

# HAYU ALQI UYXAT

Portland Public Schools | Portland, Oregon

The hardest mountain to climb is the one within.





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Personalized Learning for Every Student

*The building's warm, natural palette and wooded setting reinforce the treehouse concept, creating a calming and uplifting presence within the urban fabric.*

Hayu alqi uyxat, meaning “Many Future Paths” in Chinook wawa, is a transformative educational facility purpose-built to serve Portland Public Schools’ alternative education students—youth whose needs are not fully met by traditional school settings. This 85,000-square-foot facility brings visibility, dignity, and a strong sense of belonging to students who have historically been placed on the margins of the public education system.

The project emerged as part of the Benson Polytechnic High School Modernization, yet stands independently—both physically and philosophically—as a new model for equity-driven school design. As part of this broader vision, the district sought to create a permanent home for its Multiple Pathways to Graduation (MPG) programs. These programs embody a mission to “provide educational options for all youth that empower, engage, and prepare them for college, work training, and global citizenship while serving as a vanguard for systemic educational change.”

From the earliest stages, the project was shaped by a comprehensive and inclusive planning process. A wide range of stakeholders—students, educators, district leadership,

families, community organizations, and local Indigenous leaders—were deeply involved in visioning sessions, programming discussions, and design workshops. Their voices not only guided the development of the facility but are embedded throughout the space, from the school’s name to its experiential graphic design response.

For decades, MPG students were taught in borrowed, hidden, or substandard spaces across the city. This new building consolidates and elevates these essential programs into a centralized, welcoming hub, providing students with the resources and environment they need to thrive.

The facility supports four core programs, each with distinct needs:

- + **Alliance High School** – offering flexible, student-centered paths to graduation
- + **Reconnection Services** – a transitional program within Alliance that supports re-engagement for students disconnected from school, providing academic, social-emotional, and healing-centered learning in a small, supportive setting

+ **Portland DART School** – serving students involved in the juvenile justice system with a blend of academic and therapeutic supports

+ **Teen Parent Services** – supporting young parents with on-site childcare and academic continuity

These programs now share a unified, purpose-built space designed with deep empathy and intent. Inspired by a “treehouse” design concept, the building serves as both a sanctuary and a launchpad—a place where students feel safe, supported, and uplifted. Natural materials, mass timber structure, warm lighting, and biophilic design elements create a calming environment that supports trauma-informed teaching practices and social-emotional learning.

More than just a building, hayu alqi uyxat is a physical embodiment of PPS’s commitment to educational equity. It reimagines what’s possible for alternative education and sets a precedent for how school districts can honor every student’s journey—with beauty, purpose, and intention.

### SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

Owner: Portland Public Schools

Location: Portland, Oregon

Project Description: An alternative high school accommodating four different alternative programs that provide alternate pathways to education.

Building Area: 85,000 sf

Sustainability: Tracking LEED Gold

Cost: \$67m





# SCHOOL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## More Than a Building: A Vision Fulfilled

The hayu alqi uyxat project emerged from a simple, radical idea: students in alternative education deserve a school designed specifically for them—one that affirms their worth, reflects their identities, and supports their unique educational journeys. For decades, Portland Public Schools' alternative programs had operated in borrowed or makeshift spaces—often in basements, repurposed offices, or buildings not designed for learning. While the students enrolled in these programs demonstrated resilience and potential, the environments they were placed in told a different story.

During the planning process for the modernization of Benson Polytechnic High School, discussions evolved as to where to house a couple of alternative programs historically housed at Benson. A powerful realization surfaced: what if, instead of continuing to house alternative programs in forgotten corners of the district, a purpose-built facility was created in the centrally-located parking lot adjacent to Benson? This suggestion quickly evolved into a vision—one that aligned with PPS's broader equity goals and redefined how educational spaces could serve students facing significant barriers.

The name of the school, hayu alqi uyxat, meaning “Many Future Paths,” speaks directly to the mission of the building: to provide students with a range of opportunities and a supportive environment to discover the future that’s right for them. The phrase, offered by local Indigenous leaders who were deeply involved in the naming process, also acknowledges the land’s original stewards and centers cultural inclusion in the project’s identity.

From the start, this project aimed to do more than consolidate programs under one roof. It was designed to transform the learning experience—breaking down systemic inequities, addressing generational trauma, and removing barriers like childcare, transportation, or lack of mental health support. The process was deeply collaborative, involving educators, families, students, and community partners to ensure the building would reflect not just functional needs, but hopes, healing, and a sense of belonging.

In delivering this facility, Portland Public Schools didn’t just invest in a building—they invested in a belief: that students in alternative education deserve beauty, dignity, and purpose-built spaces that recognize their potential and honor their stories.



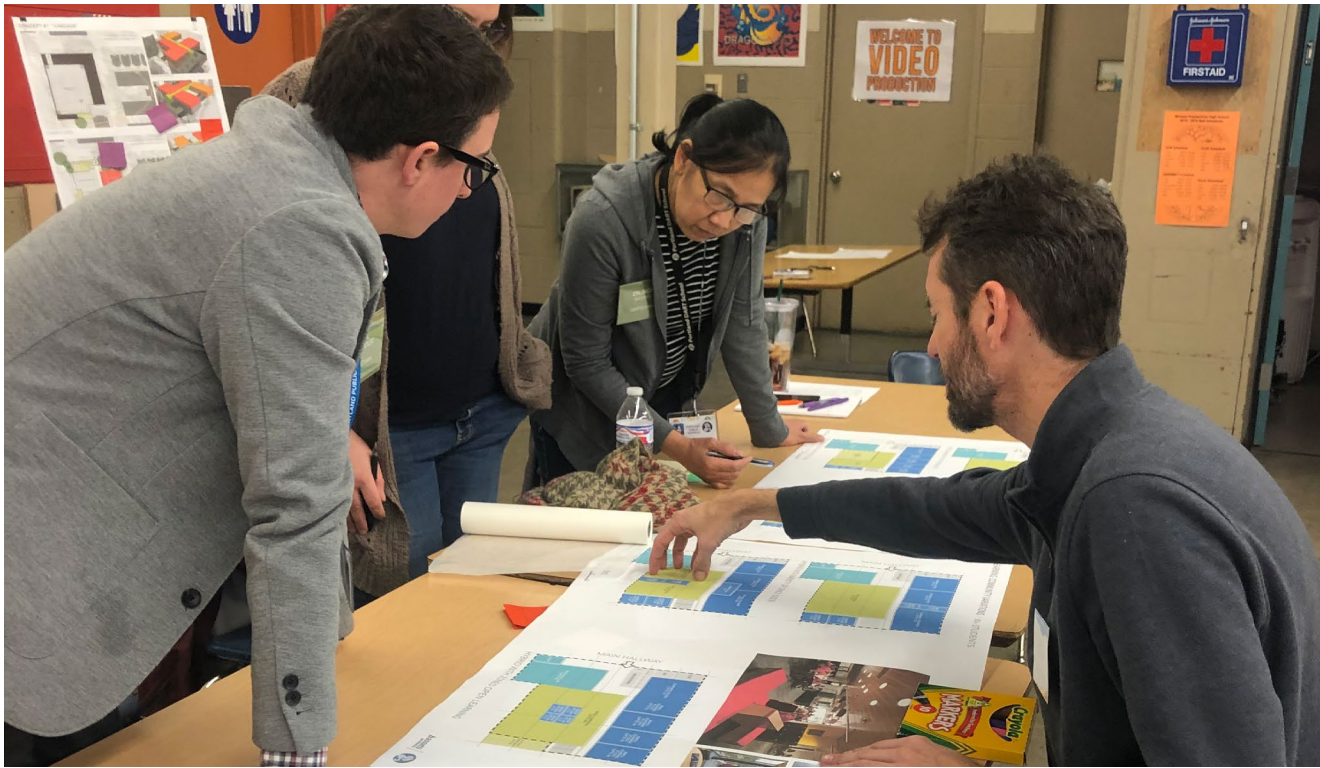


# Teachers Fighting For Student Success

The driving force behind this project was the tireless advocacy of educators who saw their students' potential—and knew they deserved more than leftover classrooms. For years, teachers and administrators had improvised within inadequate facilities, providing individualized support, building trust, and adapting curriculum to meet the needs of students facing trauma, instability, or systemic barriers.

Their frontline experiences helped shift district perspectives, reframing alternative education programs not as secondary or peripheral, but as vital and deserving of a purpose-built environment. Portland Public Schools embraced this vision, launching a design process centered on equity, inclusion, and dignity.

These educators were not only advocates—they were co-creators. Their feedback directly influenced the layout, programming, and function of the space, ensuring it would support everything from small-group instruction to wraparound services and childcare. The building is a tribute to their persistence and their belief in their students' future.





## Student Engagement

Student voice was not just included—it was foundational. From the beginning, students participated in visioning sessions and design workshops, sharing their hopes for a space that felt safe, welcoming, and truly theirs. Their insights helped shape everything from room types to material choices.

The most visible manifestation of student engagement is the building’s experiential graphic design (EGD) response. Developed in close collaboration with students, this layered visual storytelling approach includes:

- + Biophilic patterns digitally printed on natural wood paneling to create a calming, nature-connected atmosphere
- + Linework representing individual student paths, symbolizing both independence and collective strength
- + Actual student quotes embedded in the walls, giving their words permanence and presence in the space

One student’s comment during the design process captured the spirit of the entire project:

***“Most people don’t care what I have to say, and now I get quoted on a wall.”***

This expression of being seen and valued underscores what makes hayu alqi uyxat so transformative: the physical environment affirms student identity, agency, and belonging.



*The main entry welcomes students with a variety of seating options, warm wood finishes, and a custom tree ring graphic featuring a student quote.*



# EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

## A Vision for Dignity, Equity, and Individualized Success

The educational vision for hayu alqi uyxat is rooted in a fundamental belief: every student—regardless of background, circumstance, or learning style—deserves an environment where they feel safe, seen, and supported. Portland Public Schools set out to create a facility that goes beyond meeting basic needs, offering an inspiring, purpose-built environment that places equity and dignity at its core. It reflects a district-wide commitment to affirm student identity and success through thoughtful, trauma-informed, and inclusive design.

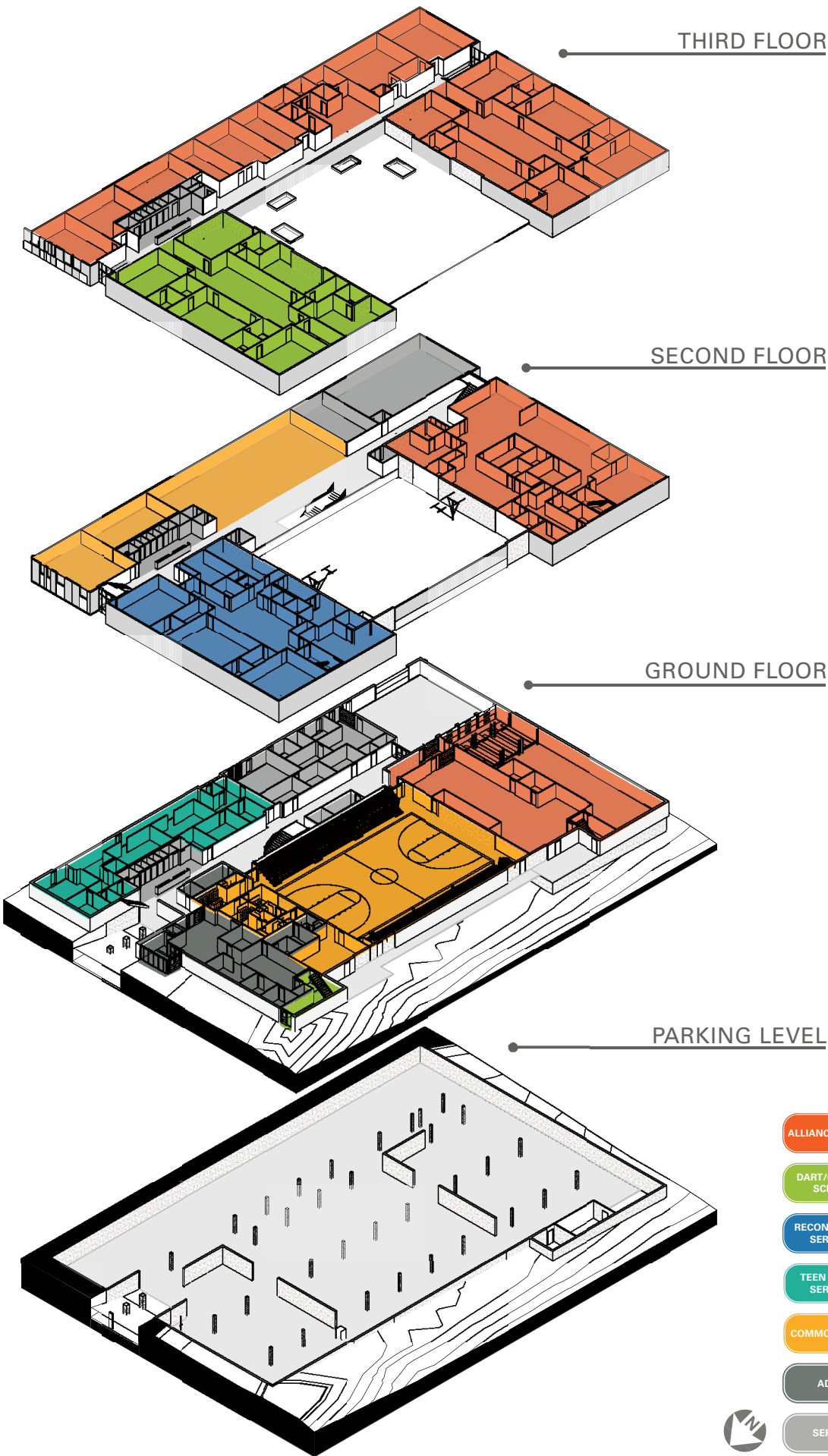
### THE TREEHOUSE CONCEPT: A PLACE OF REFUGE AND PERSPECTIVE

The guiding metaphor for the building’s design is a treehouse—a space of safety, possibility, and perspective. Inspired by input from students who asked for a school that felt “uplifted” and “connected to nature,” the design team envisioned the building as part of a forest, where students could find both shelter and growth.

This treehouse concept is embodied in the building’s warm wood finishes, filtered daylight, and soft, natural textures. A biophilic material palette—anchored by mass timber elements—evokes the grounding calm of a wooded landscape, while elevated walkways and open communal spaces encourage exploration and connection. The design response inspired by the treehouse metaphor not only creates a calming and inspiring environment, but also reinforces the idea that students are not trapped by their pasts—they are embraced and supported in rising toward their futures.



- ACCENT
- METAL
- BRICK
- GLASS



Left: The metaphor of a treehouse and forest inspired the exterior facade design, as well as the material palette throughout.

Right: The arrangement of program spaces and shared common spaces provide a sense of identity for each program, embraced by the shared identity of a whole school community.





## Refuge Among the Trees

In the library, expansive windows frame the surrounding trees, immersing students in nature and further reinforcing the treehouse concept of refuge, perspective, and growth. Exposed mass timber elements add warmth and natural beauty, while thoughtfully chosen, acoustically-sensitive materials soften noise and create a calm atmosphere. Flexible furniture supports a range of uses, allowing students to gather, reflect, or study in ways that best support their individual needs—all within a space designed for comfort and belonging.



SUPPORTING THE WHOLE STUDENT

Every aspect of the environment is designed to meet the needs of the whole student—academically, emotionally, and physically. Scaled, adaptable classrooms allow for personalized instruction, while integrated spaces for therapy, reflection, and sensory regulation support mental health and emotional well-being.

On-site childcare is a cornerstone of the Teen Parent Services program, removing a critical barrier to learning and reinforcing the school’s commitment to supporting students beyond academics. The co-location of Portland DART School, which supports students involved with the justice system, further reinforces the facility’s role as a centralized hub of wraparound support.

FLEXIBILITY SUPPORTS PERSONALIZED LEARNING

The layout of the overall building and each learning community fosters multiple modes of learning—individual, group, therapeutic, and experiential. Classrooms are intimate and personal, allowing educators to build strong, trusting relationships with students. Adjoining breakout rooms, soft-seating areas, and shared commons provide flexibility for informal support, one-on-one coaching, and collaborative work.

This layered approach allows teachers to shift between instruction, intervention, and encouragement as needed—without leaving the learning environment. The variety of spatial types also supports culturally responsive and trauma-informed teaching strategies, ensuring the school can adapt to each student’s individual learning journey.

DESIGNED FOR GROWTH AND CHANGE

Flexibility was a driving force in the project’s planning. With multiple programs housed under one roof—each with different schedules and operational needs—the building was designed to flex and evolve over time. Learning communities feature operable partitions, movable furnishings, and multifunctional rooms allow the environment to shift with changing pedagogies and student populations.

Circulation paths and zoning strategies were carefully planned to allow for both connection and privacy—students can easily access shared services while maintaining a sense of identity within their specific program.

*The diagram highlights the organization of a learning community, where adaptable spaces and intentional adjacencies support equity, collaboration, and student well-being.*





## Where Heritage Meets Innovation

Framed by preserved heritage trees, the building and its solar-topped bike parking reflect a seamless blend of nature, sustainability, and the treehouse-inspired design that defines the campus.







# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

## A Healing Place Rooted in Community

Set within Portland's Lloyd District on the former staff parking lot of Benson Polytechnic High School, hayu alqi uyxat transforms an underutilized site into a vibrant educational sanctuary. The building's design and siting emphasize openness, connection, and a deep respect for its surrounding context. Tucked just steps from a major urban thoroughfare, the school balances accessibility with a sense of retreat—creating a calm, treehouse-like atmosphere amid the city.

Its presence signals a new era for Portland Public Schools, one where alternative education is no longer tucked away, but proudly visible and integrated into the educational landscape. The facility's position on the site prioritizes safety, accessibility, and connection to transit while preserving green space and integrating a secure underground parking structure to offset the lost surface parking.

A key planning challenge was successfully integrating three distinct building entries—separating access for the DART School, Teen Parent Services daycare, and the main school entrance—to meet the unique needs, privacy, and safety considerations of each program. This careful choreography extended beyond the building, coordinating the parking garage entry, a surface lot for trash, recycling, and deliveries, the daycare drop-off zone accessed from Flanders Street, and dedicated access to the Auto CTE program, also off Flanders. Together, these moves ensure seamless operations without compromising the school's sense of welcome or its calm, nature-connected presence.

The overall architectural expression reflects warmth and transparency. Wood is used prominently both outside and in, signaling that this is a space of care, creativity, and belonging. Large windows flood interior spaces with daylight, and careful massing creates a human-scaled building that feels approachable and inspiring.





# Structure and Spirit in the Commons

Mass timber columns and beams define the space, adding warmth and rhythm to the bright, cheerful commons—where flexible seating and natural light create an inviting atmosphere for connection and learning.



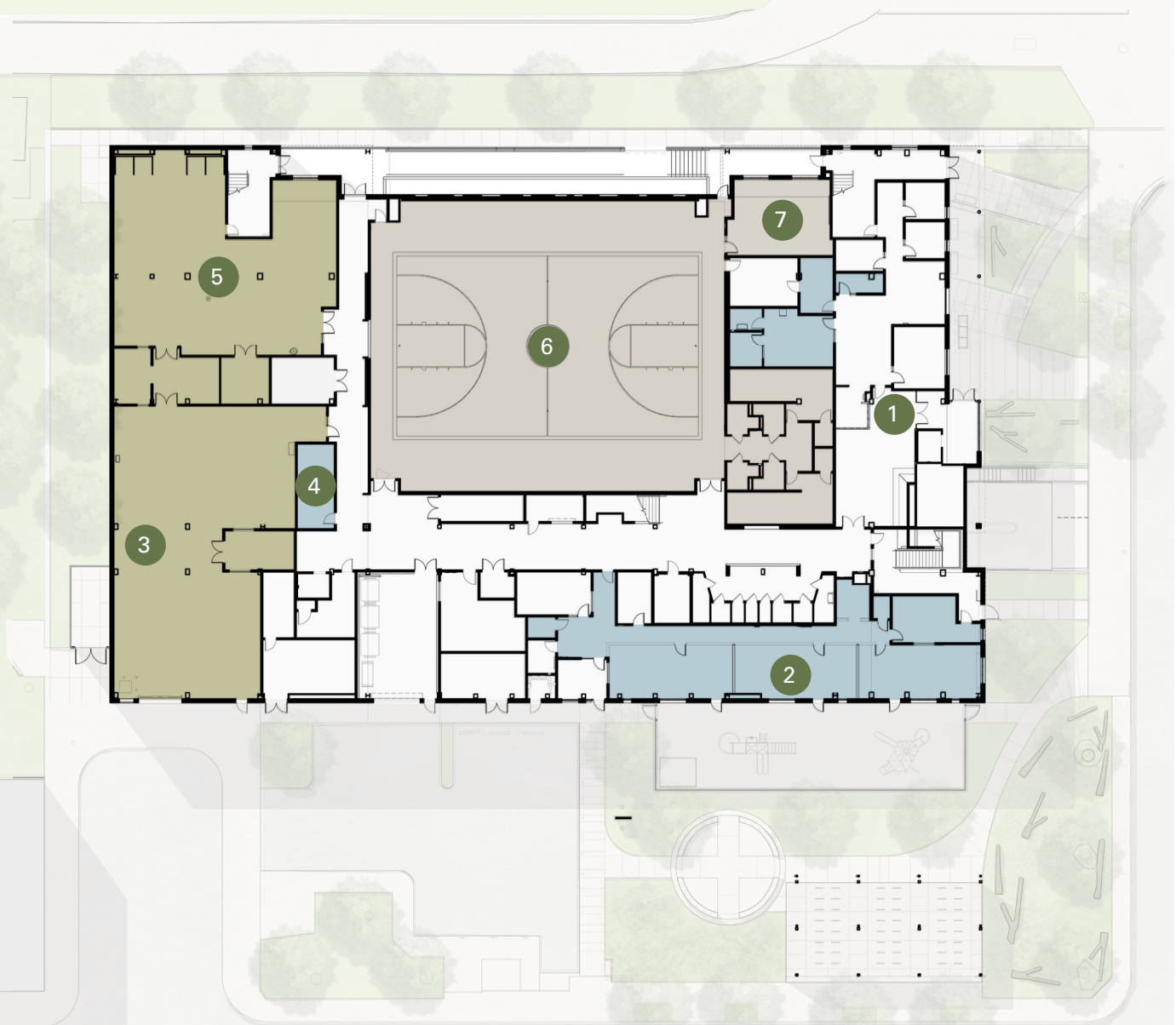
# A Layout That Supports Diverse Journeys

The building layout is organized to balance program identity with shared community. Each educational program—Alliance High School, DART, and Teen Parent Services—has its own zone within the building, allowing students and staff to develop strong, program-specific cultures. At the same time, shared spaces like the childcare center, common areas, and support services are centrally located to foster cross-program connection and efficient operations.

Despite its small-school scale, the building offers students access to a diverse range of learning opportunities, including two CTE programs, a makers lab, and a culinary classroom, all designed to cultivate hands-on, real-world skills. Small classrooms support personalized, relationship-based instruction, while distributed adult planning spaces ensure educators and support staff are embedded throughout the building, easily accessible to students and able to collaborate across programs.

The design prioritizes intuitive wayfinding, daylight access, and choice. From quiet nooks to open commons, from private counseling rooms to large flexible classrooms, the building provides a variety of environments to match each student’s needs on any given day. Outdoor space is intentionally woven into the building, with terraces, courtyards, and seating areas extending the learning environment and reinforcing a connection to nature.

The treehouse concept comes through in vertical circulation, layered views, and overlapping zones—students move through the building like branches of a tree, each path offering new vantage points and opportunities for growth.



## FLOOR PLAN LEGEND

- 1

Entry / Administration
- 2

Teen Parent / Daycare
- 3

Automotive CTE
- 4

Food Pantry
- 5

Manufacturing CTE
- 6

Gymnasium
- 7

Weight Room
- 8

Commons
- 9

Culinary Classroom
- 10

Media Center

11

Student Services

12

Teen Parent Office

13

Flex

14

Digital Media

15

DART Office / Kuumba School

16

Makerspace

17

Alliance Admin Office

18

Natural Resources

19

Roof Deck

## KEY

- Career Technical Education (CTE)
- Science Lab
- Academic Classroom
- PE/Athletics
- Services / Wellness

FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



THIRD FLOOR





## The Core of Community

At the heart of the school, a regulation-size basketball court brings students together—fostering movement, connection, and a sense of community within the building's core. Its inclusion, along with integrated seating, was a direct result of strong stakeholder engagement and leadership advocacy—ensuring this key element remained a priority throughout design, with no value engineering compromises.





## Social Emotional Well-Being

Trauma-informed design principles are embedded throughout the building. The architecture was guided by research and community feedback emphasizing the need for safety, predictability, and comfort—especially for students who have experienced instability or adversity.

Key features include:

- + Clear sightlines that support supervision and a sense of control
- + Calming materials and colors, with biophilic finishes that reduce stress
- + Sensory spaces and quiet rooms for emotional regulation
- + Non-institutional lighting and acoustics, designed to feel warm and welcoming
- + Secure yet open entry points, balancing safety with dignity

By designing spaces that support emotional well-being, the school becomes more than a place to learn—it becomes a place to heal, grow, and belong.

*This adaptable common space gives students choice—whether they need quiet reflection, personal support, or collaborative learning—reinforcing the school’s commitment to individualized pathways and social emotional well-being.*





## Empowering Student Parents

A cheerful, engaging childcare space supports young families—giving student-parents the freedom to learn and thrive with peace of mind, knowing their children are just steps away.





## Experiential Graphic Design

The interior of hayu alqi uyxat is animated by powerful experiential graphic design (EGD) elements that reflect student voice, cultural identity, and the metaphor of growth. Designed in collaboration with students, the graphics transform corridors and common areas into story-rich environments.

Key layers of the EGD system include:

- + Nature-based imagery—digitally printed leaf patterns, tree textures, and organic forms reinforce the biophilic theme
- + Linework representing individual student journeys, converging and diverging in abstract maps of experience
- + Student quotes embedded in the design, literally placing their voices on the walls and celebrating their presence

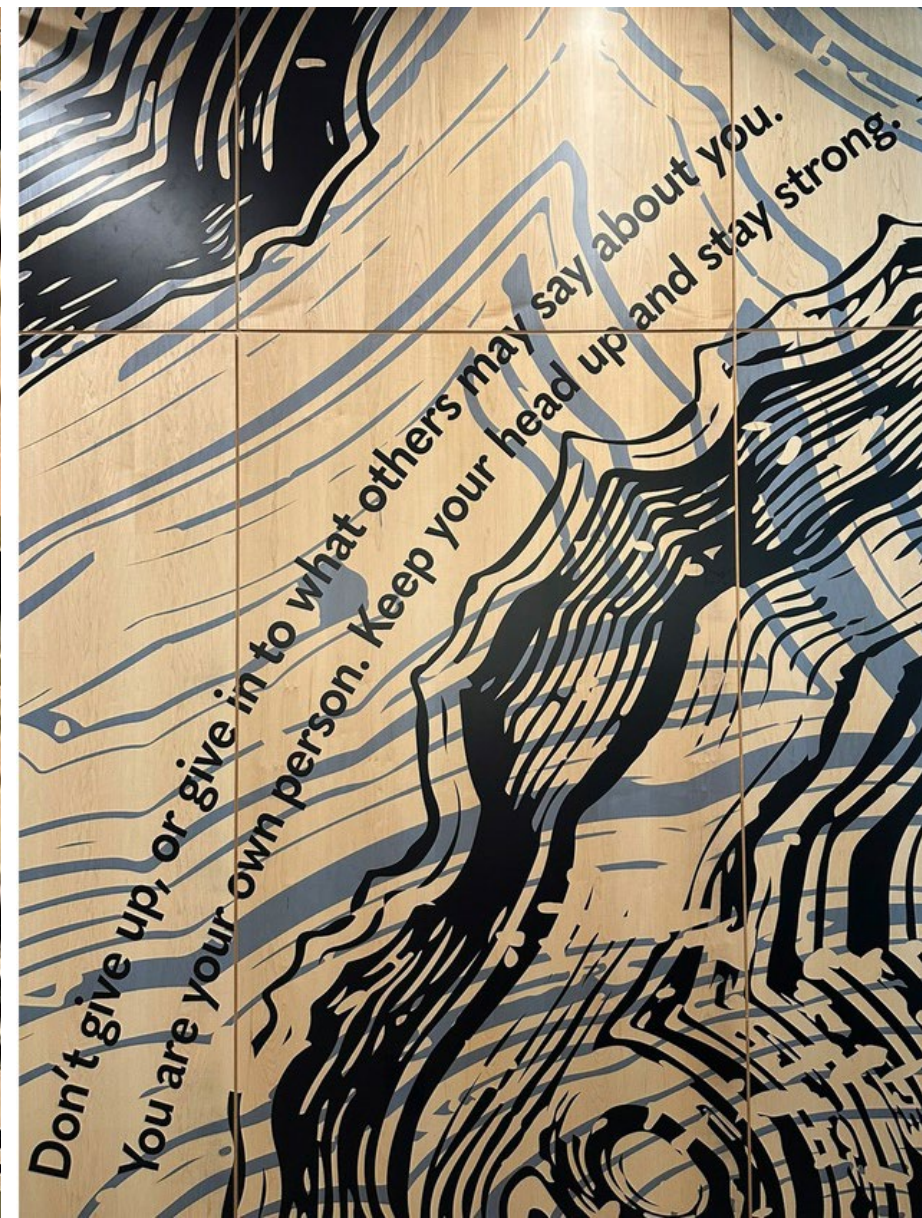
The experiential graphic design does more than decorate—it inspires. It creates moments of reflection, reinforces the message that every student belongs, and shows that the school was designed not just for them, but with them.

As one student shared during a design review:

***“This is the first time I’ve ever seen my voice matter.”***

These visual elements become daily affirmations of identity, possibility, and pride.

*Graphic panels throughout the school feature organic patterns—leaves, mushrooms, and tree rings—interwoven with student quotes, creating a layered narrative of growth, nature, and identity.*







# Learning in Motion, Art on Display

A flexible learning space with varied furniture and a dedicated art display wall encourages creativity, collaboration, and student expression in both formal and informal ways.





*At the top of the stairs, the commons is bathed in natural light, with expansive windows and exposed columns and beams that celebrate the warmth and structure of mass timber.*

## RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

### MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

The design of hayu alqi uyxat directly advances the educational goals of Portland Public Schools by supporting the whole student—academically, emotionally, and socially. The environment was purposefully crafted to reflect the educational model behind alternative learning: personalized instruction, strong student-teacher relationships, and wraparound services that address barriers to success.

The building's flexibility supports differentiated instruction, while trauma-informed spaces empower educators to teach in ways that are responsive, culturally affirming, and restorative. On-site services like mental health counseling and childcare allow students to remain in school, maintain stability, and re-engage with their education on their own terms. The project brings the district's goal of equitable access to high-quality learning environments into clear focus.

### ADVANCING EQUITY, INCLUSION AND SUSTAINABILITY

Portland Public Schools has made equity, inclusion, and sustainability foundational pillars of its capital improvement program—and hayu alqi uyxat exemplifies all three. It was intentionally designed and constructed to:

- + Replace marginal, inequitable learning spaces with a dignified, permanent facility
- + Centralize scattered programs into a more efficient, community-serving hub
- + Achieve LEED Gold certification through all-electric operations, solar energy, and low-carbon mass timber
- + Surpass the district's COBID contracting goal, achieving 34% participation by DBE, WBE, and SBE firms—nearly double the 18% goal

By investing in this facility, the district set a precedent: equity is not only about program access—it is about the quality of space, the intentionality of support, and the message the built environment sends to every student.

### STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY

The school also fulfills broader community goals by creating a safe, stable place for students who often struggle to find belonging in traditional systems. It integrates essential services that support not only academic achievement but also workforce readiness, family stability, and mental health.

The presence of Teen Parent Services with childcare, for example, ensures young parents can finish their education while also supporting their children's early development. Likewise, the DART program's inclusion in a purpose-built space strengthens partnerships between PPS, social services, and the justice system. Together, these programs provide a web of support that radiates outward—benefiting families, neighborhoods, and community networks.

### UNINTENDED IMPACTS: VISIBILITY, VOICE, VALUE

Perhaps the most powerful outcomes of the project were unplanned. The visibility of the building—no longer hidden in a basement or behind a back door—has changed

how students see themselves, and how the community sees them. Educators have reported a renewed sense of pride and legitimacy in their programs. Students are more engaged, more connected, and more willing to take ownership of their educational journeys.

The experiential graphics throughout the school, originally conceived as a subtle visual layer, became a deeply meaningful form of student expression and identity. Quotes and linework representing student voices have become daily reminders that this school is theirs.

What began as a functional project to consolidate programs has become something much more: a model for equity-driven school design, and a testament to what happens when architecture values and reflects the voices, needs, and aspirations of those it serves.





## A Refuge in the Heart of the City

Nestled among the trees in a lush urban setting, the school sits beside Buckman Field Park—offering students a calming, nature-connected environment in the heart of the city.