. Cultural differences, inadequate education, higher rates of poverty, and misalignment and discrimination in the delivery of services have resulted in lower life expectancy and the burden of chronic disease. AI/AN mortality is linked at higher rates than other Americans in categories of chronic liver disease, diabetes, unintentional injuries, assault/homicide, intentional self-harm/suicide and chronic lower respiratory diseases. The Gila River Indian Community has the highest rates of diabetes in all of Indian Country, approximately 50% of total membership. Issues around health and wellness are of urgent and immediate importance.

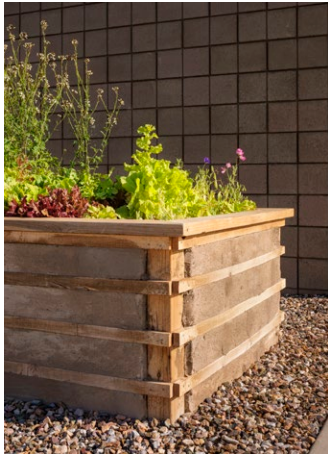
Equity in resources and access are linked to fundamental questions around inclusion and respect for differing world views. Interest groups documenting and advocating around these issues recommend a holistic approach to health and wellness that considers perspectives encompassing the notion of connectedness (with the past and with others), strong family bonds, adaptability, affinity with nature, wisdom of elders, meaningful traditions and a formation of a strong, resilient spirit.



PROJECT STRATEGIES

CURRICULUM

The School's focus on agriculture is used to teach traditional and sustainable practices and as a way to make learning real and alive for students. Learning also focuses on health, nutrition, wellness, physical activity and traditional meal preparation as a way to instill good habits and self respect. The program supports addressing a range of issues that include obesity, substance abuse, social disconnection and diabetes.



ACCESS the project includes a range of programs, features and strategies, including:

Classroom amplification. Native children have 3 times higher rates of chronic otitis media, which can cause hearing loss. Sound amplification systems and acoustical treatments have been incorporated throughout the school.

Family context. Addressing broader issues that may affect student success, the school's FACES program is dedicated to equipping parents and caregivers with knowledge and resources to prepare their children for a stronger start in life and greater success in school.

Special Needs. As with many communities in Indian Country, the GRIC have a significant population of students with increased or specialized needs. The school incorporates a sensory classroom, SPED resource areas and an OT/PT therapy suite.



LANGUAGE

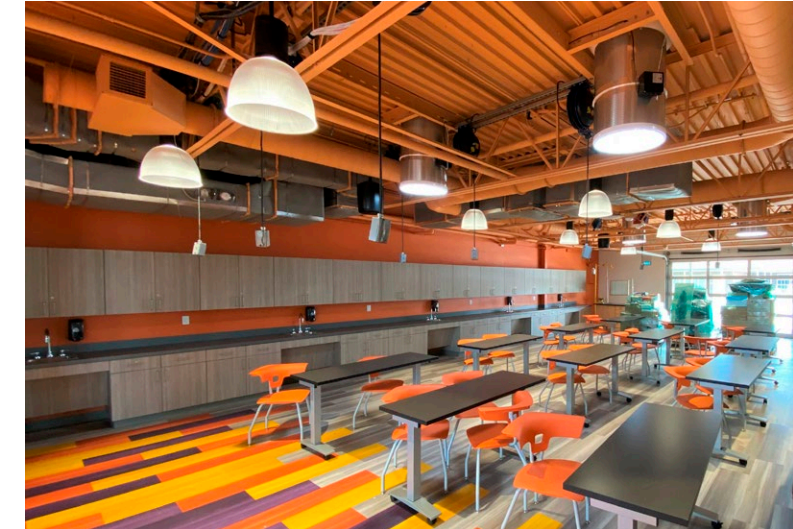
Many AI/AN communities equate language with culture, and culture as fundamental to existence. Unique and contextual, the native language of O'otham is taught at the school and used throughout the facility as a rich and potent reminder of identity, connection through generations and belonging in this landscape. All signage prioritizes the use of O'otham, with English used secondarily.

VALIDATION AND ENRICHMENT

A wide ranging cultural integration and artwork program has been implemented throughout the school. Curated to create a range of experiences and moments across the campus, these ubiquitous expressions serve to instill cultural knowledge and foster a deep sense of belonging.

Sustainability

The school incorporates responsible and wide ranging strategies around sustainability and speaks to the priorities of education and the needs of the wider Community.



Much like health and wellness, a nuanced and multi-layered approach to sustainability became one of the key features of the Casa Blanca project. The project's approach to sustainability included both conventional methodologies and cultural interpretations. The project integrates pragmatic architectural and engineering approaches to meeting the goal of LEED Silver. Additional strategies address the unique desert environment and the specific context of the Community.

The project is responsive to the American Institute of Architects Design Framework which defines principles for good design in the 21st century. The School has been designed to achieve LEED Silver certification; the application is currently under review by the USGBC.

Casa Blanca incorporates responsible and wide ranging strategies around sustainability and speaks to the priorities of education and the needs of the wider Community.

ECOSYSTEMS AND WATER

Accomplished engineers and stewards of the environment, respect for land and management of water is a deeply embedded part of the Community's identity.

- In the desert climate rainfall is low and limited mainly to the annual monsoon. Roof water is captured, stored, and used to irrigate planting areas. Butterfly roofs and rain-chains mark important campus locations and celebrate the rain as a kinetic element.
- Annual rainwater flow across the site was preserved through a series of channels that redirect water around the site to maintain current flow rates. Limiting living lawn area to a single central space reduced the need for potable irrigation water by over 60% from the baseline.
- Existing native plants were preserved and replanted; all supplemental plantings are native species.

ECONOMY, ENERGY, RESOURCES

Passive and active strategies were used to limit consumption of energy and resources.

- Design focused on targeting resources to create the highest benefit to students and teachers and to create spaces that accommodate multiple uses. The school was designed to be highly adaptable to changes in educational program and for all spaces to be available for teaching and learning.
- Building forms were simplified and made from locally available materials. Solar tubes bring controllable daylight indoors; walkway overhangs shade east/west facing spaces; clerestory windows provide daylight; north-facing overhead doors connected interior spaces with shaded outdoor learning spaces.
- PV canopies shade parking and provide approx. 30% of the school's electrical power.

INTEGRATION AND EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES

The school was built to support the preservation of culture and language while preparing students for 21st century careers. By having control of the planning and design process, the GRIC has agency in directing the future of their community.

WELL-BEING, CHANGE AND DISCOVERY

The GRIC is an under-resourced community with a significant population of elders. The school was designed to bring the community together to welcome them for programs and events; it has also been equipped as a place of refuge during weather or climate emergencies, with emergency power, cooling, hygiene and food service capabilities. Designed to support the well-being of students, the school contributes to the broader vitality and resiliency of the Gila River Indian Community.

AIR QUALITY
BIPOLAR IONIZATION
SYSTEM CLEANS DUST AND
PATHOGENS FROM THE AIR

ARTWORK
A VIBRANT AND
UBIQUITOUS ARTWORK
PROGRAM INSTILLS PRIDE
AND CONNECTION TO
STORIES, TRADITIONS AND
THE ENVIRONMENT

**COMMUNITY BUILDING
AND CORE SPACES**
ARRAYED ALONG STREET
EDGE PROVIDE FACILITIES
FOR EXTENDED USE BY
THE COMMUNITY. SPACES
ARE EQUIPPED TO HOUSE
THE COMMUNITY IN TIMES
OF NEED/CRISIS

PHOTOVOLTAIC ARRAY
PROVIDES SHADE FOR
TEACHER PARKING AND
GENERATES 30% OF
SCHOOL'S ENERGY NEEDS

GATHERING AREAS
SUPPORT FESTIVALS,
EVENTS AND PREPARATION
OF TRADITIONAL FOODS

HIGH EFFICIENCY
CONDENSING WATER
HEATERS ARE USED FOR
DOMESTIC HOT WATER.
GAS-FIRED HEATING
PROVIDES BACK UP POWER
IN COMMUNITY BUILDING.
ALL OTHER BUILDINGS ARE
ELECTRIC HEAT PUMPS
WITH NO FOSSIL FUELS.

Wellness, Sustainability and Community Resiliency



OFFSITE STORMWATER
CHANNELED AROUND THE
CAMPUS MAINTAINS AN
UNINTERRUPTED FLOW
ACROSS THE DESERT

SOLAR TUBES
AND CLERESTORY
WINDOWS BRING LIGHT
INTO ALL LEARNING
SPACES AND MINIMIZE
SOLAR GAIN

**TRADITIONAL BUILDING
FORMS**
COMBINED WITH
SIMPLIFIED PALETTE AND
LOCALLY MADE MATERIAL.
CREATE STRUCTURES THAT
FEEL AS IF THEY BELONG
IN THE LANDSCAPE

DEEP OVERHANGS
PROVIDE SHADE AT
OUTDOOR WALKWAYS

**SUSTAINABLE
AGRICULTURE**
BASED ON TRADITIONAL
PRACTICES

ADJACENT PARCEL
OWNED BY THE
COMMUNITY AND MASTER
PLANNED FOR FUTURE
RECREATIONAL USES

THE BUILDING ENERGY
MODEL SHOWS A 40%
ENERGY COST SAVINGS
OVER A BASELINE
COMPLIANT BUILDING.

Results

The existing Casa Blanca Community School was a program of exceptional quality, with a strong culture and a high degree of engagement with families. The component that was missing, and held the program back, was the quality of the facility and limitations in the physical environment.

Since it's completion in 2021, educators and administrators have hosted multiple family and community events and have been exploring existing and interactive learning opportunities. The school's principal, Kim Franklin, shared a few highlights:

- An Art Walk event incorporated Community artists and the school's Language Arts/ Reading curriculum into a magical event for students and families. The student curriculum requires them to research artists and write about them. The Art Walk, where the school's Muralists presented in front of their work, was followed by families working together to create an art piece and viewing work on display by students.
- Read Across America became a huge celebration this year. CBCS gives every child copies of books written by Native American authors. Thanks to the schools outstanding technology, students were able to meet with the authors in the gym.
- January marked Winter Storytelling. Students and families got to experience the wonder of the winter stories as told and illustrated by Community members

The School has hosted parents, grandparents and extended families for multiple events, gardens have been planted, children are learning their language and students are excelling.



Casa Blanca has been visited by state and federal representatives and has hosted several Tribal delegations. Interest has been growing in the Community efforts to leverage Section 105(l) to fund school construction in Indian Country.

TRIBAL DELEGATION VISITS

Part of the 105(l) Lease Summit of July 2022

- Chehalis Tribal Representatives
- Mashantucket Pequot Indian Tribe
- Navajo Nation
- Oglala Sioux Tribal Delegation
- Pechanga Tribal Council
- Pueblo of Laguna
- San Carlos Apache Tribe
- National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) Board of Directors

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE VISITS

- Jason Freihage, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Management Indian Affairs
- Judith Wilson, Director Office of Facilities, Property and Safety Management
- Ambassador Susan Rice, Director of the U.S. Domestic Policy Council
- Jaime Harrison, Chairman of the Democratic National Committee
- Senate Interior Appropriations Committee Staff and representatives of the Department of Interior

THE ARIZONA CONGRESSIONAL DELEGATION

- Senator Mark Kelly
- Congressman Tom O'Halleran
- Representatives of Senator Sinema's Offices
- Congressman Greg Stanton
- Congressman Ruben Gallego

Sources

Many sources were consulted in preparation of this submittal.

SPECIFIC AND GENERAL SOURCES HAVE INCLUDED:

PAGE 1 AND 7: Testimony quoted from Governor Steven Roe Lewis, May 2018
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Executive Office of the President, Dec. 2014 Native Youth Report. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/docs/20141129nativeyouthreport_final.pdf

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HEALTH AND WELLNESS OF THE GRIC AND INDIAN COUNTRY:

National Indian Health Board: Health Equity in Indian Country. March 2023: https://www.nihb.org/docs/03212023/2023_CMS%20Health%20Equity%20Report_FINAL_508.pdf

MENTAL HEALTH AMERICA

NATIVE & INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES & MENTAL HEALTH:

<https://www.mhanational.org/issues/native-and-indigenous-communities-and-mental-health>

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL & PREVENTION AND INDIAN HEALTH SERVICES

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THE GILA RIVER INDIAN COMMUNITY

<https://www.gilariver.org/index.php/districts/district-5-casa-blanca>

<https://www.gilariver.org/index.php/about/history>

<https://www.gilariver.org/index.php/about/culture>



Project Credits

We wish to acknowledge the Gila River Indian Community for their foresight in prioritizing education and their tenacity in seeking solutions and advocating for their members. Working with members of Community’s Tribal Council, Building Committee, Owner representatives, educators, elders and artists has been a rewarding and humbling experience.

The project team worked at their limits to prioritize the needs and expectations of the project on a timeline that seemed impossible to meet during a world wide pandemic. We applaud the efforts of the team and thank them for their dedication and collaboration.

Lastly, we want to thank Principal Lillian Kim Franklin for her dedication to students and the Community. Under her inspired leadership, the School and children of Casa Blanca are on a pathway to thrive.

OWNER The Gila River Indian Community
OWNER’S REPRESENTATIVE Steven Heeley, Esq.
DESIGN ARCHITECT/ARCHITECT OF RECORD

MEP/FP G2 Consulting Engineers
STRUCTURAL Caruso Turley Scott
SITE/CIVIL DOWL Engineering
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE Neill + Young Associates
FOOD SERVICE AZ Restaurant Supply
ENVIRONMENTAL SWCA
GEOTECHNICAL RAMM
CONSTRUCTION MANAGER CORE Construction

Association for Learning Environments
2023 James D. MacConnell Award

The Gila River Indian Community
CASA BLANCA COMMUNITY SCHOOL
Bapchule, Arizona

