



INA A. COLEN ACADEMY

K-8 PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL

OCALA, FL

Sharp Minds. Kind Hearts.



Executive Summary

The Ina A. Colen Academy was conceived as part of a new master community development. The goal was to create a new rich community for multi-generational families. The heart of this community would be a new K-12 school that educates the hearts and minds of students and families in an environment where everyone belongs, works together and thrives.

Phase 1 of the vision is a new 116,000 sf kindergarten through eighth grade academy built to accommodate 1,000 students with a mission to cultivate passionate learners in an inclusive school community in which individuality and diversity are valued and students develop understanding and empathy for others through collaboration and active learning.

This first phase was built as the central core allowing for future phases to expand outward to limit disruption on an active campus.

The design forms a large “Z” shape starting with the tallest 2-story program, the gymnasium, and sloping down to a one-story building, the kindergarten building. This form helps break down the scale of a large K-8 school into the scale of the students. An example of this are the courtyards which are activated by solar canopies, functioning as shade structures for the outdoor classrooms, age-oriented playgrounds, and class garden areas. These zones feel intimate enough to not be overwhelming to a student and open enough for easy passive surveillance for the teacher.

Where Tradition Inspires Innovation

Ina A. Colen Academy redefines the learning experience through project-based, whole-child education that prioritizes both academic achievement and emotional wellness. Designed to empower every learner, the school fosters meaningful relationships, personalized learning, and cross-generational connections. Its innovative, inclusive approach—supported by an environment purposefully crafted for exploration and care—places students firmly at the center of every decision.

Values embedded: Learners First, Innovation, Place Matters, Diversity, Respect

Preparing Learners for Life

At Ina A. Colen Academy, students develop the academic, emotional, and collaborative tools they need to navigate high school, postsecondary education, and life beyond. A culture of care, relevance, and community engagement allows students to apply their learning in real-world contexts—developing voice, agency, and a deep respect for self and others within a purposefully designed environment that makes learning visible and meaningful.

Values embedded: Learners First, Collaboration, Place Matters, Innovation, Respect



Scope of Work

Design Capacity:
982 students (phase 1 built)

Master planned for 2,074 K-8th grade
+ 864 students 9th -12th grade

Building Area:
116,000 sf (phase 1 built)

Master planned for 188,000 sf for
K-8th grade and 160,000 sf for 9th
-12th grade

Budget

Construction Cost:
\$38 million (phase 1 built)

Core Values

Inclusivity

Ina A. Colen Academy fosters belonging by celebrating the diversity of Marion County. The school promotes respect for all identities while building a culture of shared values. Through inclusive practices, students, families, and staff feel seen, valued, and connected to one another.

Family Involvement

Ina A. Colen Academy values families as vital partners in every child's development. The school fosters trust and inclusion, inviting families to participate actively in their student's journey. Outreach, support services, and shared learning opportunities ensure families feel welcomed, informed, and engaged.

Constructionist Approach

Ina A. Colen Academy embraces a constructionist model where learning is rooted in experience, inquiry, and reflection. Students build understanding by tackling real-world problems, collaborating with peers, and engaging diverse perspectives. Project-based learning and dialogue circles support student agency, blending academic rigor with social-emotional growth.

Social Responsibility

At Ina A. Colen Academy, social responsibility starts with self-awareness and the courage to act with integrity. Students learn to consider how their choices impact others and the world around them. This mindset is embedded throughout the curriculum, nurturing empathy, ethics, and environmental stewardship.

The Design

The design reflects inclusivity through flexible, welcoming spaces that adapt to diverse needs. Open layouts encourage connection across ages and roles. Transparent circulation, accessible design, and shared areas promote safety, equity, and belonging for every member of the school community.

The design invites family participation through accessible, community-focused spaces. A welcoming entry leads to shared commons, meeting rooms, and a resource center for events and support. Clear navigation, open sightlines, and flexible gathering areas foster connection, making families feel at home and engaged.

The campus is designed to support hands-on, student-led learning. Classrooms connect to shared collaboration zones, makerspaces, and outdoor areas that encourage exploration and creativity. Transparent, flexible spaces with writable surfaces make learning visible and interactive, reinforcing discovery through meaningful engagement.

The campus supports social responsibility through sustainable features and spaces that promote reflection, care, and action. Outdoor learning areas connect students to nature, while visible green strategies—like daylighting and resource-conscious materials—model environmental ethics and institutional accountability.

The Community

IACA fills a need that will be created by the future development of Calesa, a master-planned community encompassing more than 1500 acres in Ocala, Florida. The community offers a mix of homes appealing to a diverse range of demographics, and at buildout will be home to over 5,000 families. Schools in the area are at or near capacity and there are limited educational choice options available. With support from the Colen Family Charitable Trust, IACA offers a unique educational opportunity to Marion County students, while of an easily accessible public charter school option to families moving to Calesa. The first activity of every school day is “circle time,” where all students form a circle and allows the teacher to explore issues of concern. Also, it allows children to explore and address issues which concern them. It provides a structured mechanism for solving problems, in which all participants have an equal footing. This core value became a key element of design for each room and furniture selection.

IACA strives to promote the long-term development and success of all its students through its focus on physically and emotionally healthy students and lifestyles; a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for students and adults; challenging academics to equip students for successful transition to secondary education and beyond; active engagement in learning and connections to the school and broader community; and access to personalized learning supported by qualified and caring adults. The foundational elements of IACA's educational program include project-based learning; social and emotional learning and development; health and wellness; focus on growth mindset; family involvement; and multi-generational connections.



RAPID POPULATION AND ENROLLMENT GROWTH:

Population Increase: Between 2020 and 2021, Marion County's population grew by over 10,000 residents, with the number of school-age children increasing by 1,334 during the same period.

Record-High Enrollment: By December 2023, Marion County Public Schools (MCPS) reached an all-time high enrollment of 45,651 students, marking a significant rise from 41,279 students in the 2020–2021 school year.

SCHOOL OVERCROWDED CHALLENGES:

High School Overcapacity: By 2022, high schools in Marion County were operating at 98% capacity, with 12,636 students enrolled out of a total capacity of 12,891 seats.

Middle School Overcrowding: West Port High School, in particular, faced significant overcrowding, operating at 112% capacity.

District-Wide Strain: The influx of new residents and students strained existing school facilities, prompting MCPS to plan for new schools to alleviate overcrowding and accommodate future growth.

ENHANCED COMMUNITY APPEAL:

Incorporating schools into master-planned developments increases the attractiveness of these communities to potential residents, particularly families. The Calesa development offers a variety of amenities aimed at enhancing the lifestyle of its residents. Beyond the inclusion of the Ina A. Colen Academy, the community boasts several features that contribute to its appeal including FAST (Florida Aquatics Swimming & Training).

Challenges

Evolving context: Creating a school that felt embedded in a new and growing residential community, while allowing for long-term adaptability.

Unformed community identity: Designing for a population and culture still in development, requiring flexible enrollment, programming, and space planning.

Safety vs. civic openness: Balancing the school's role as a civic anchor with the need for secure, clearly defined student zones.

Site adjacency: Navigating proximity to high-traffic recreational and wellness facilities like FAST to ensure connection without disrupting operations.

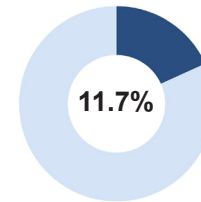
Progressive pedagogy: Supporting an innovative educational model with nontraditional spaces—encouraging movement, exploration, and multiple modes of learning.



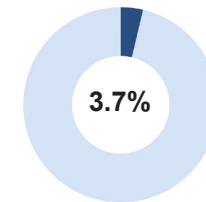
34 -Teacher Count



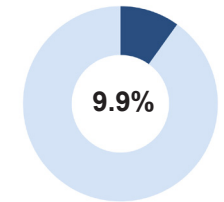
546 -Student Count



Economically Disadvantaged



Current English Language Learners



Students with Disabilities

Assets

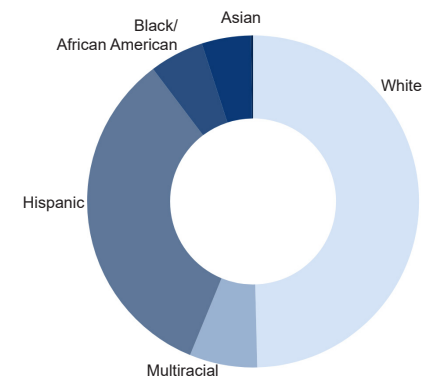
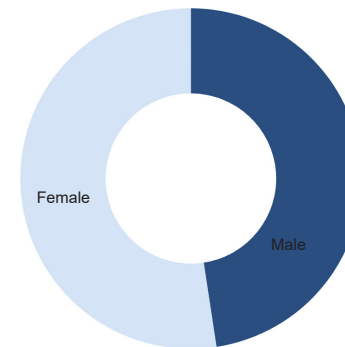
Community alignment: Being part of Calesa Township brought a built-in population and a master plan prioritizing education, wellness, and connectivity.

Strong backing: The Colen Family Charitable Trust and Colen Built Development provided funding, vision alignment, and development expertise.

Educational partnership: The Collaborative Educational Network ensured the model was rooted in research and best practices from the outset.

Wellness integration: Access to FAST and surrounding green infrastructure supported whole-child development and extended learning.

Ground-up opportunity: New construction allowed the design team to fully align physical space with the educational mission from day one.



Visioning Process

Honoring a Legacy, Inspiring the Future

The visioning process for Ina A. Colen Academy began with a single guiding principle: to create a school that embodied the values, compassion, and unwavering belief in the power of education that defined the life of Ina A. Colen. A dedicated educator and community advocate, Ina left an indelible mark on all who knew her. Her namesake school was envisioned not simply as a learning institution, but as a living tribute—a place where every child is seen, every family is welcomed, and every educator is empowered to spark curiosity, empathy, and growth.

In partnership with the Circle Square Foundation and a broad coalition of planners, educators, designers, and community stakeholders, the vision for IACA emerged as a deeply intentional, learner-centered model. Conversations were rooted in honoring Ina's belief in the dignity of every individual and the transformative potential of inclusive, project-based education. Her legacy was the moral compass of the process—informing decisions around scale, transparency, community integration, and emotional wellness.

The result is a school that not only bears her name, but reflects her heart.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders consisted of Colen Family Charitable Trust, Colen Built Development, LLC, and the Collaborative Educational Network. The school principal collaborated with the design team to set values, goals, and design direction for the new school.

The stakeholders wanted more than just an “inviting” building, social and emotional learning for both students and staff is at the core of IACA's program and it was vital that the school lived and breathed this mission. The stakeholder team believed that a whole-school approach focused on administrators and staff as well as students is critical for the environment we created.



The Colen Family Charitable Trust is dedicated to empowering passionate, self-directed learners who are equipped to make thoughtful decisions for themselves and their communities. This mission comes to life through its support of Ina A. Colen Academy, where the Trust helps deliver high-quality education, resources, and professional development to students, teachers, and school leaders across public, independent, and charter schools serving grades K–8.



Community-Centered Planning

The vision for Ina A. Colen Academy was shaped by a deeply collaborative process led by the Colen Family Charitable Trust, Colen Built Development, LLC, and the Collaborative Educational Network. These key stakeholders, in partnership with the founding principal and design team, worked together to set clear values, goals, and direction for a school that would serve as the heart of the Calesa community. Rather than simply designing an “inviting” building, the team was united in its belief that the school should be a living embodiment of social-emotional learning—supporting not just students, but staff and families as well. The planning process resulted in more than a physical structure; it created a dynamic, inclusive hub for learning, wellness, and connection that serves the broader Marion County community.

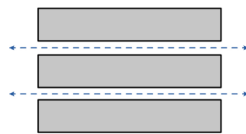
Fostering Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion through Engagement

The engagement process was intentional and value-driven, emphasizing equity, wellness, and whole-child development. The stakeholders envisioned a school where diversity would not only be reflected, but actively embraced—where all students and adults could feel psychologically safe, emotionally supported, and empowered to thrive. By embedding social-emotional learning into the core of both the educational model and the spatial design, the team ensured that every classroom, collaboration zone, and staff area reinforced a culture of care and inclusion. This whole-school approach prioritized the wellbeing of educators and administrators as much as learners, underscoring the belief that sustainable equity begins with supporting those who lead and teach.

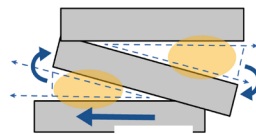
"We want social and emotional learning to be a culture in our school. Relationships and being productive in society - that is what we want for our kids."
- Dr. Christy Noe



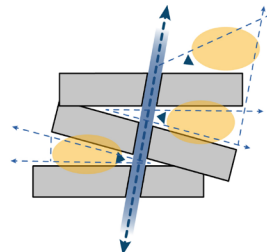
Transformational Diagrams



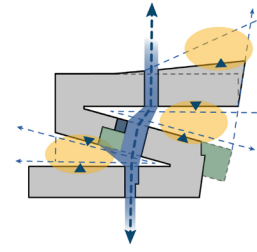
- 1 BAR BUILDING**
Traditional approach offers limited circulation and connectivity.



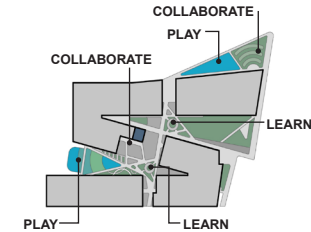
- 2 ROTATE & SHIFT**
The new configuration creates opportunities for courtyards and shared spaces.



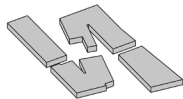
- 3 SLICE**
Slicing the configuration creates connectivity and an axis of circulation.



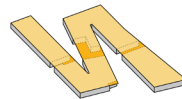
- 4 SUBTRACT**
Strategic subtraction creates arrival plazas, breakaway space and places of rest.



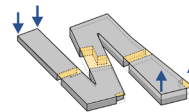
- 5 ACTIVATE**
Programming the courtyards into class size scale creates zones of learning.



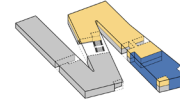
- 6 MASSING**
Four single story buildings at a similar elevation.



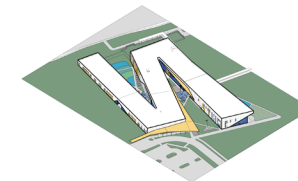
- 7 COVER**
Continuation of a single roof allows for shaded walkway and building connections.



- 8 COVER**
Scaling the building for smaller and larger programs such as a small classroom vs a larger gym.

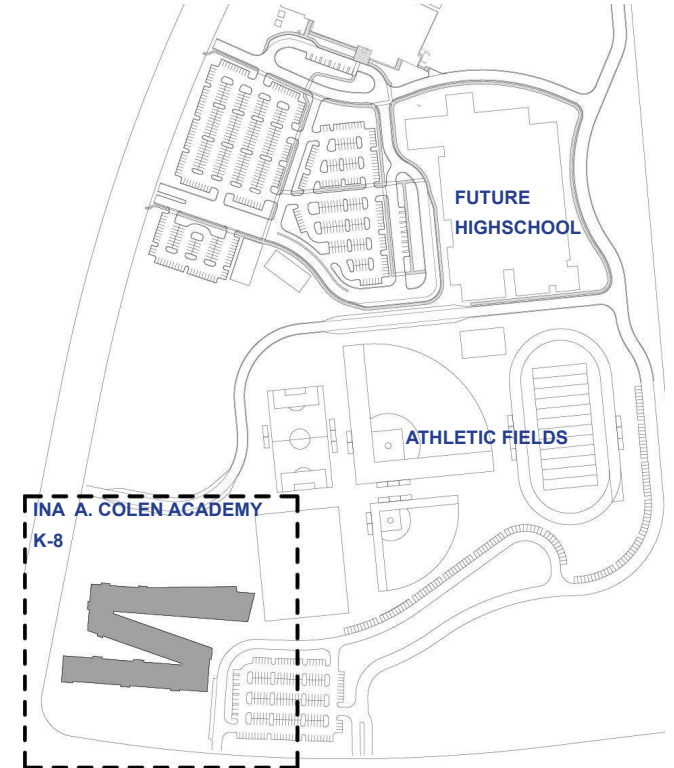


- 9 VOLUME**
Volume is given to assembly program such as gymnasium and cafeteria.



- 10 SITE**
Synchronizing for indoor /outdoor shaded spaces for expanded student learning.

Physical Environment



The design forms a large “Z” shape starting with the tallest 2-story program, the gymnasium, and sloping down to a one-story building, the kindergarten building. This form helps break down the scale of a large K-8 school into the scale of a class. To reinforce this concept, indoor classrooms were separated by outdoor learning spaces which were then covered to protect the students from sun and rain. This space between the buildings is as important as the space inside of the buildings. The covered breezeways between each building allow for quick access for all students to the shared spaces such as the gymnasium and cafeteria, while also linking the bus loop, parent loop to the heart of the campus.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The campus is broken down by an ungulating facade. The white facade veil is lifted to the blue facade highlighting the secured campus entries. These entries bring students in through the bus loop, parent car drop-off and golf cart drop-off into the central courtyards. Ensuring the campus feels inviting while being secured was key in the design and planning of the school.

The sunshades were used as another element to orient and break down the scale of the school. The color of the shades fades from a yellow to green to teal as you move South through the campus. These colors relate to the interior color wayfinding and allow the grades to identify where their building is from the interior and exterior through visual cues.





Bridge connection to Music and Gymnasium building



Social Stair and outdoor dining space



Outdoor Classroom Solar Canopy



Turf Outdoor Amphitheater



Courtyards are activated by solar canopies, functioning as shade structures for the outdoor classrooms, age-oriented playgrounds, and class garden areas. These zones feel intimate enough to not be overwhelming to a student and open enough for easy passive surveillance for the teacher. The outdoors is then brought indoors through lots of natural daylighting and glass garage doors. The windows all include solar shades which help limit direct sunlight while also adding playfulness to the façade through an ombre of color. The glass garage doors are used in specialty classrooms such as the DaVinci lab, Robotics lab and Science lab. These allow teachers to expand their classroom into the courtyard for indoor/outdoor learning.

Level 1 Plan

BUILDING B
GRADES 3-5

BUILDING A
GYMNASIUM

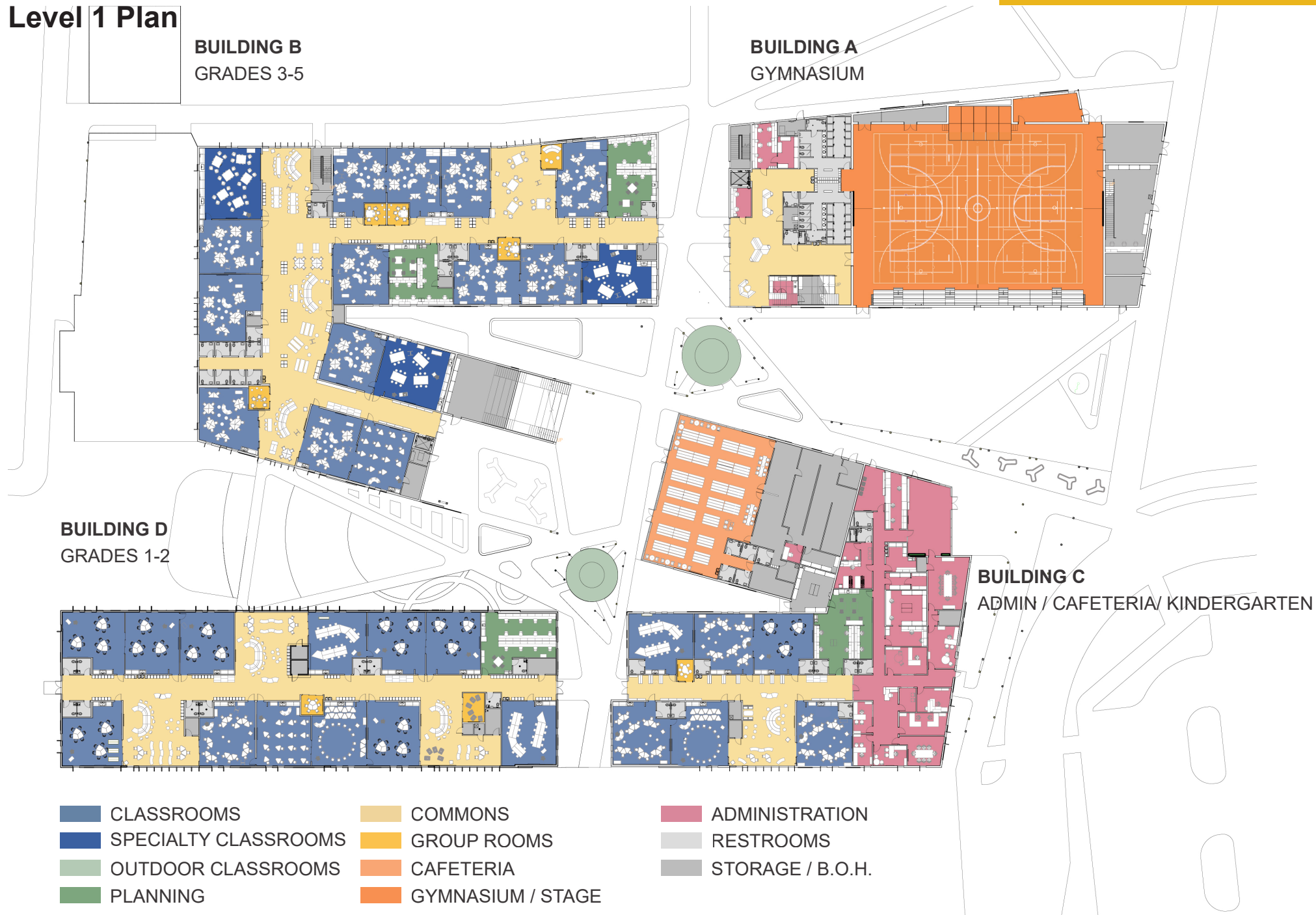
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

BUILDING D
GRADES 1-2

BUILDING C
ADMIN / CAFETERIA / KINDERGARTEN

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| CLASSROOMS | COMMONS |
| SPECIALTY CLASSROOMS | GROUP ROOMS |
| OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS | CAFETERIA |
| PLANNING | GYMNASIUM / STAGE |

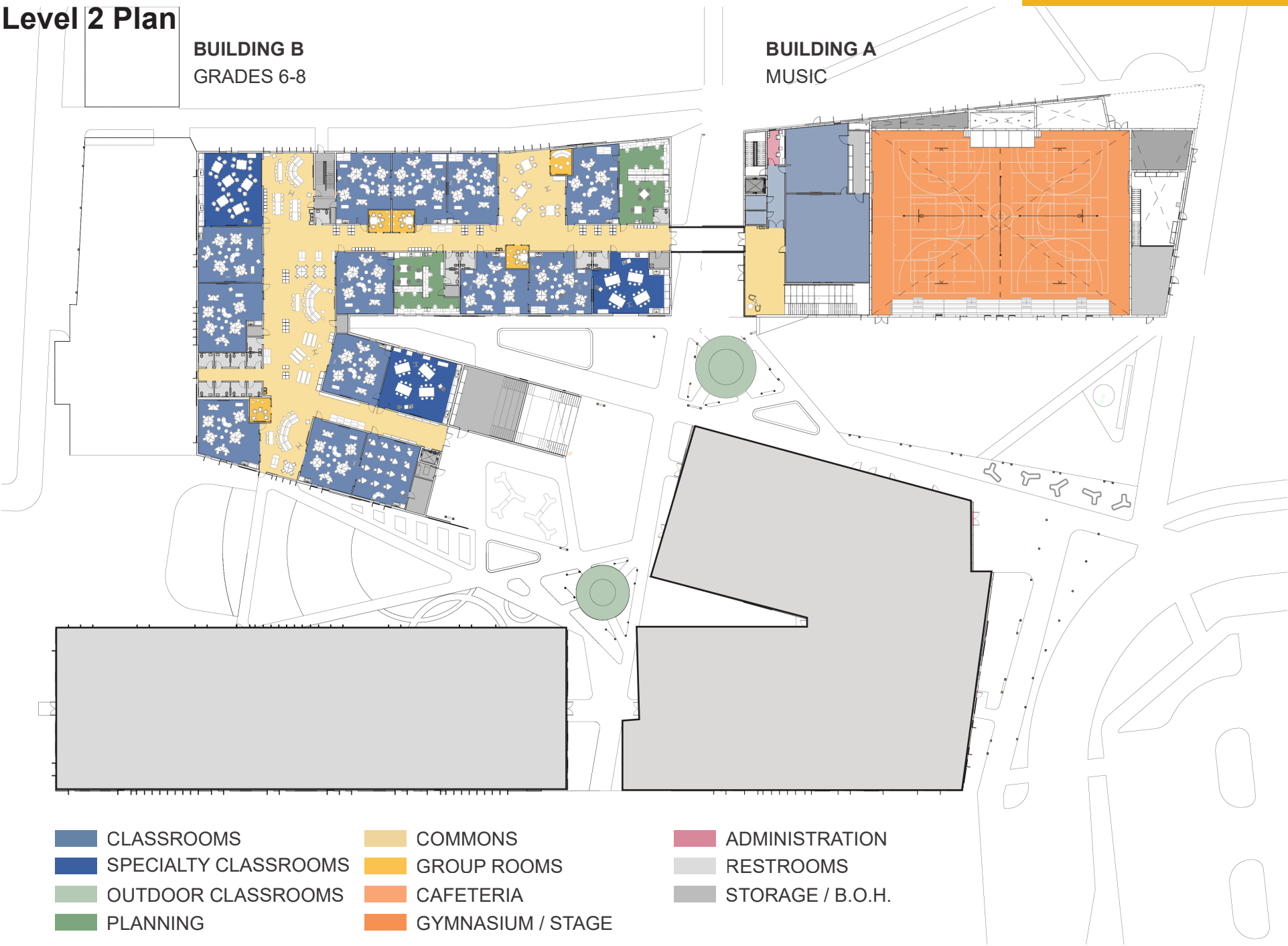
- | |
|------------------|
| ADMINISTRATION |
| RESTROOMS |
| STORAGE / B.O.H. |

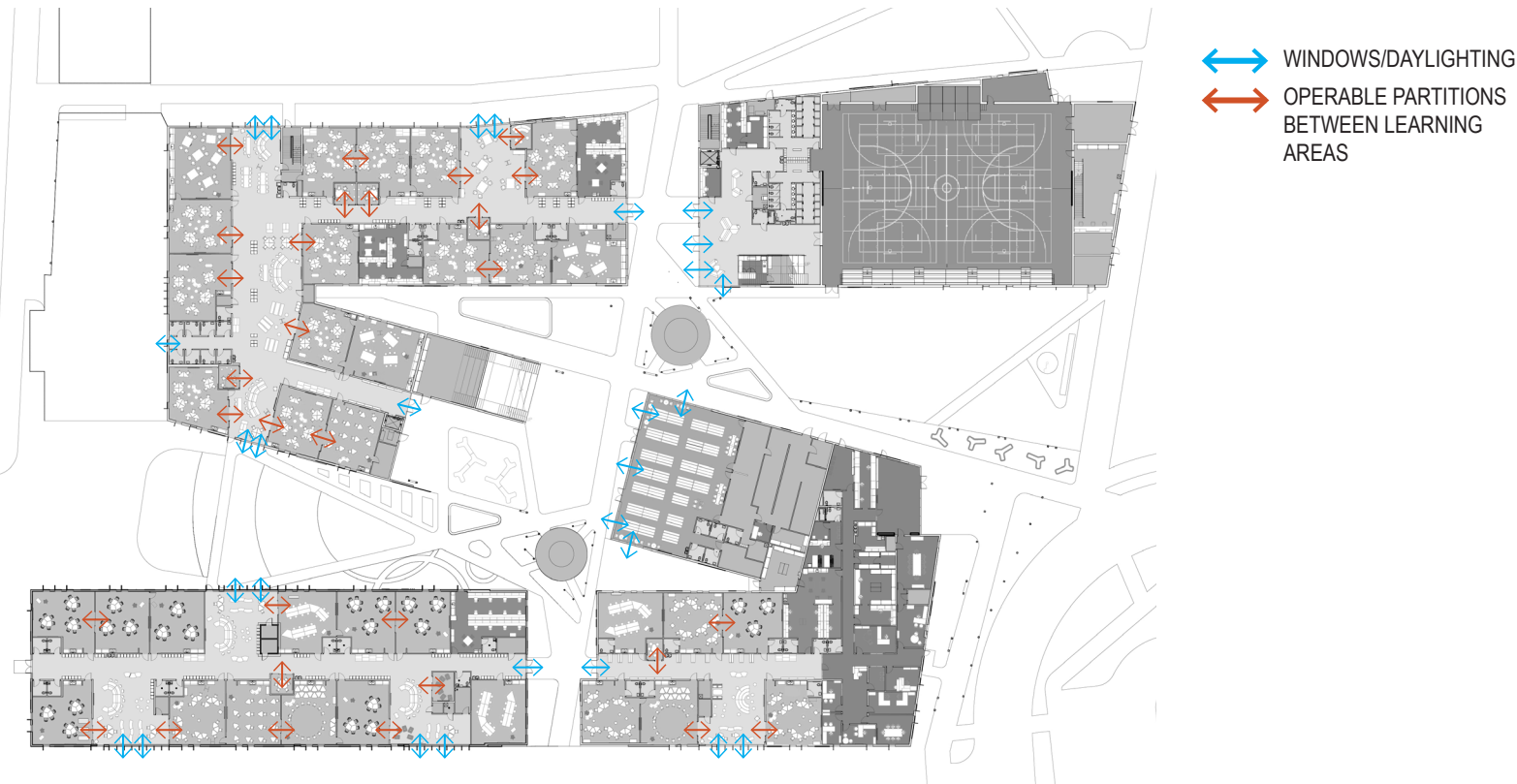


Level 2 Plan

BUILDING B
GRADES 6-8

BUILDING A
MUSIC

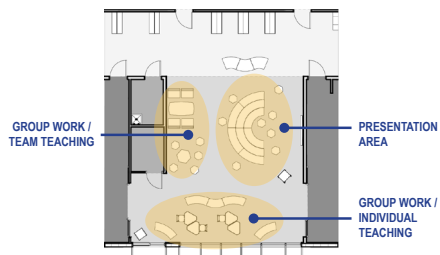




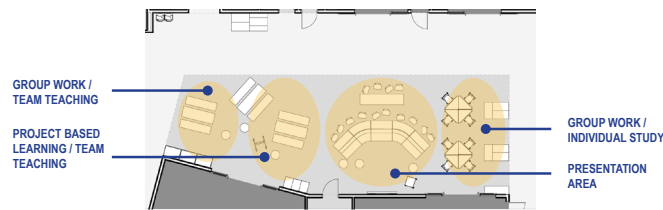
PASSIVE SURVEILLANCE & DAYLIGHT

This diagram of Building B illustrates the major egresses and interior windows for transparency between the learning areas. Operable partitions allow the learning community to expand their space into either adjoining learning studios or the learning commons. Interior windows allow for visual transparency and passive supervision. Doors connecting the learning spaces to the outdoors invites the opportunity to expand projects and learning outside, as well as providing additional security for the community. The windows all include solar shades which help limit direct sunlight while also adding playfulness to the facade through an ombré of color.

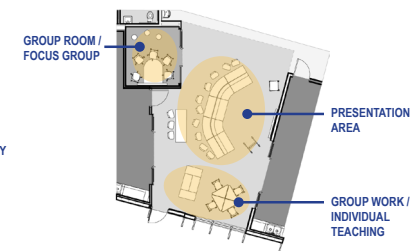
Wayfinding Color



KINDERGARTEN COMMONS



3RD - 5TH GRADE COMMONS



6TH-8TH COMMONS



AESTHETICS - WAYFINDING COLORS

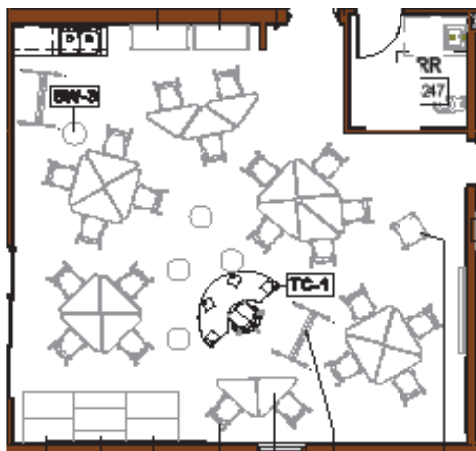
A large building can be overwhelming to young students; color is used to break down the scale of the campus and give each building a sense of identity. This allows the space to feel more intimate and personal. Each building is given its own distinct color palette, allowing students to identify with their building and giving them a sense of “graduation” as they move up through the campus eventually graduating into the second floor which houses the middle school.

DESIGN FLEXIBILITY & LEARNING MODALITIES

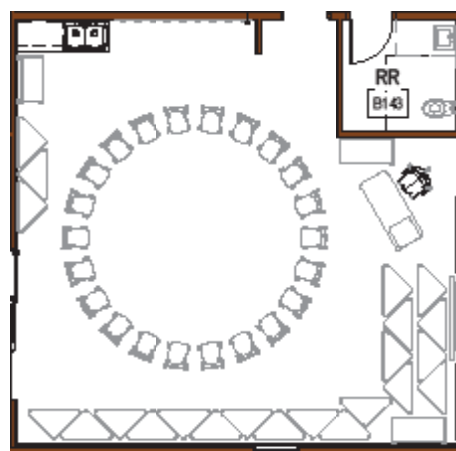
There is a large variety of furniture and equipment that allows the students and teachers to change the way the space looks and how it is used. (i.e. move furnishings, create spaces, display their own work etc.) The furnishings are flexible, easy to use and move and can be rearranged to adapt to different activities or needs. One of the varieties of furniture includes soft seating. A well-designed school will also provide a variety of areas that students can pick from depending upon their own personal preferences for the activity in question. The learning modalities are the basis for design of effective learning spaces.



TYPICAL STUDENT LAYOUT



MORNING CIRCLE LAYOUT



The first activity of every school day is “circle time,” where all students form a circle and allows the teacher to explore issues of concern. Also, it allows children to explore and address issues which concern them. It provides a structured mechanism for solving problems, in which all participants have an equal footing. This core value became a key element of design for each room and furniture selection.

IACA strives to promote the long-term development and success of all its students through its focus on physically and emotionally healthy students and lifestyles; a physically and emotionally safe learning environment for students and adults; challenging academics to equip students for successful transition to secondary education and beyond; active engagement in learning and connections to the school and broader community; and access to personalized learning supported by qualified and caring adults. The foundational elements of IACA's educational program include project-based learning; social and emotional learning and development; health and wellness; focus on growth mindset; family involvement; and multi-generational connections.

Adults in the school guide students not only in their academic endeavors but in their personal and behavioral growth. They teach students about respect by providing them freedom to make choices (and mistakes) within firm boundaries. As we nurture the whole child, we allow students to see the natural consequences of their behaviors and encourage them to make positive, respectful decisions going forward. Creating a culture of respect reaffirms each student's self-worth and helps them find their role in the larger, more diverse school community.

Project based learning (PBL) builds on a foundation of self-guided exploration and mastery as students progress through primary, intermediate, and middle grades. Students are presented with problems that have real world impact. In collaborative groups and with guidance from the teacher, they decide how to explore and/or research the problem; pose hypotheses to be proved or disproved; debate with team members; analyze data; and formulate solutions and draw conclusions. Lastly, students have the opportunity to hone their communication skills as the results of their projects are presented to the larger community.

Our comprehensive approach to social and emotional learning (SEL) is based on selected components of the Valor Compass model in conjunction with a comprehensive SEL curriculum. The goal of the Compass model is for students to “find their true north, balance their sharp minds and big hearts, and draw on their noble purpose as they take aligned actions in the world.” These concepts are directly modeled and taught through our social and emotional learning curriculum and are integrated throughout academic instruction and daily school activities. Attention to health and well-being will be evident throughout the campus. These include the importance of exercising the mind and body, making healthy food choices, and recognizing emotional indicators. Teachers, administrators, and students will be encouraged to develop school-wide, class, and/or personal goals to target particular health needs or areas requiring attention. The campus will have a gym, outdoor playground, and green space. The outdoor space can also be used to grow a vegetable garden or other outdoor projects promoting healthy lifestyles. Parents will receive regular updates on health and well-being through newsletters, the school's website, and family activities.

IACA strives to educate the hearts and minds of students and families in an environment where everyone belongs, works together, and thrives. In addition to encouraging parents to serve as resources for the school, we hope to be a valuable resource for our parents by providing programs targeted to their needs. As an inclusive school, our goal is for families to feel as much a part of the IACA community as do their children. We intend to actively recruit volunteers from the nearby retirement community as a way of fostering connections between our students and the seniors, establishing multigenerational relationships will benefit both children and adults.

To ensure the school's success, we have established a governing board of knowledgeable, highly dedicated individuals who are committed to bringing this unique educational choice option to the local community. Together they bring a diverse set of skills and experience that will support the pedagogical health of the educational program as well as the financial and organizational health of the school as a whole.



Inspired Environments, Empowered Minds

The strong academic performance at Ina A. Colen Academy affirms that the learning environment is meeting its intended goal. Student outcomes reflect not only effective instruction, but also the successful implementation of a broader educational vision—one that prioritizes engagement, equity, and growth. The alignment between space, pedagogy, and purpose is evident in how students are performing and progressing. Since opening in 2022, the school has maintained an A-rating, reinforcing the idea that thoughtful design can directly support lasting academic success. The results that follow illustrate the impact of that alignment in measurable terms.

“When it comes to individual school grades, 45 out of 50 schools maintained or improved their school grade over the 2022-2023 school year, which is an increase from 39 after the 2022-2023 school year.”

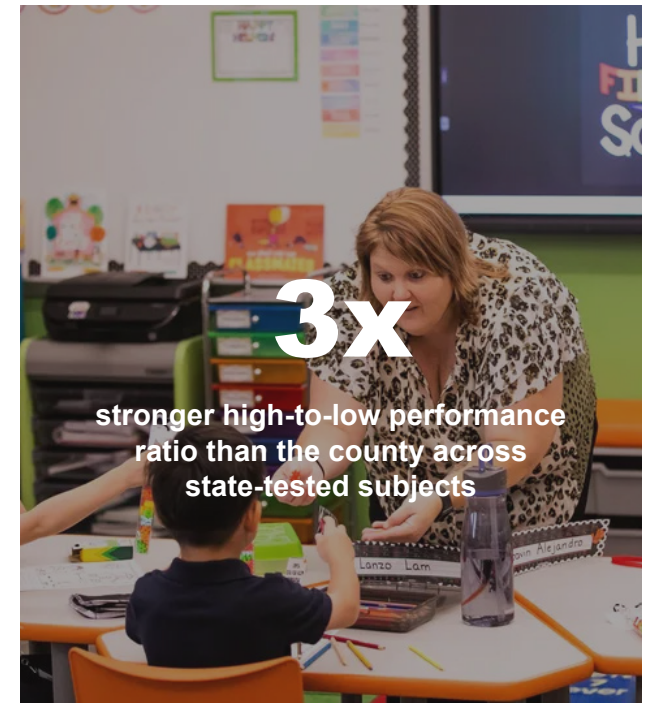
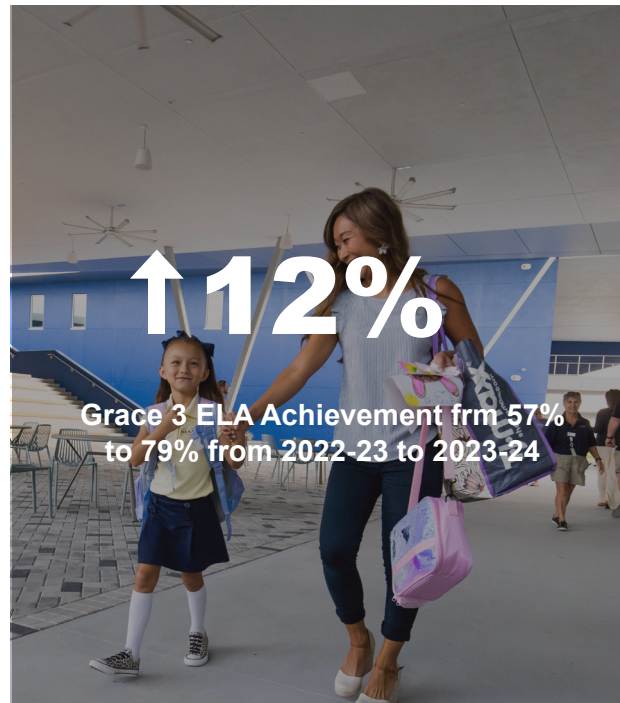
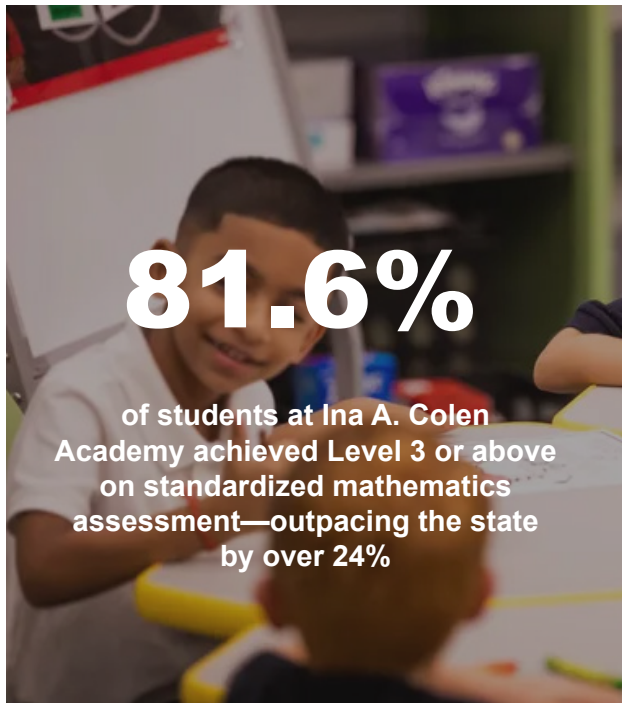
- District Representative

<https://www.ocalagazette.com/marion-countys-school-grades-are-in-see-how-each-scored-in-2023-24/>

““This is a well thought-out charter school that not only meets the academic standards of the Marion County Public School System, but could potentially exceed those standards.”

- Beth McCall, School Board Member

<https://www.ocala.com/story/sponsor-story/calesa-township/2021/04/05/new-family-friendly-master-planned-community-first-its-kind-ocala/4837116001/>





At Ina A. Colen Academy, students learn the importance of academics, personal development, and caring for one another - skills that can be applied in any future endeavor.