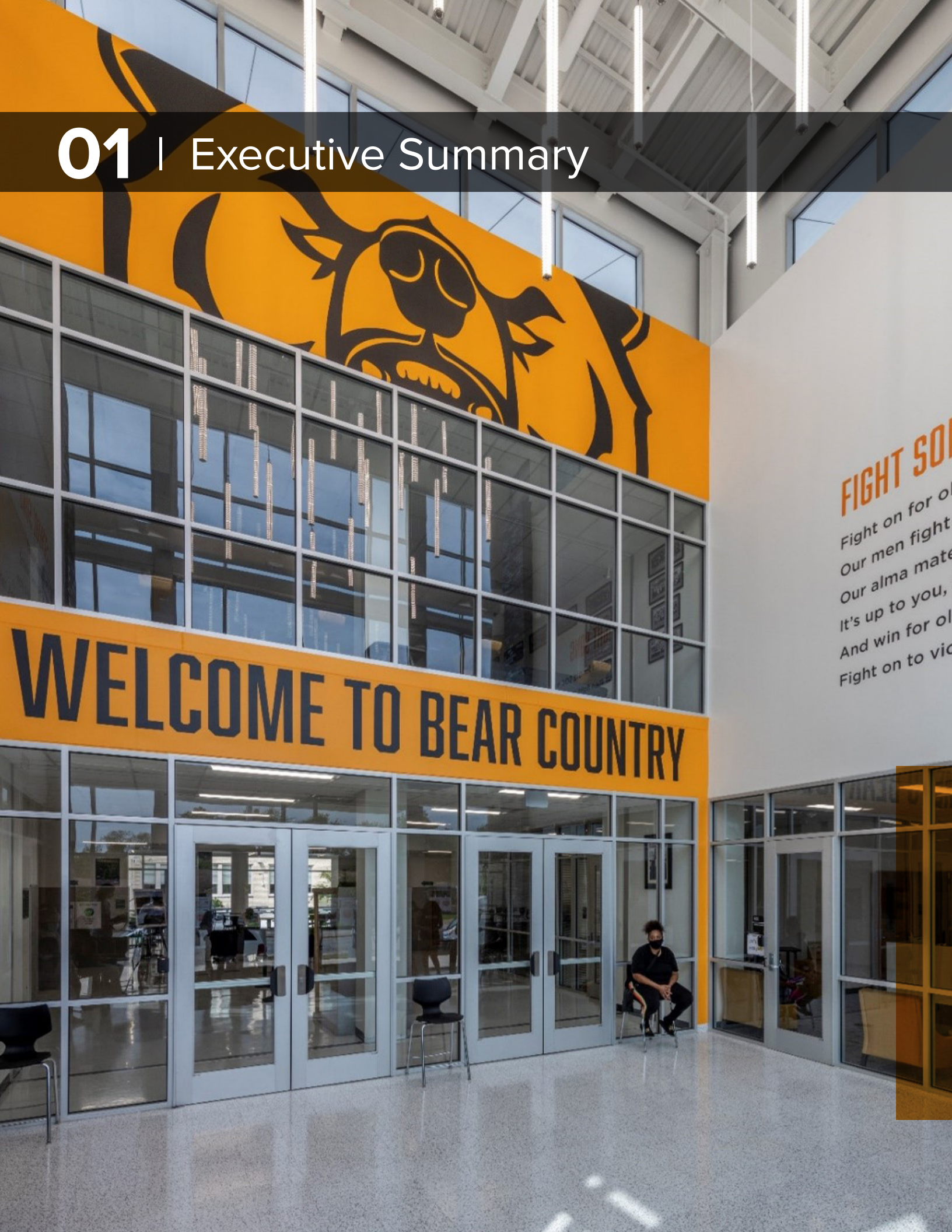




**South Oak Cliff High School**  
2025 James D. MacConnell Award



# 01 | Executive Summary



South Oak Cliff High School (SOC), originally constructed in the 1950s, stood as a longstanding educational institution in South Dallas. Over decades, the facility suffered severe infrastructure degradation, resulting in a student-led walkout in 2016 that gained national media attention. The protest shed light on the poor conditions, including leaky roofs, failing HVAC systems, gas leaks, pest infestations, and overall safety hazards.

In response to community advocacy and stakeholder engagement, the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) initiated a comprehensive renovation and expansion project to revitalize SOC into a state-of-the-art learning facility. The addition & renovation focuses on modern learning environments, enhanced athletic and fine arts facilities, and sustainable design elements.

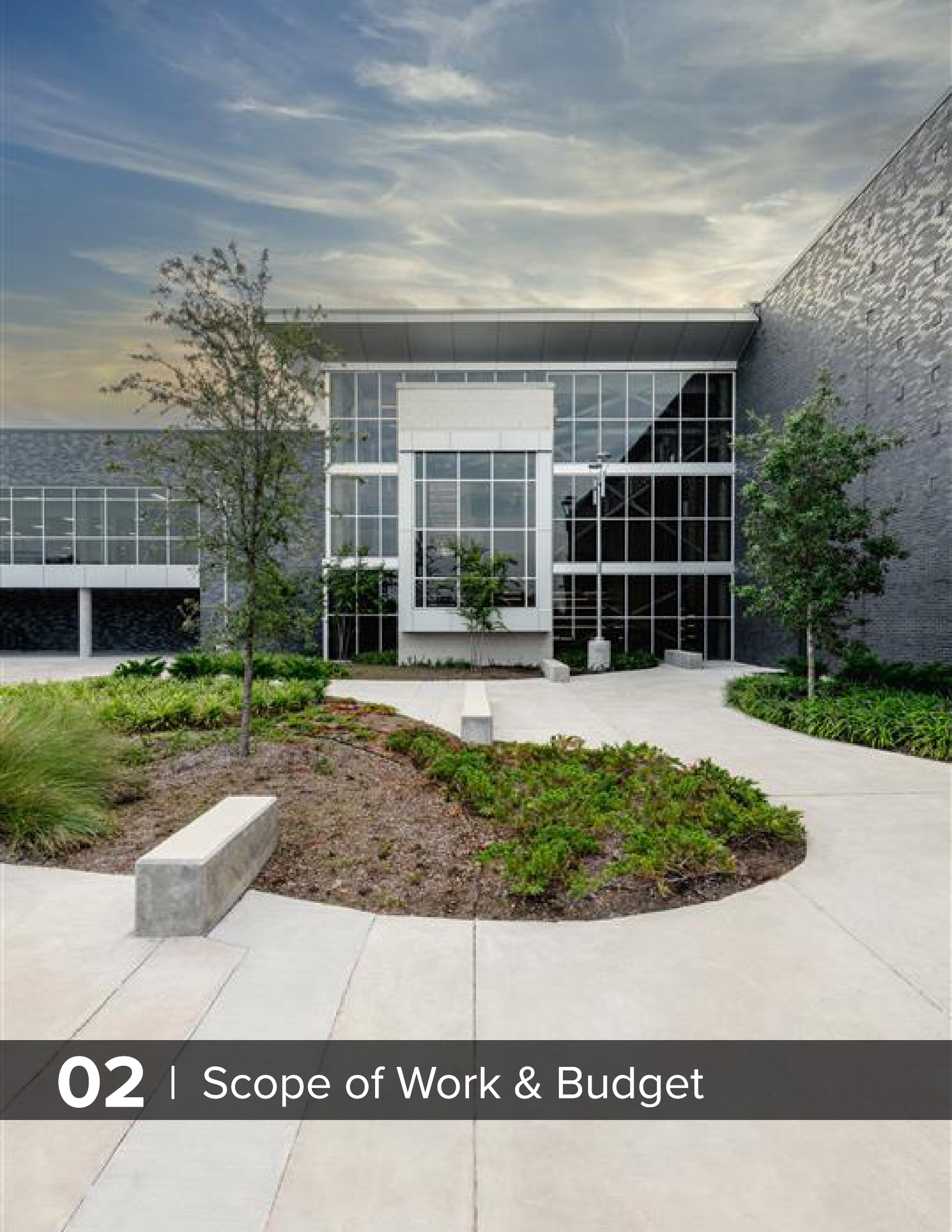


Through a highly collaborative design and planning process, SOC has been transformed into an equitable, future-ready school that fosters academic excellence, student engagement, and community pride. The new facility has improved student retention, increased enrollment, and positioned SOC as a model for educational equity in undeserved communities.

South Oak Cliff High School is situated in a historically undeserved, multi-generational community in South Dallas. Before the renovation, the school's deteriorating condition symbolized systemic neglect. The successful transformation of SOC was not just about infrastructure, it was about restoring community trust and ensuring educational equity.

The SOC project aimed to address decades of neglect and create an equitable, state-of-the-art learning environment. The project transformed an aging facility into a vibrant educational hub, increasing student enrollment, improving academic performance, and restoring community pride. The design balances historic preservation with modern educational strategies, ensuring a sustainable, adaptable, and inspiring environment for generations to come.





**EQUITY-DRIVEN TRANSFORMATION: A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ADVOCACY IN DESIGN**

South Oak Cliff High School's \$52 million renovation & addition was more than just a school upgrade—it set a precedent for equity in Dallas ISD and became a catalyst for reinvestment in historically underserved communities. The project represented a shift in how the district responded to schools in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods, which had long faced disparities in funding and resources compared to wealthier, predominantly white areas.

**PROJECT SIZE:**  
202,000 Sf Renovation  
60,000 Sf Addition

**CONSTRUCTION COST:**  
\$56 Million

**COMPLETION DATE:**  
May 2020

**CONSTRUCTION METHOD:**  
Competitive Sealed Proposal

**CORE VALUES**

**Equity and Inclusion:** The renovation directly addressed systemic neglect and reinvested in a historically underserved neighborhood.

**Community Engagement:** Students and community members became active drivers in the project's initiation and vision.

**Sustainability:** The site design integrates storm water management and energy efficiency to support long-term resilience.







## 03 | Research & Engagement

### CONTEXT

#### EDUCATIONAL INEQUITIES & ADVOCACY

The 2016 student walkout became a catalyst for transformative change, shifting attention to long-standing inequities in school infrastructure. The students used the word “Omaha” to symbolize the walkout, and this was later integrated into the design of the school to symbolize the change it triggered.

#### URBAN CONNECTIVITY & SITE INTEGRATION:

Improved pedestrian and public transit access, site connectivity, and visibility of the school.

#### HISTORICAL & SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND

SOC is located in South Dallas, Texas, a historically marginalized community with significant economic and educational disparities. The neighborhood has a high percentage of low-income households, with many families facing systemic barriers to resources and opportunities. The school has served as an anchor institution for the community since the 1950s, fostering multi-generational connections and local pride.



#### COMMUNITY

SOC is a generational school deeply embedded in South Dallas. Families remain in the neighborhood for generations, and SOC is seen as the “Mecca” of the community.

#### STAKEHOLDERS

- Students – Advocated for better conditions through protests.
- Parents & Alumni – Preserved legacy while seeking modernization.
- Dallas ISD – Funded and guided the project.
- Local Churches and Businesses - grounded the project with sense of community

The addition and renovations to South Oak Cliff High School addressed significant challenges, including severe infrastructure degradation and a community divided over whether to renovate the historic campus or pursue new construction. Recognizing the building’s deep cultural roots and historical significance, the design team embraced the opportunity to honor its legacy while transforming the space into a modern, high-performing educational environment. Leveraging the strength of a resilient community and a passionate alumni network, the project became more than a renovation—it became a symbol of restoration, unity, and renewed pride.



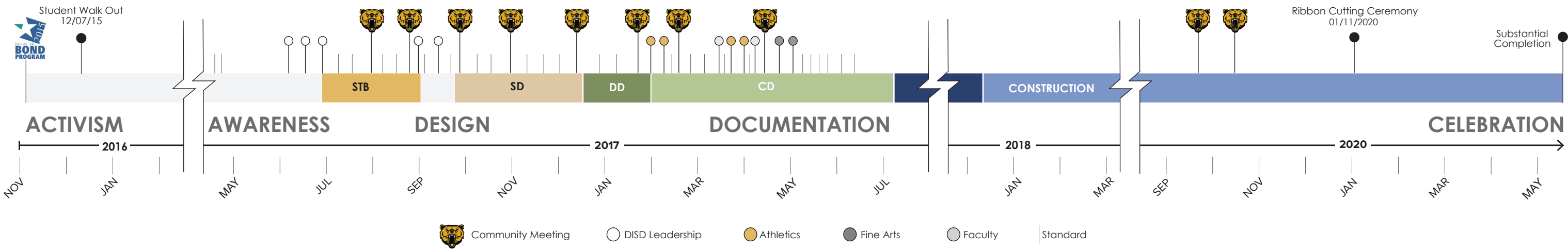
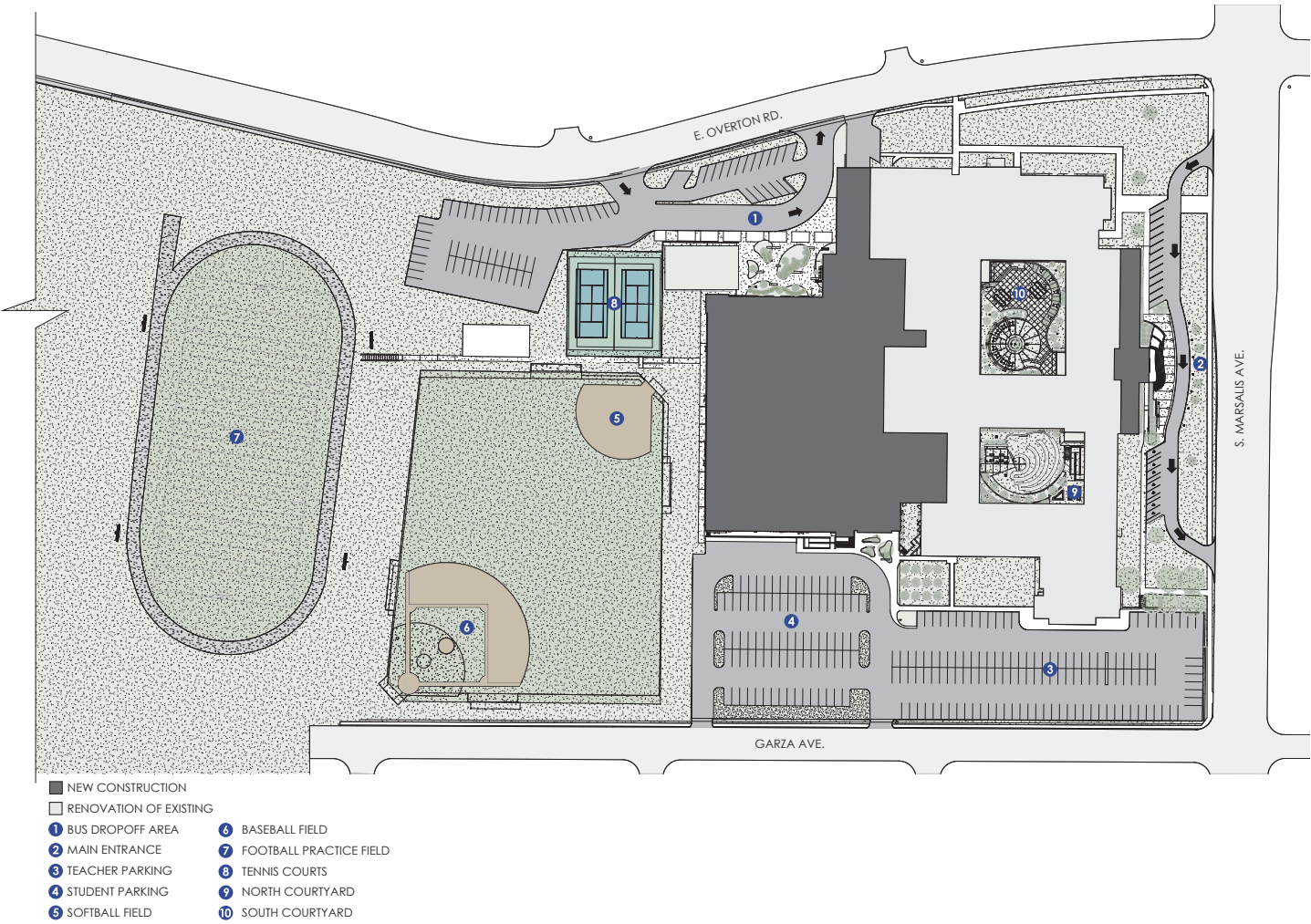
PROCESS



The visioning process for South Oak Cliff High School was centered on deep community engagement, with a series of inclusive sessions that ensured the design reflected the values of equity, cultural identity, and modern learning. Stakeholders—students, educators, alumni, and neighborhood leaders—were invited to share their voices, ultimately shaping a space that supports academic excellence while honoring the community’s legacy. This transparent, collaborative process restored trust in public investment and reinvigorated civic pride, proving that when communities are truly heard, transformative design follows.

**Community Engagement**  
Broad-based participation helped ensure that all voices were heard in decision-making.

The value gained through the transformation of South Oak Cliff High School extended far beyond upgraded facilities. The project became a catalyst for healing and empowerment—restoring community confidence in public education, affirming the neighborhood’s worth, and creating a learning environment that students are proud to call their own. It demonstrated that equitable design can spark social change, turning a long-neglected campus into a beacon of hope, achievement, and opportunity for generations to come.





**PRE-DESIGN & COMMUNITY ADVOCACY (2015-2016)**

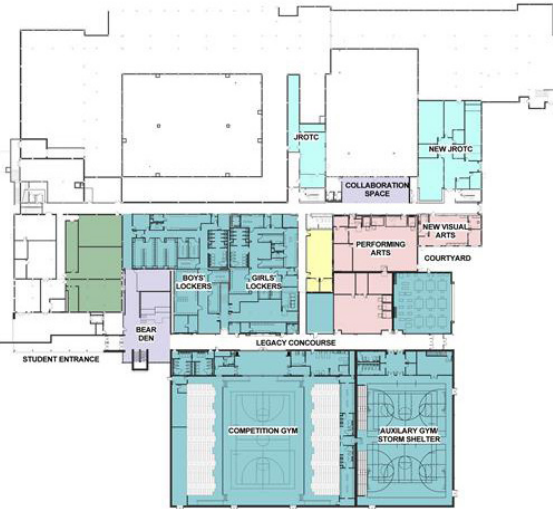
- December 2015: Students organized a walkout to protest unsafe and inadequate learning conditions, gaining national media coverage.
- April 2016: An initial design charrette was held with community leaders, alumni, and Dallas ISD to discuss the future of SOC.
- 2016-2017: Multiple community meetings and school board discussions took place to refine the project vision and secure funding.

**DESIGN & BUDGET APPROVAL (2017-2018)**

- Initial Budget: \$9 million allocated through Dallas ISD’s bond program.
- Advocacy & Adjustments: Due to ongoing community engagement, the budget was increased to \$42 million, eventually reaching \$56 million.
- Final Design Approved: In collaboration with students, educators, and architects, a plan was finalized to integrate flexible learning spaces, modern infrastructure, and community-oriented areas.

**CONSTRUCTION & IMPLEMENTATION (2018-2020)**

- 2018: Groundbreaking took place, marking the beginning of construction.
- May 2020: Major renovations completed, including STEM labs, athletic facilities, and the Legacy Concourse.
- January 2020: A ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrated the transformation, with over 1,500 alumni, students, and faculty in attendance.
- August 2020: Full occupancy and the official opening of the renovated campus.





## 04 | Physical Environment

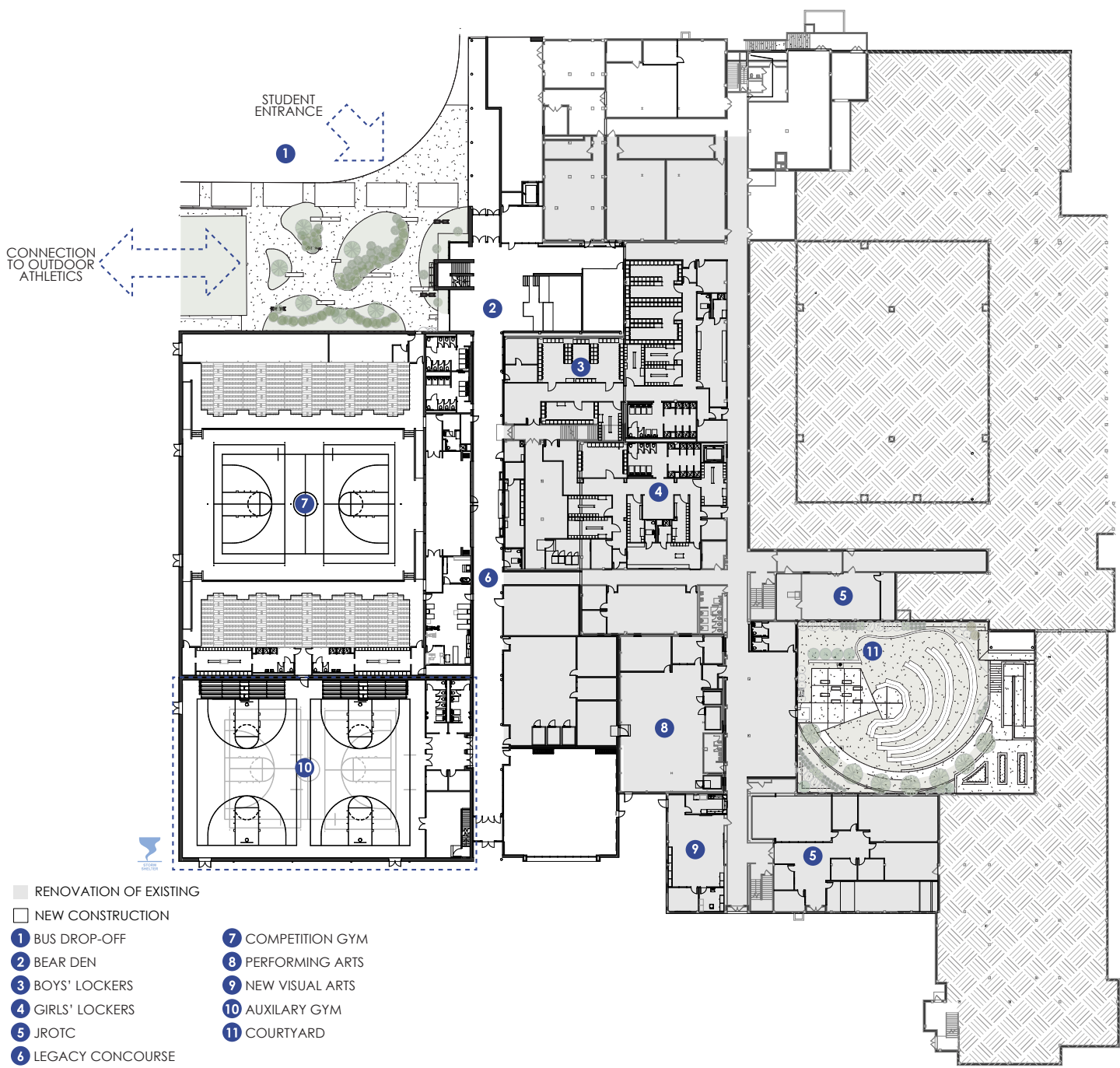
At South Oak Cliff High School, the physical environment was completely re-imagined to reflect the community's resilience, pride, and aspirations for the future. Faced with the dual challenge of deteriorating infrastructure and a divided public debate over renovation versus new construction, the project leaned into the strength of the community itself. Through an inclusive visioning process that prioritized equity and modern learning, the design team worked hand-in-hand with students, alumni, educators, and local leaders to shape a campus that honors the past while preparing for the future.

The redesigned campus also emphasizes community integration. At its heart is the Legacy Concourse, a museum-like spine displaying historical artifacts and student milestones, reinforcing a deep connection between past and present. Outdoor courtyards were re-imagined as flexible spaces for learning, performance, and neighborhood events, extending the educational environment beyond the classroom walls.





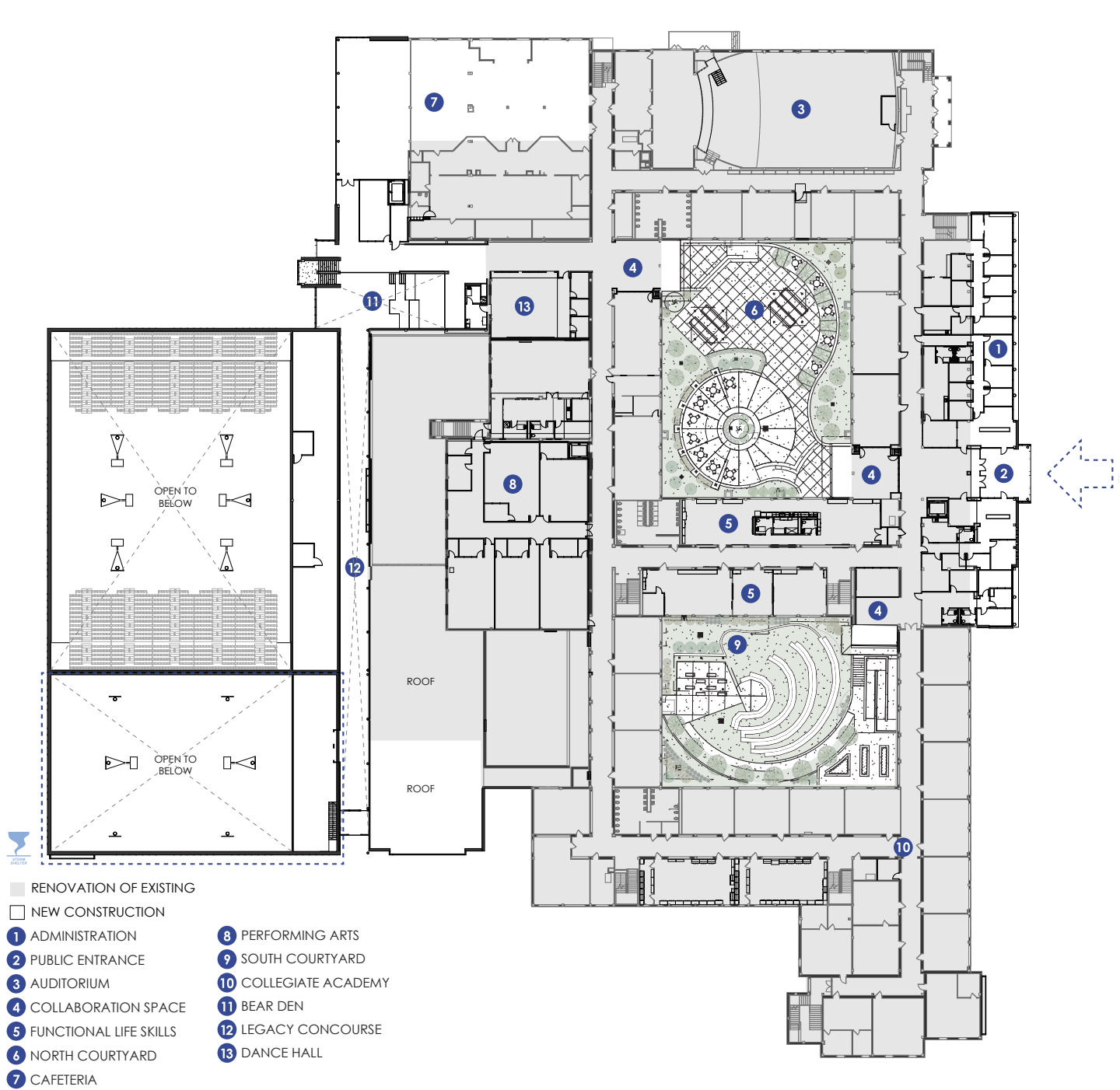
LOWER LEVEL



Behind the scenes, critical facility upgrades provide lasting value: new HVAC systems, LED lighting, and sustainable insulation enhance energy efficiency; a campus-wide water filtration system ensures clean, safe drinking water; and durable, low-maintenance materials like CMU block and high-resilience flooring reduce long-term costs while standing up to daily use.

Academically, the school now features state-of-the-art STEM classrooms and interdisciplinary learning environments that encourage collaboration and innovation. Expanded fine arts facilities offer students

MAIN LEVEL



new avenues for creative expression, while athletic and extracurricular enhancements—including a 2,000-seat competition gym, a new weight training center, and a storm-hardened auxiliary gym—support student health, achievement, and safety.

Together, these improvements tell a story of transformation—where meaningful community input shaped a campus that is not only functional and future-ready, but a bold symbol of pride, equity, and



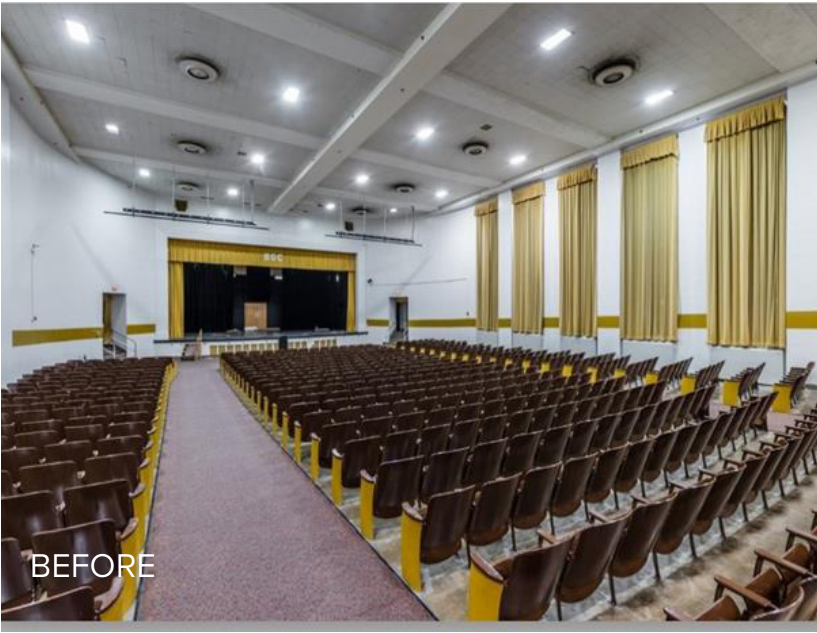
Athletics have long been a source of pride and identity at South Oak Cliff High School, but outdated facilities once limited the full potential of its student-athletes. The recent renovation removed those barriers, creating high-performance spaces worthy of the school’s talent and legacy.



At the heart of this transformation is the Legacy Concourse, a statement that connects the social stair to the new athletic additions. It’s a celebration of excellence, showcasing student achievements, historical milestones, and the stories of legendary alumni & educators who helped shape the school’s cultural legacy.

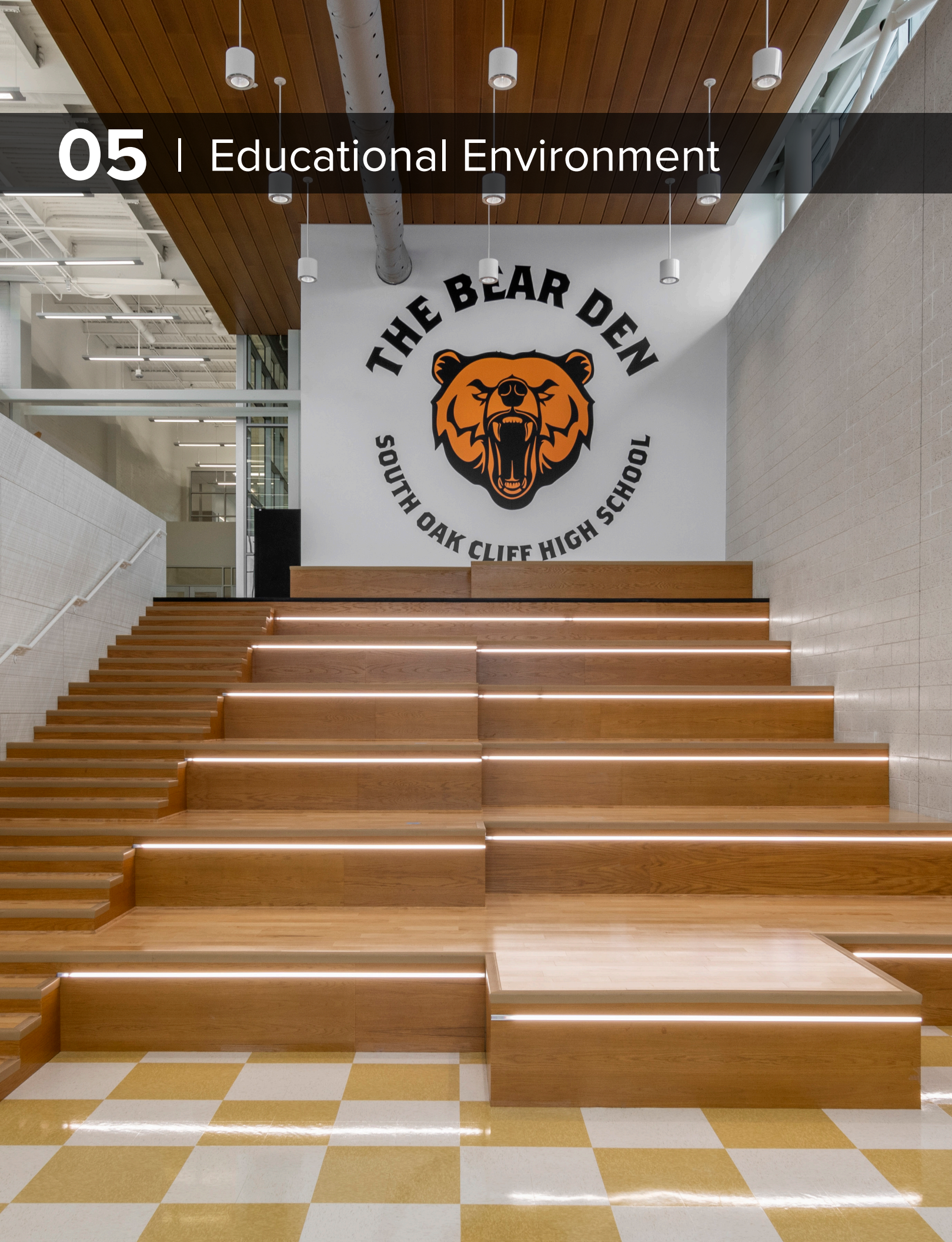
This physical and symbolic connection reinforces the idea that athletics are not separate from academics or community values—they are deeply intertwined. The new facilities now reflect the caliber of the students who use them, enabling South Oak Cliff to nurture the next generation of champions, both on and off the field.

The renovation of South Oak Cliff High School integrates sustainable and resilient design strategies that support long-term performance and community safety. Key features include storm-resistant construction in critical areas like the auxiliary gym, energy-efficient HVAC systems to reduce operational costs, and natural lighting enhancements that boost student well-being while minimizing the need for artificial light. Together, these elements ensure the campus is both environmentally responsible and prepared for future climate challenges.





# 05 | Educational Environment



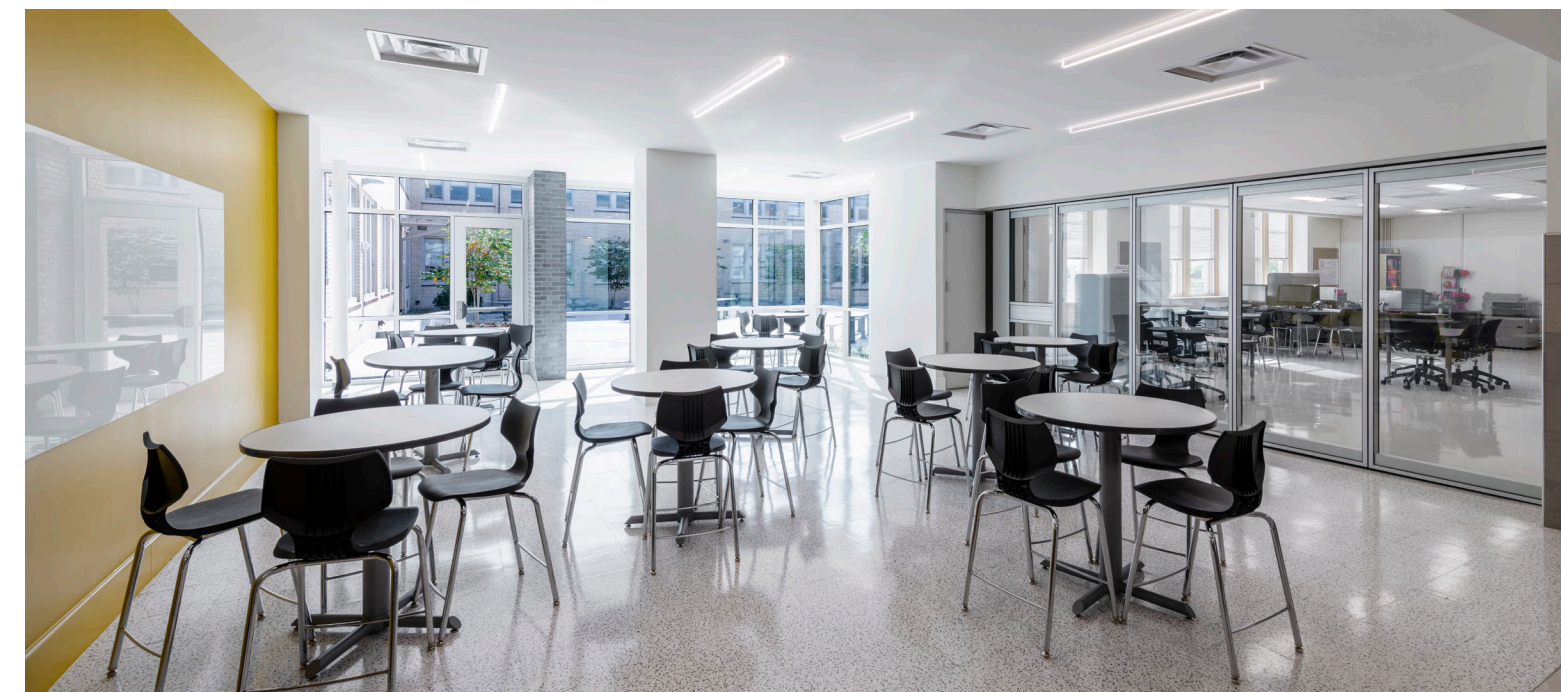
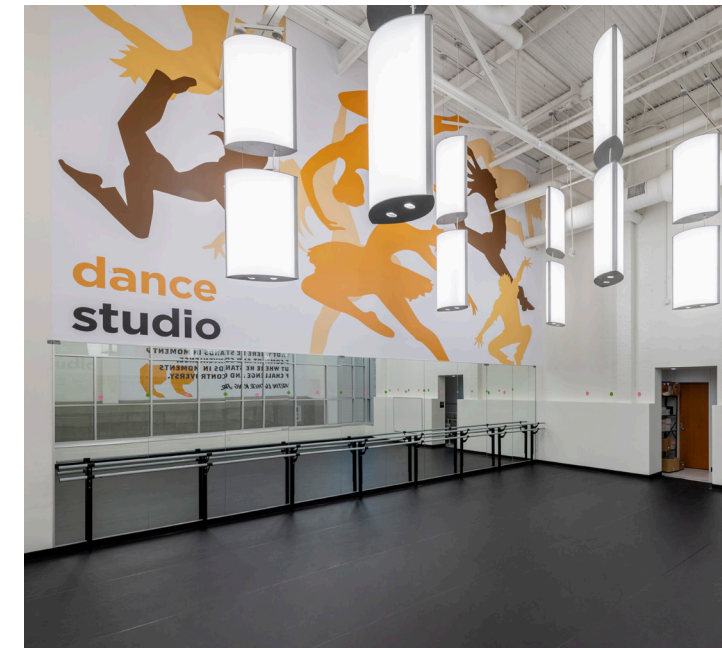
## DESIGNING FOR ACADEMICS, ATHLETICS, AND MENTAL HEALTH

The re-imagined South Oak Cliff High School campus is a model of holistic student wellness, purposefully designed to nurture the mind, body, and spirit. At its core, the redesign fuses rigorous academics with high-performance athletics and mental wellness support through intentional spatial design.

Modern academic environments include Career & Technical Education (CTE) labs and collaborative learning hubs that encourage hands-on exploration and peer-to-peer engagement. These are complemented by adaptive features like the Learning Stair—a dynamic space that functions as a lecture area, informal gathering zone, and performance venue—supporting a range of learning styles and group sizes.

Physical wellness is championed through state-of-the-art athletic facilities, including a 2,500-seat competition gym and an auxiliary gym that also functions as a community storm shelter. Outdoor courtyards extend the classroom experience, providing calming, flexible environments for both instruction and reflection.

Every design decision was made with adaptability, safety, and student success in mind, resulting in a campus that responds to academic demands, fosters physical health, and supports emotional well-being in an ever-changing world.





The transformation of South Oak Cliff High School prioritizes educational environments that align with modern curriculum needs and foster long-term adaptability. Central to the renovation was the reclamation of underutilized and neglected spaces, re-imagined as vibrant, flexible areas that support creativity, collaboration, and hands-on learning.

Two previously overlooked courtyards were converted into dynamic outdoor learning environments, offering students fresh air and natural light while supporting project-based instruction and informal gathering. A new learning amphitheater was introduced to promote interactive teaching styles and encourage student participation across disciplines.

Inside the school, classrooms now feature flexible layouts with movable furniture to accommodate a range of instructional strategies, from traditional lectures to group-based learning. Technology-rich environments—including smart classrooms, STEM labs, and interactive learning staircases—equip students with tools essential for success in the 21st century.

The expansion of fine arts and career & technical education (CTE) spaces, including dedicated choral rooms, hands-on training labs, and an enhanced auditorium, ensures that students have access to a broad, enriched curriculum that prepares them for both college and career pathways. This comprehensive approach to reclaiming space reflects a deep commitment to educational innovation, equity, and future-ready learning.



**Student-Centered Design:**

Each space is designed to foster a safe, inspiring, and supportive student experience. The collaborative learning environments are anchored to the student courtyards to support varied modalities, from group collaboration to individual focus.







## 06 | Results

The South Oak Cliff project demonstrated that aging schools in historically marginalized communities could be modernized to the same standards as those in wealthier areas. After the renovation, Dallas ISD made equitable investments in schools like Kimball, Carter, and Roosevelt High Schools.

For decades, disparities in Dallas ISD mirrored larger racial and economic inequalities in the city. South Oak Cliff's transformation became symbolic of a long-overdue reckoning with these issues, demonstrating that students in Black and Latino communities deserved the same educational opportunities as their peers in wealthier neighborhoods. The project inspired discussions on equity beyond facilities, including curriculum enhancements, teacher recruitment, and support services in historically underserved schools.

"Us as students, us coming together. You know we got something done. We got people to listen to us, and us standing out and standing up for ourselves and what we believe in got us this school."  
- Former Student Leader, Lizzett Godinez



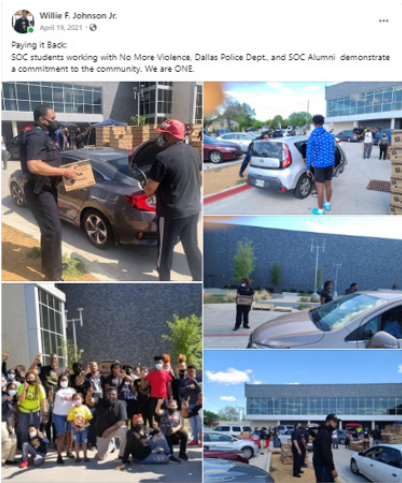


**DISTRICT & COMMUNITY IMPACT:**

- Model for Future Renovations: SOC’s transformation influenced DISD’s commitment to equity-driven infrastructure investments.
- Strengthened School-Community Bonds: The school now functions as a multi-use facility supporting educational and cultural events.
- Value of the process and project to the community: SOC now functions as a “Town Center”, hosting community activities, alumni events, and extracurricular programs beyond school hours.

**UNEXPECTED ACHIEVEMENTS:**

- National Media Attention: Coverage in Texas Monthly and Texas Standard influenced broader policy discussions on school equity.
- Inspired Similar Projects: The success of SOC led to increased funding for other underserved schools in Dallas.



**STUDENT ENROLLMENT INCREASE:** Students transferred back into SOC as enrolment increased immediatly from 900 to over 1,300 students.

**HIGHER TEACHER RETENTION:** Improved working conditions fostered stronger faculty engagement.

**REVITALIZED SCHOOL SPIRIT:** In 2021 SOC football team won its first state championship in 60+ years, boosting morale and community pride. Then SOC went on to win back to back state football championships.

“This is the Mecca of the community. It motivates people and our stakeholders to come and be more involved in our school activity.”

-Principal Dr. William Johnson

**South Oak Cliff didn’t just make history. It rewrote the narrative around inner-city schools**

South Oak Cliff winning a state football championship wasn't just a rarity for Dallas, but for inner-city schools across the board.



State Sen. Royce West (left), Dallas ISD Superintendent Michael Hinojosa and South Oak Cliff head coach Jason Todd pose for a photo after winning the Class 5A Division II state championship game at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Saturday, Dec. 18, 2021. South Oak Cliff defeated Liberty Hill 23-14 for Dallas ISD's first title since 1958. (Elias Valverde II/The Dallas Morning News) (Elias Valverde II / Staff Photographer)

