

# LEWIS C. CASSIDY ACADEMICS PLUS

Philadelphia, PA

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**EWING  
COLE**

**SALT** DESIGN  
STUDIO

**DM** DAVID MASON  
+ ASSOCIATES

**||| PERRYMAN  
SHOEMAKER**



THE SCHOOL DISTRICT OF  
PHILADELPHIA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Designed to set a **new standard** for education in Philadelphia, Lewis C. Cassidy Elementary School is a dynamic, LEED Gold-certified PreK-8 facility that supports 21st-century learning while fostering deep community connections. The 83,000-square-foot school serves 570 students and replaces an outdated early 20th-century building with a flexible, technology-integrated environment tailored for modern pedagogy.

The design overcomes the previous school's spatial and technological limitations by incorporating collaborative learning spaces, a central student common ("the canyon"), and a state-of-the-art media center. The layout **maximizes daylight**, improves circulation, and supports diverse learning styles with specialized STEAM-focused classrooms, maker spaces, and a discovery common. **Biophilic design** and intuitive color-coded wayfinding buttresses the welcoming, inspiring environment.

Outdoor areas extend learning **beyond the classroom**, with a biophilic playground, a green roof, and stormwater gardens that enhance sustainability and student wellness. **Community engagement** is central to the design, ensuring the school's assembly spaces, gymnasium, and outdoor areas serve as neighborhood assets.

By prioritizing inclusivity, sustainability, and innovation, Cassidy Elementary establishes itself as a "**school of choice**," shaping the future of education in Philadelphia while enriching the surrounding community.



## SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

Design Capacity: **570 Students**

Building Area: **83,000 SF**

(Replacing an existing 1924 school building.)

Key Features: **New Schoolyard & Playground**  
**LEED-Gold Facility**  
**21st Century Learning Spaces**

Construction Cost: **\$55.2M**



## KEY GOALS

■ Provide students with advanced educational opportunities and safe learning environments.

■ Create learning environments that support innovative approaches to instruction and promote collaboration and inclusion.

■ Provide spaces that allow for students to work and reflect quietly.

■ Create a new urban center that merges with the local community.

■ Elicit pride in students, parents, teachers and the community.

■ Optimize sustainable design and occupant wellness.



## KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The design team engaged with the following stakeholders throughout the design, development, and construction process.

■ The School District of Philadelphia Office of Capital Programs

■ Lewis C Cassidy Academics Plus School:  
 Head Principal  
 Administrative Staff  
 Current and Past Teachers  
 Current and Past Students

■ Overbrook Residents:  
 Parents  
 Alumni  
 Neighbors

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics from the 2025-2026 school year:

**344**

Students Served Over  
the Full Year

**88%**

Black

**85%**

Students Identified as  
Economically Disadvantaged

**8%**

Hispanic

**44%**

Students Living  
in Poverty

**2%**

Multiracial

**25%**

Students with  
IEPs

**1%**

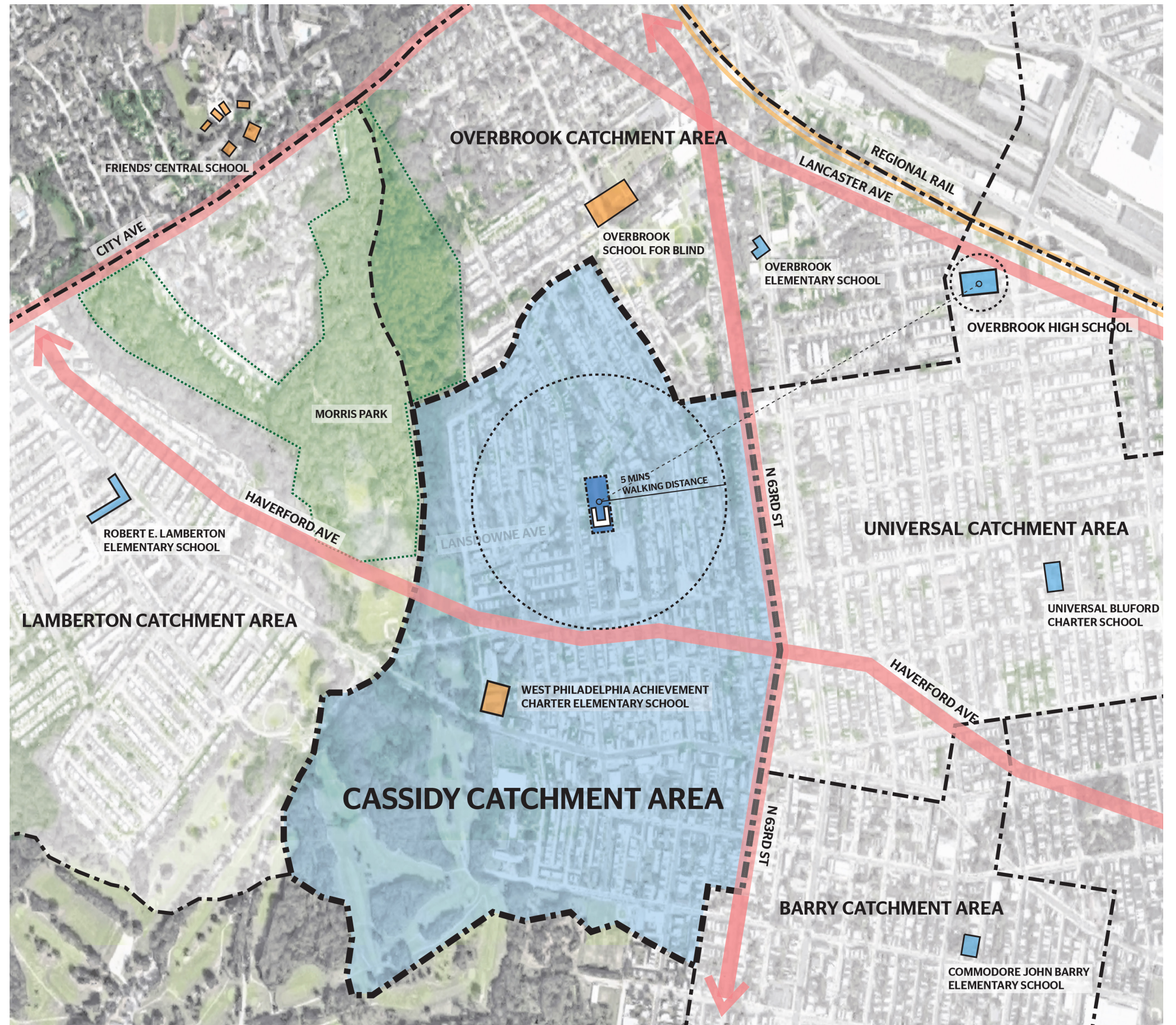
Asian/Pacific  
Islander

**7%**

English Language  
Learners

**1%**

White



# SCHOOL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

## Existing School Building

Built in 1924 the Colonial Revival building was added to the National Register of History Places in 1988. However, in more recently history the buildings condition worsened to a dangerous state. The existing Lewis C. Cassidy school was featured in a 2018 Philadelphia Inquirer article 'Toxic City, Sick Schools', in which the reporter outlines unsafe levels of lead, asbestos, and other harmful materials present in school buildings. In addition to the unsafe learning environments, the existing school building layout was not conducive to the 21st Century Learning standards that the School District of Philadelphia planned to implement throughout the district.

In preliminary studies the design team explored the possibility of renovating the existing facility. However, following conversations with the school district and surrounding community it became clear the best path forward was to start fresh with a brand new building.

“Perhaps the most toxic school in the Philadelphia system is an elementary school in Overbrook called Lewis C. Cassidy Academics Plus.”

-Philadelphia Inquirer, 2018 Article 'Toxic City, Sick Schools'

Lewis C. Cassidy Academics Plus School is located within the Overbrook Park neighborhood of West Philadelphia. With a catchment admissions system many members of the community are alumni of school. Their passion for their community & their students was at the forefront of every conversation.

The design team initiated the planning process in June 2020 during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite restrictions, the design team consistently engaged with SDP administrators, teachers, and community members through virtual meetings for two years. This collaborative approach ensured that the final design addressed diverse needs and reflected community values and aspirations. The outline below describes the general organization of the virtual community meetings held throughout the design and documentation process:

### 1 Visioning

#### Listening

The purpose of the visioning session was to listen & learn. This session was the first connection between the community and the design team. The community members were invited to share their goals and priorities for the new school.

### 3 Programming

#### Listening

During programming the design team spearheaded a conversation focused on spaces targeted for community use during non-school hours. This conversation guided the design team in planning & programming these spaces to best serve the students and the community.

### 2 Site Organization

#### Workshop

This session focused on site access and organization. The design team presented initial site plan configurations and invited the community members to share input & feedback.

### 4 Planning & Design

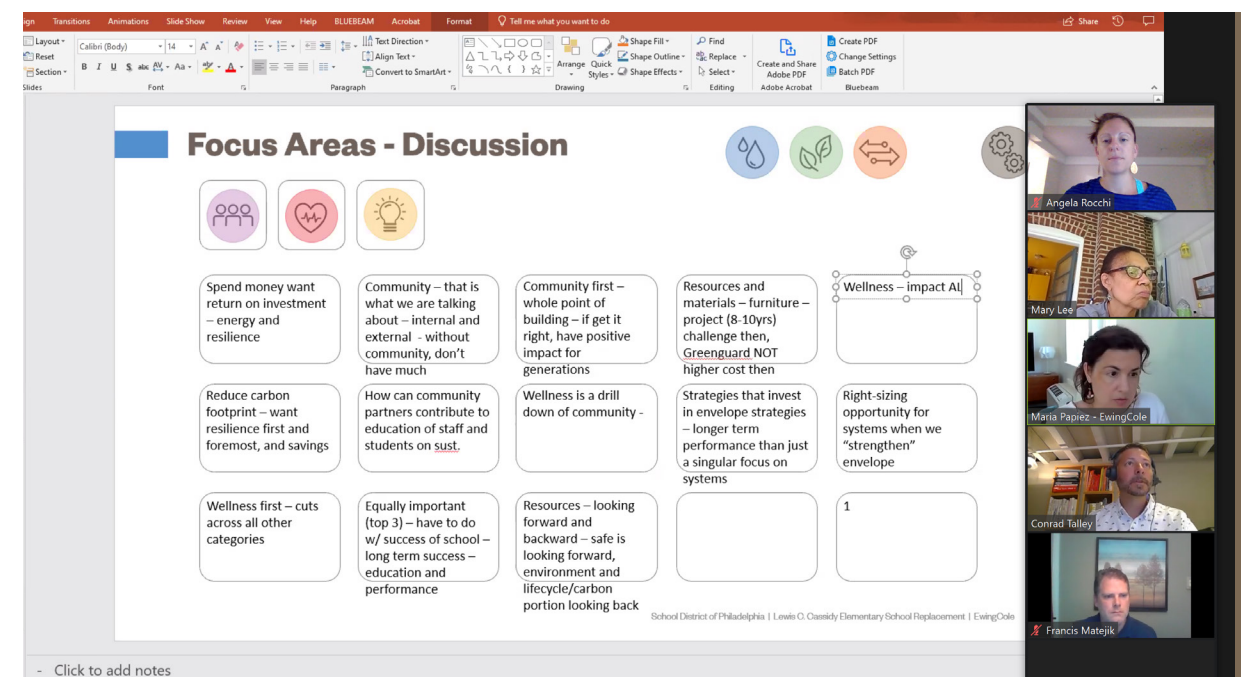
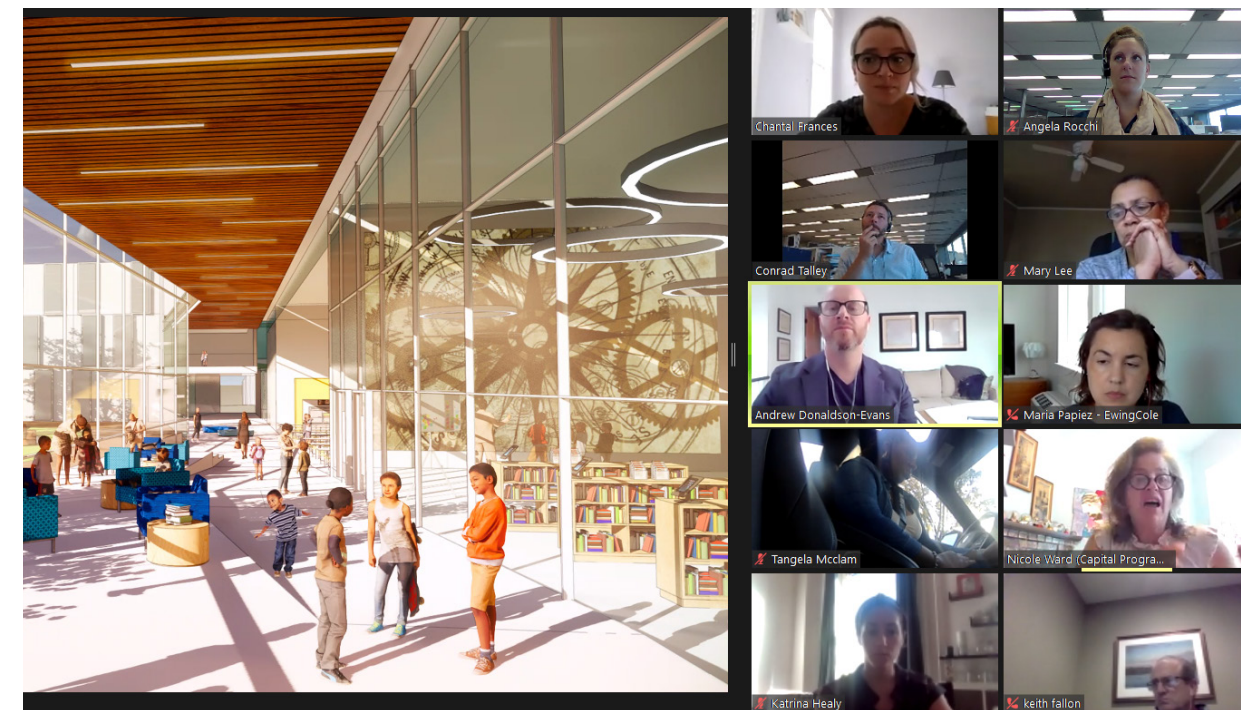
#### Workshop

In these workshops the design team presented plans and renderings to the community members. The feedback received was then integrated into the final design.

“We really take pride in the new building and I’m so glad that we were a part of this,” - Yaszmeen Muhammad, Teacher



JESSICA GRIFFIN / Staff Photographer  
Students are dismissed for the day at Lewis C. Cassidy Academics Plus School in Overbrook, one of a dozen Philadelphia schools that are so dilapidated it would cost almost as much to fix it as it would to raze and replace it.

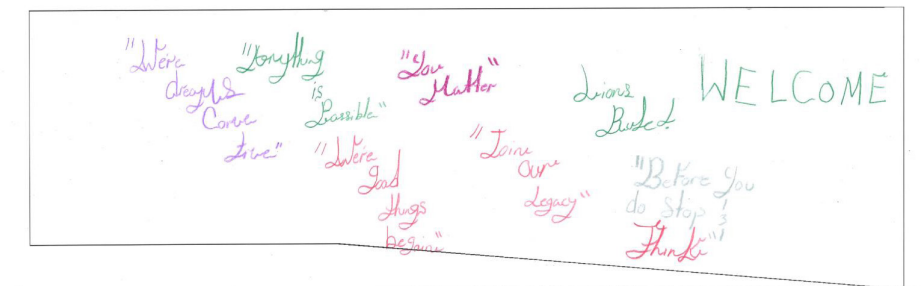
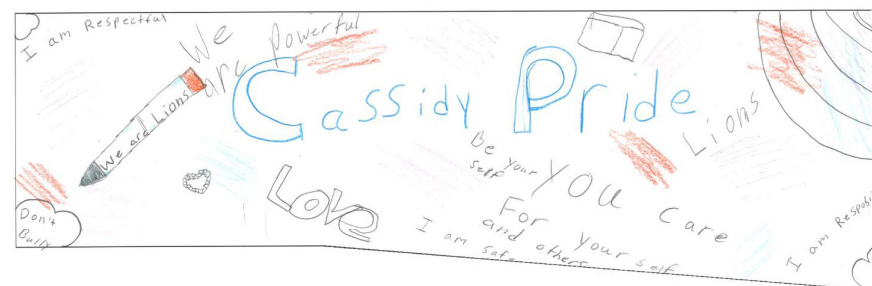
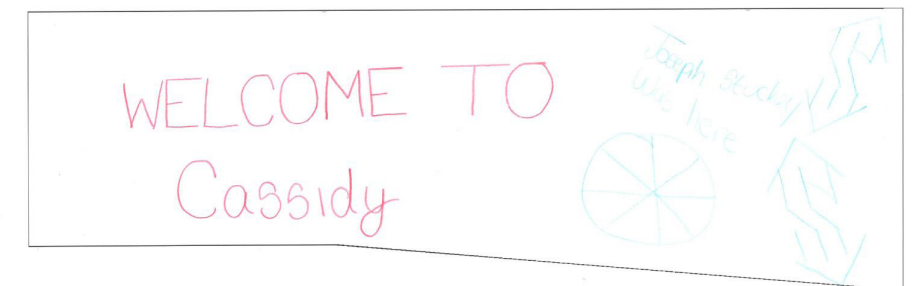
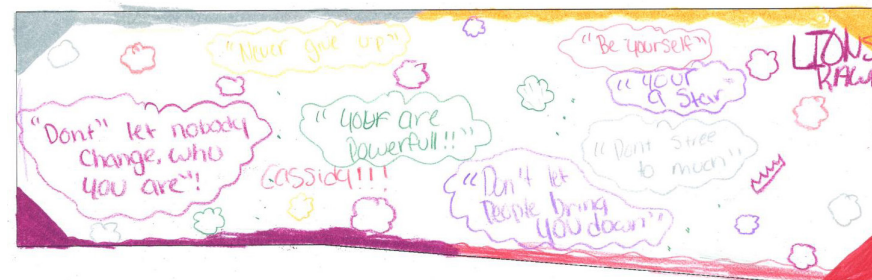
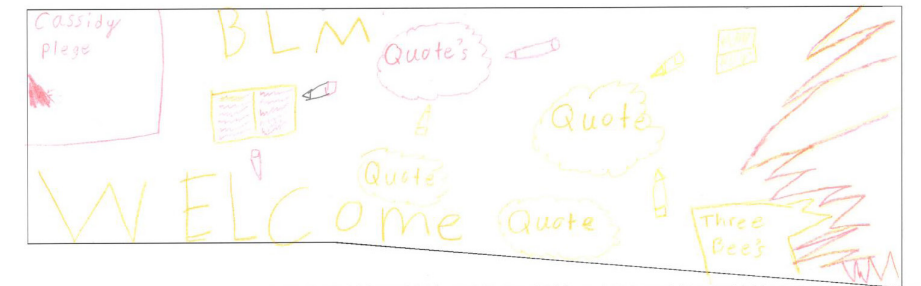




## STUDENTS IMPACT

In 2017, a class of Cassidy fourth-grade students wrote letters to their local state representative regarding the conditions of their school building. One student in particular, Chelsea Mungo shared, "Every day I go to school, I feel like I'm in a prison or a junkyard." These letters encouraged local representatives to prioritize funding for a new school for Chelsea & her classmates. The photo included on the top left includes Chelsea Mungo and State Senator Vincent Hughes at the grand opening of the new Lewis C. Cassidy Elementary School in August 2024.

Understanding the impact the students had on bringing this project to life, the design team knew it was critical to have their input in the design. Following the virtual community focus group meetings the design team held an in-person design session with Cassidy students. This session focused on **graphic design and school pride**. The students were invited to sketch their ideas. This conversation brought to the forefront an interest in **words of affirmation and positive language** throughout the school. The design team integrated these ideas into the final design with experiential graphics and large format text throughout the building. Featured below are a few examples of the **students sketches** from the design workshop.

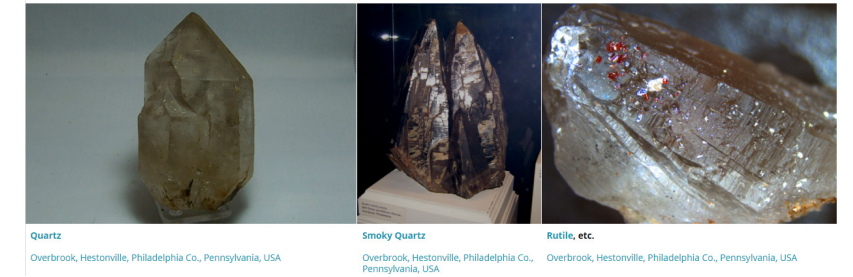
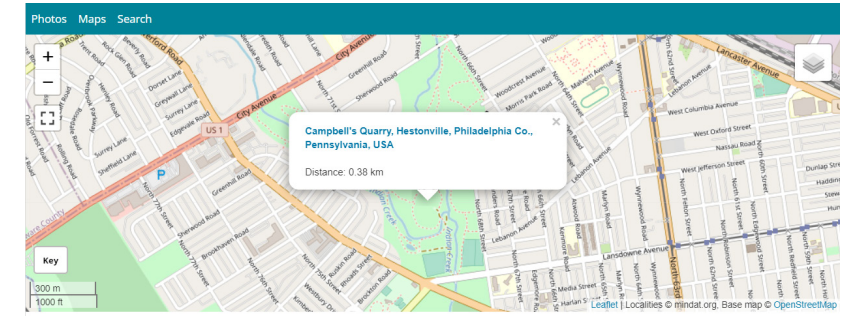


# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The school is set back from Lansdowne Avenue, reducing its apparent scale amidst the adjacent houses and preserving usable outdoor space. This thoughtful placement integrates the school into the community while **providing a safe inner play area for students**. Careful attention to site identity and viewsheds ensures that the school is perceived as a welcoming and **integral part of the neighborhood**, with open sightlines creating safe and nurturing outdoor spaces.

The site design ensures access for all users, with pathways connecting the school to local transit stops and accommodating both pedestrian and vehicular traffic. The schoolyard and parking areas are inclusive, featuring ADA-compliant pathways and play equipment to ensure that all students can participate in outdoor activities.

The site is nestled between expansive greenery of Morris Park and the city-scape of West Philadelphia. The split-volume massing references back to a historic quartz quarry of Morris Park. The Cassidy exterior design mimics a cut quartz stone with a muted exterior and a vibrant interior. This allows for a blend of subtle, grey brick facing the community, and playful & colorful metal panel facing the school yard.



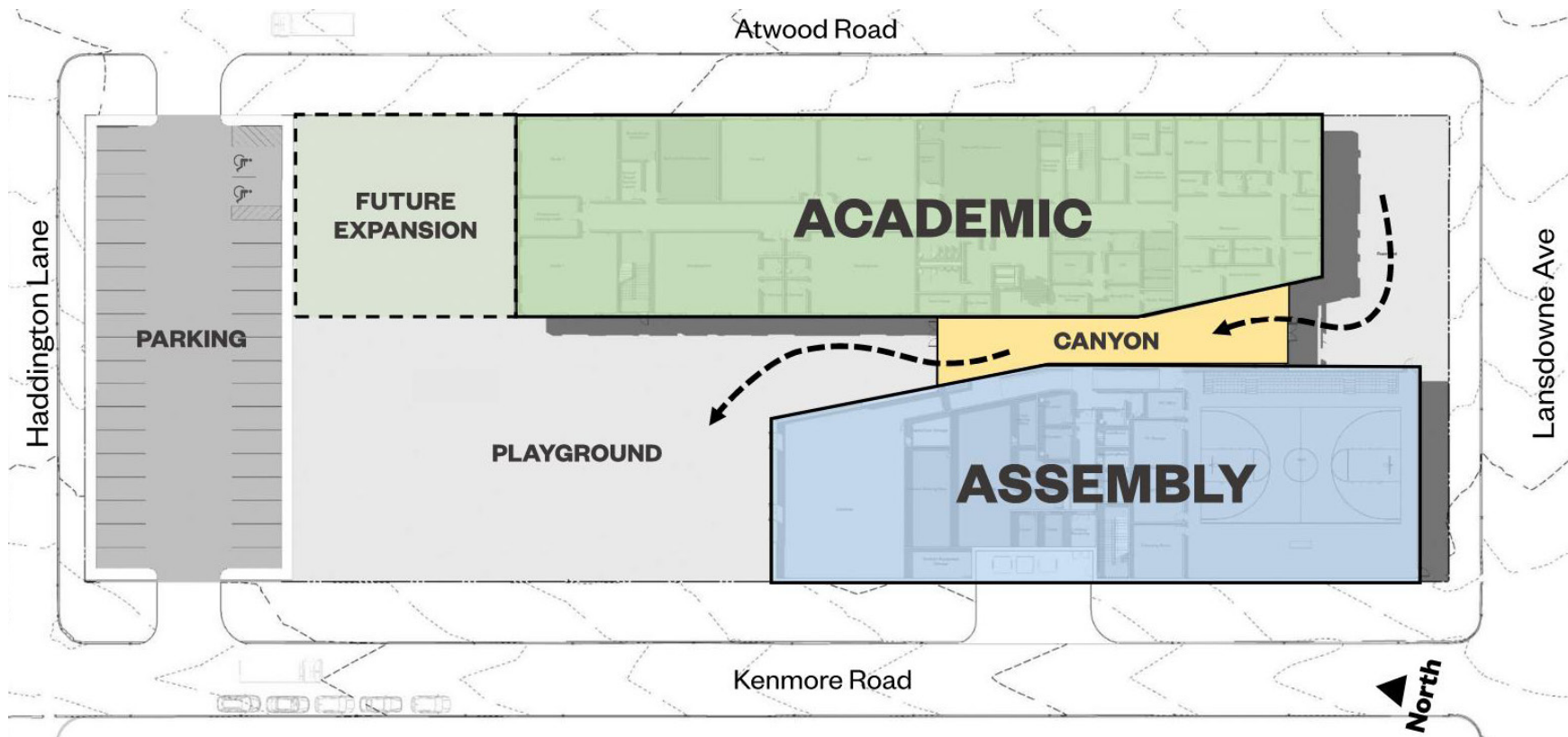
The photos to the left capture the surrounding community, featuring 2-3 story residences, sidewalks, street parking, and specifically along the edges of the school building site, large historic street trees. The trees lining the site offer a green buffer between the small-scale residences and larger school building.



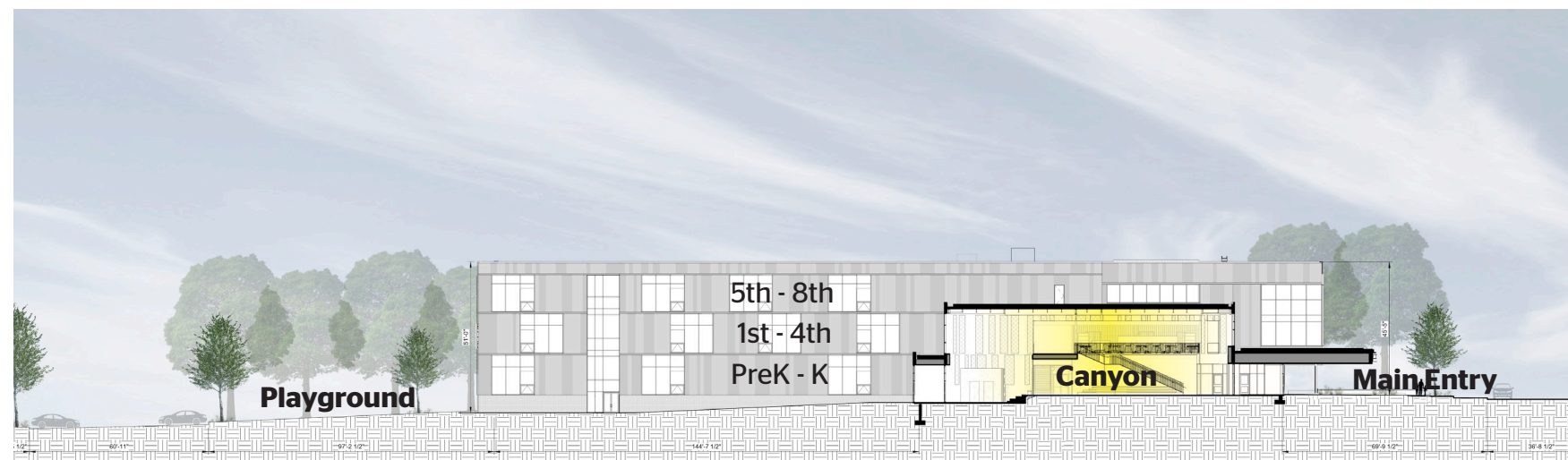
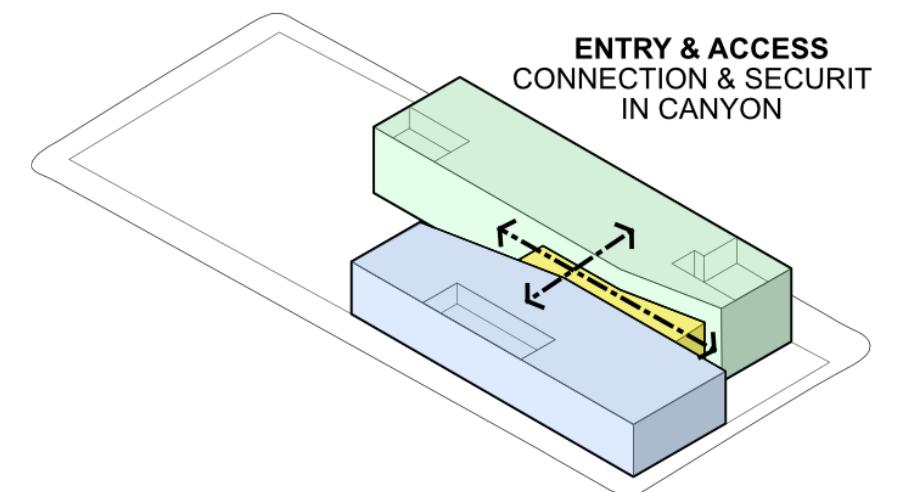
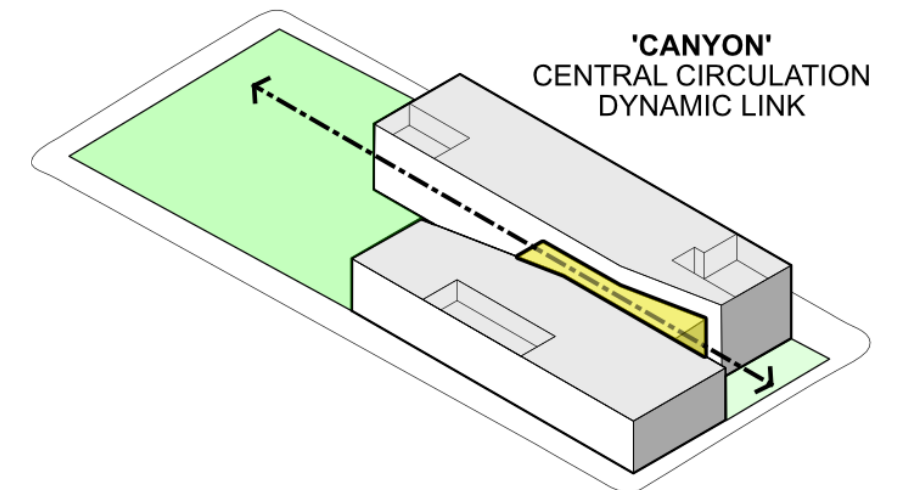
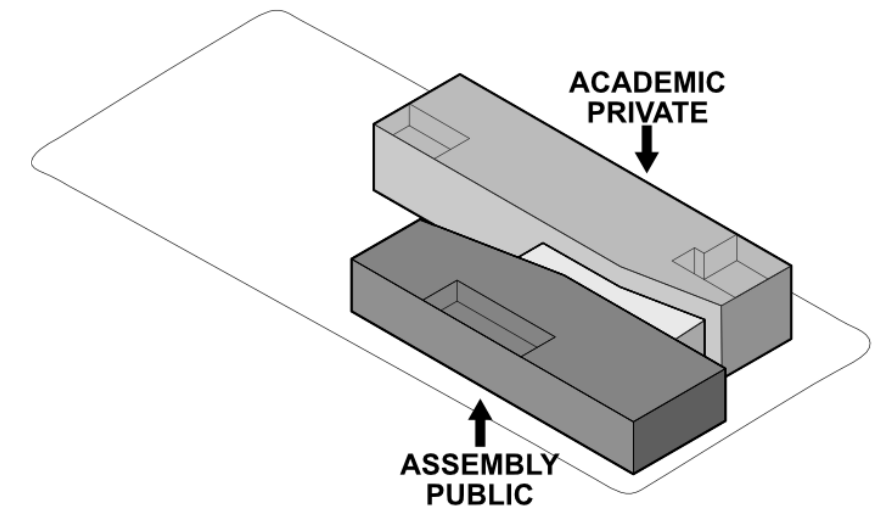
The diagram on the right highlights the 'split quartz' concept for the new school building, with physical & visual connections linked through the central opening.

# BUILDING & SITE ORGANIZATION

The new school is comprised of two offset volumes, housing primary academic and assembly spaces respectively, and joined by a dynamic, central student commons dubbed the “canyon”. The building mass, designed to maximize exterior landscape and minimize the impact to the surrounding residential neighborhood, offers a small front yard at the main entry and a playground paired with a student entry. Locating the assembly spaces, the gymnasium and cafeteria, on the ground floor of the west volume allows for easy access for community use during non-school hours while keeping the remaining areas in the school building locked and secured.



Program Organization



Building Section

# SCHOOLYARD & PLAYGROUND

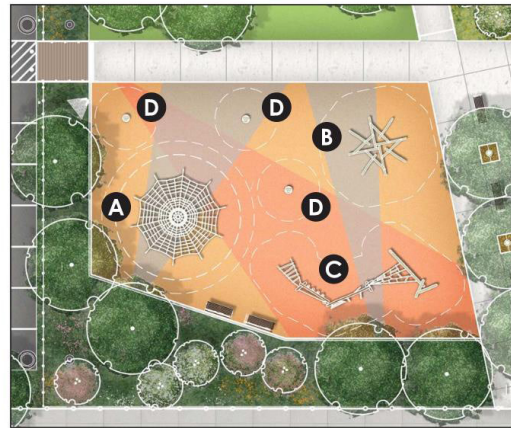
Optimize sustainable design and occupant wellness.



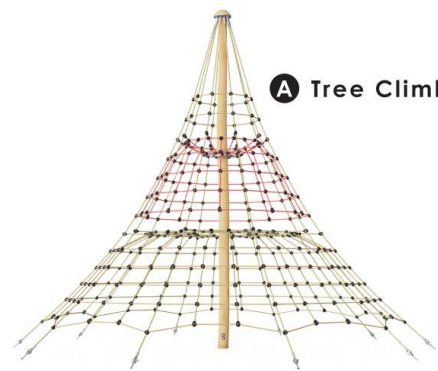
## Key Exterior Design Features

- Bioswale, raingarden, and green roof to reduce stormwater runoff
- Tiered Steps from Cafeteria to accommodate outdoor learning
- Minimize parking to maximize outdoor SF/student
- Tree Bosque & Social Gathering Space
- Bioswale between school yard and parking offers green buffer and serve as stormwater management

# A PLAYGROUND FOR ALL AGES



**Poured-In-Place Rubber Safety Surface**  
Orange, Green, & Gray Color Mix Options to Coordinate with Architectural Palette



**A Tree Climber**



**B Log Scramble**



**D Spinner Plate**



**C Obstacle Course**



**Backed Bench**  
Manufactured by Landscape Forms  
Wood Slats and Gray Powder Coat Frame with End and Center Armrests  
Location: Main Entrance Plaza & Throughout Schoolyard



**Backless Bench**  
Manufactured by Landscape Forms  
Wood Slats and Gray Powder Coat Frame with End and Center Armrests  
Location: Bosque & Social Gathering Space



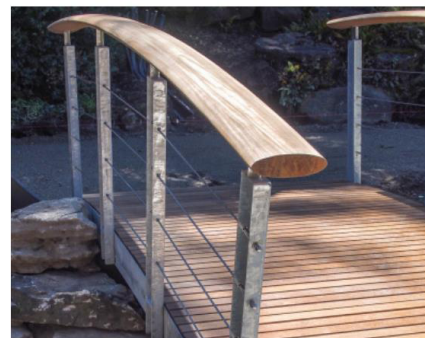
**Fixed Table**  
Manufactured by Du Mor  
3 & 4 Seat Options, Recycled Plastic Tops & Seats  
Location: Bosque & Social Gathering Space and Terraced Seating / Outdoor Classroom



**Litter & Recycling Receptacles**  
Manufactured by Landscape Forms  
Gray Litter & Green Recycling  
Location: Throughout Site



**LED Pedestrian Light Post**  
Manufactured by Landscape Forms  
16' Post Height, Black Posts & Fixtures  
Location: Throughout Site



**Pedestrian Bridge**  
Manufactured by Streetlife  
Wood Slats & Handrail with Steel Frame  
Location: Parking Lot to Schoolyard, spanning over Bioswale



**Tree Grate**  
Manufactured by Streetlife  
'Ripples' Lasercut Pattern (see inset)  
Location: Bosque & Social Gathering Space



**Bike Rack**  
Manufactured by Landscape Forms  
Powder Coat Steel  
Location: Main Entrance Plaza & Kenmore Road Schoolyard Entrance



## 50 sf/student Schoolyard Area

“The playground design strives to be inclusive and immersive while merging play with education”

### 1 Classroom & Socialization Space

- Various seating and play structures to accommodate wider variety of user
- Easy & Direct access to playground from multiple interior learning zones

### 2 Recreational Space

- Accessibly playground equipment for all to use and enjoy
- Multiple surface types for flexible play

### 3 Ecological Education Space

- Educational Signage to foster a deeper understanding of nature
- Prioritized Natural materials and textures

"I like it cause it has a lot of color... I think it brings more smiles, more energy,"  
-8th grader, Yasir.



## SCHOOL PRIDE



Elicit pride in students, parents, teachers and the community.

The building exterior takes inspiration from neighboring brick and stone buildings, but it is designed to stand out as a landmark within the neighborhood to **encourage community use**.

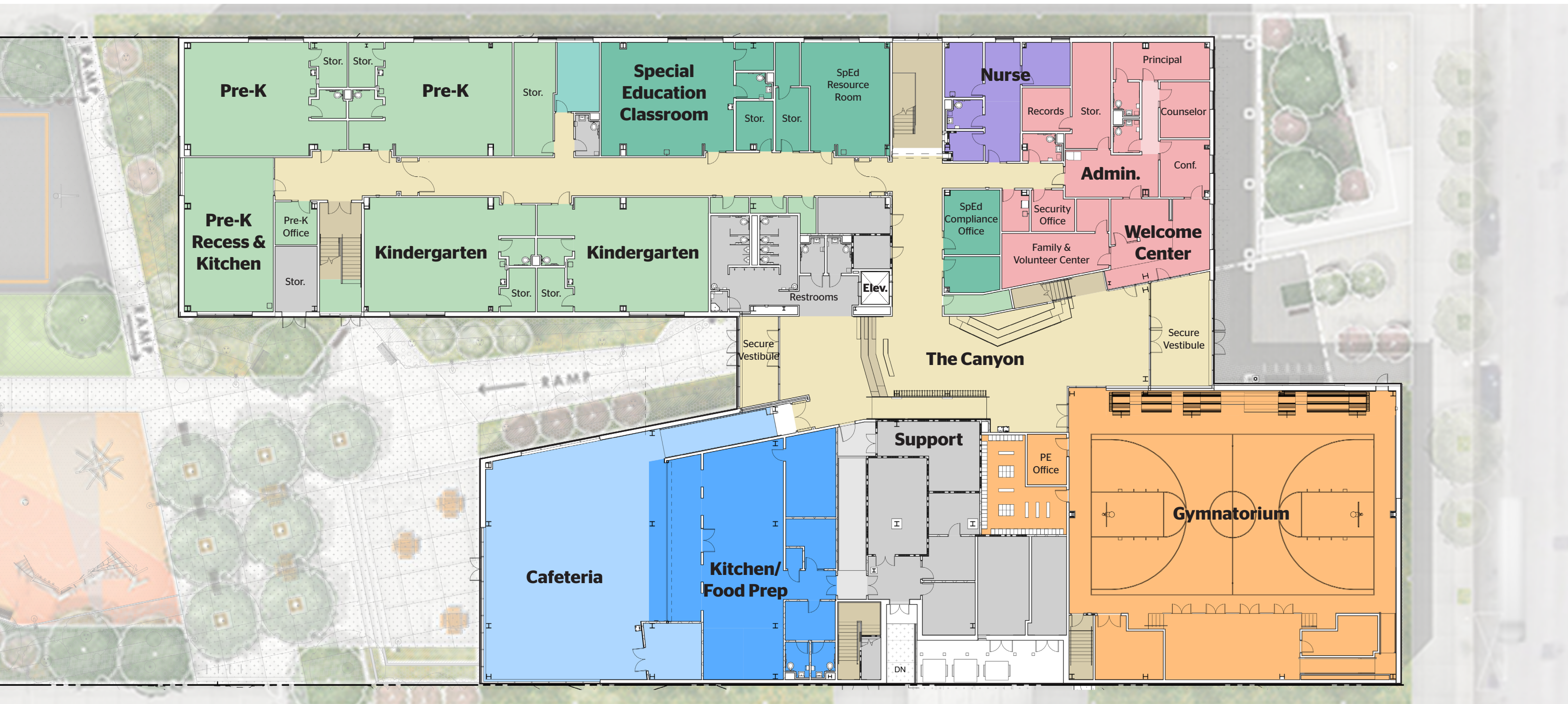
Featured on the Southwest corner facade is a mural of the Cassidy school logo, a pride of lions. The design is painted onto the brick allowing it to both seamlessly blend in with the adjacent facade and also stand out as a **beacon of school pride**.



# LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

## First Floor

Public and schoolyard entryways anchor either end of the central student commons, with its two-story volume and winding stairs and ramp that cascade through its length. An overlooking open collaboration and ad-hoc gathering space animate circulation through the **heart of the school**. Spaces such as a cafeteria and a gymnasium/auditorium, stepping down across the sloped site, are directly accessible to students of all ages as well as the wider neighborhood for community events and activities. The school's "canyon" commons serves as its central gathering space, promoting collaboration and spontaneous interaction. This dynamic, two-story space connects academic areas with assembly zones, fostering community engagement. The design prioritizes safety and security through thoughtful planning. Open sightlines throughout the building and grounds enhance natural surveillance and mitigate risk. Spaces encourage positive social interaction, reducing behaviors such as bullying. Controlled entry points and secure pathways protect students while maintaining accessibility for community use.





**Typical Classroom**  
Every classroom includes the same glazing and millwork, as well as flexible furniture to ensure adaptability in the case of enrollment fluctuations.



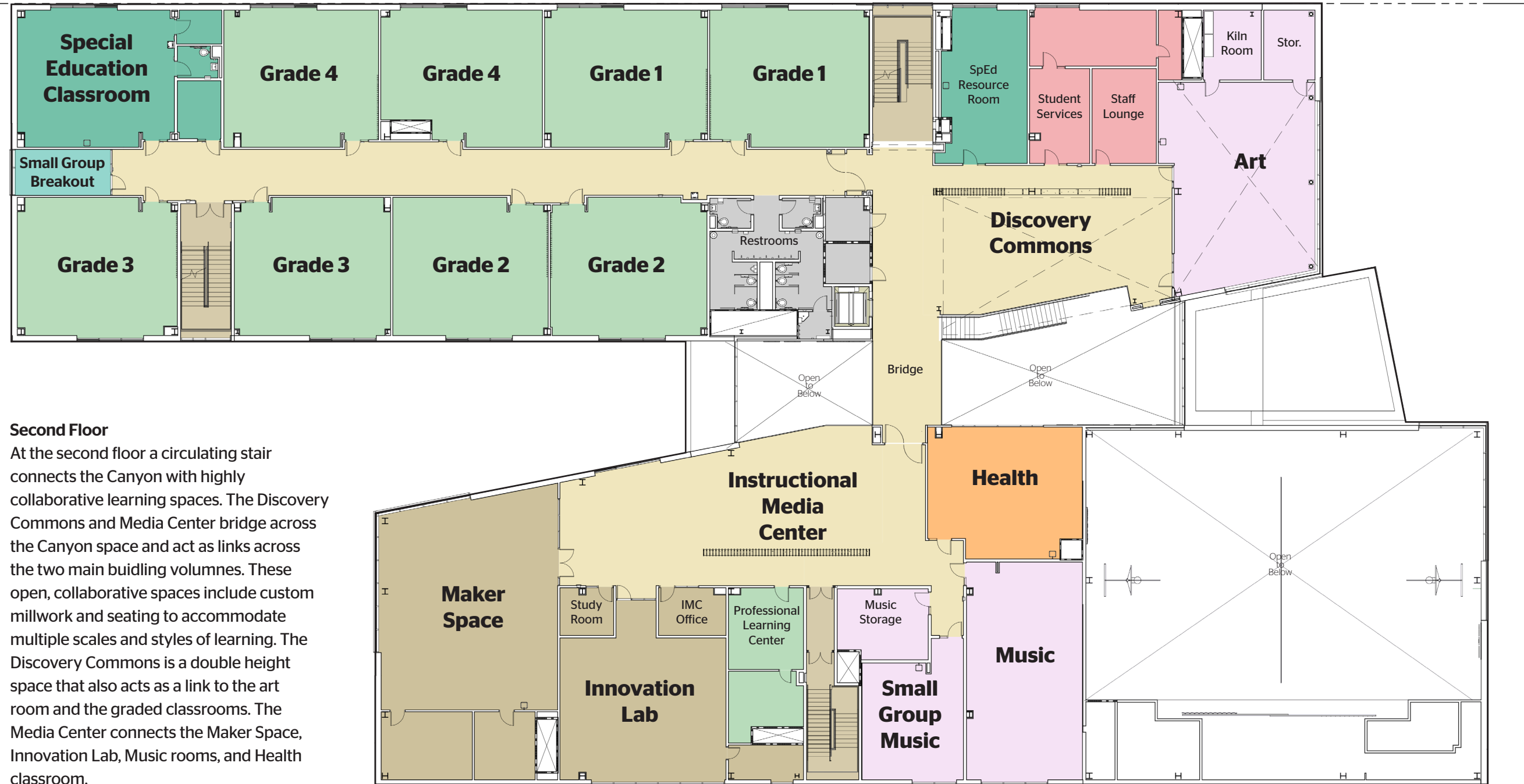
**Canyon**  
Seamless sightlines throughout the school foster safety and minimize bullying.



**Health Classroom**  
Shared views between various educational spaces inspire learning and curiosity.



**Art**  
Maximized access to daylight in the art room.



**Second Floor**

At the second floor a circulating stair connects the Canyon with highly collaborative learning spaces. The Discovery Commons and Media Center bridge across the Canyon space and act as links across the two main building volumes. These open, collaborative spaces include custom millwork and seating to accommodate multiple scales and styles of learning. The Discovery Commons is a double height space that also acts as a link to the art room and the graded classrooms. The Media Center connects the Maker Space, Innovation Lab, Music rooms, and Health classroom.



**Small Group Breakout**  
These flexible learning spaces open up the ends of each classroom corridor with interior and exterior glazing, maximizing daylight throughout the building.



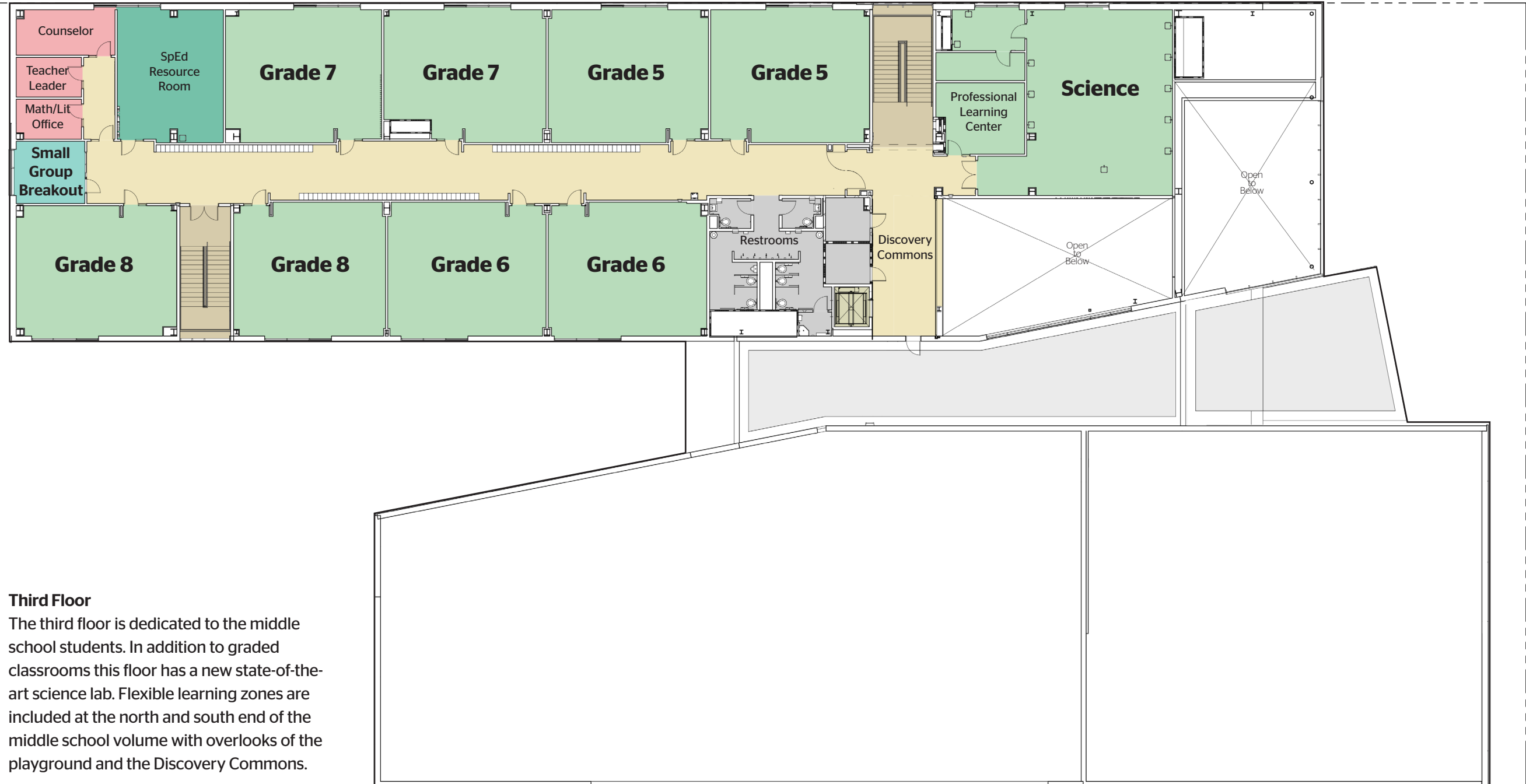
**Stairwells**  
Dynamic painting reinforce identity at each floor, floor to ceiling curtainwall expand visibility to nature.



**Discovery Commons**  
A break-out study zone for middle school students that overlooks the Canyon.



**Science Lab**  
Anchors the third floor middle school zone this classroom is uniquely dedicated to the older students.



**Third Floor**  
The third floor is dedicated to the middle school students. In addition to graded classrooms this floor has a new state-of-the-art science lab. Flexible learning zones are included at the north and south end of the middle school volume with overlooks of the playground and the Discovery Commons.

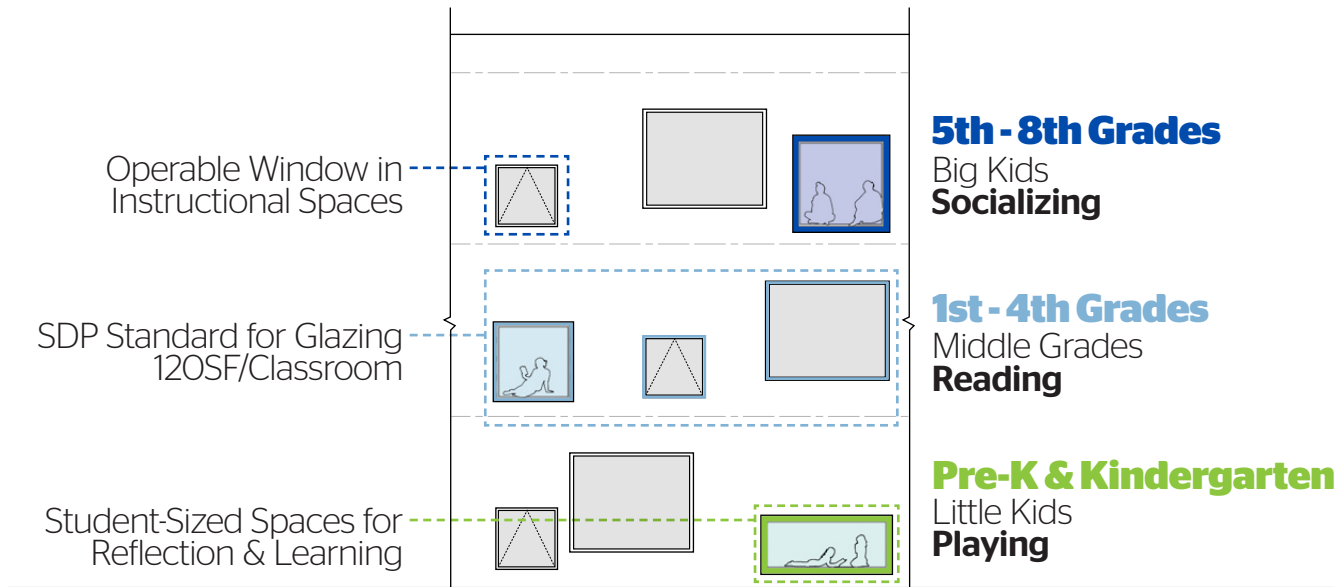
## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Cassidy Academic Plus supports 21st Century Learning, an approach emphasizing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. Technology-integrated classrooms enhance modern pedagogies and accommodate future advancements. Specialized spaces offer hands-on and experiential learning opportunities, including a maker space, media center, discovery commons, and visual arts room. Flexible interiors, enriched by vibrant, biophilic design elements, promote engagement and well-being. Daylit spaces encourage focus and collaboration, creating a positive and inspiring learning atmosphere.

The architectural and interior designs create a stimulating and nurturing environment that supports diverse learning styles and activities. Natural light, flexible spaces, vibrant colors, and biophilic materials elements contribute to the physical and mental well-being of students, fostering a positive learning atmosphere. The school follows SDP's 2020 Educational Facility Guidelines, part of Philadelphia's goal of providing educational equity for students across all neighborhoods in the city. Learning environments are equipped with current technology infrastructure and prepared for future upgrades and changes as technology evolves. Classroom environments are carefully designed for optimal student performance by using optimized building systems for lighting, ventilation, and acoustics. Safety and security are given paramount importance, with evidence-based planning and design approaches incorporated to help mitigate behavior such as bullying that can have adverse impacts on learning and safety.

- Provide students with advanced educational opportunities and safe learning environments.





The educational environment is flexible and adaptable to allow for seamless transition of learning styles and accommodate students of various ages. Learning spaces that offer different levels of privacy and a range of seating styles support the school districts curriculum from Pre-K through 8th grade.

- Grades Pre-K through 2nd grade focus on developing foundational skills and habits.
- Grades 3-5 begin taking on more independence and responsibility.
- Grades 6-8 take on a greater level of responsibility and are thinking abstractly.



Pre-K Recess Room with views to the Playground.



Instructional Media Center looking towards the Maker Space.

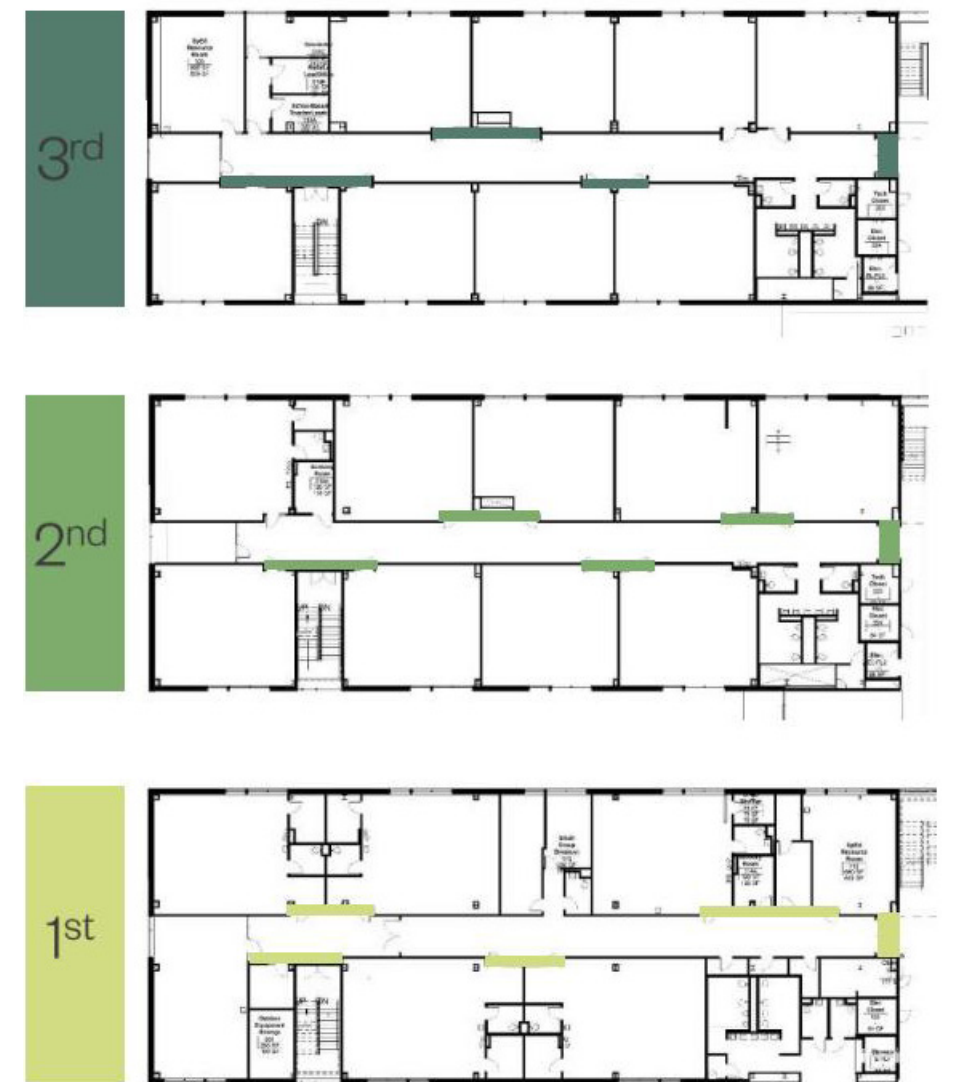
Create learning environments that support innovative approaches to instruction and promote collaboration and inclusion.

Provide spaces that allow for students to work and reflect quietly.





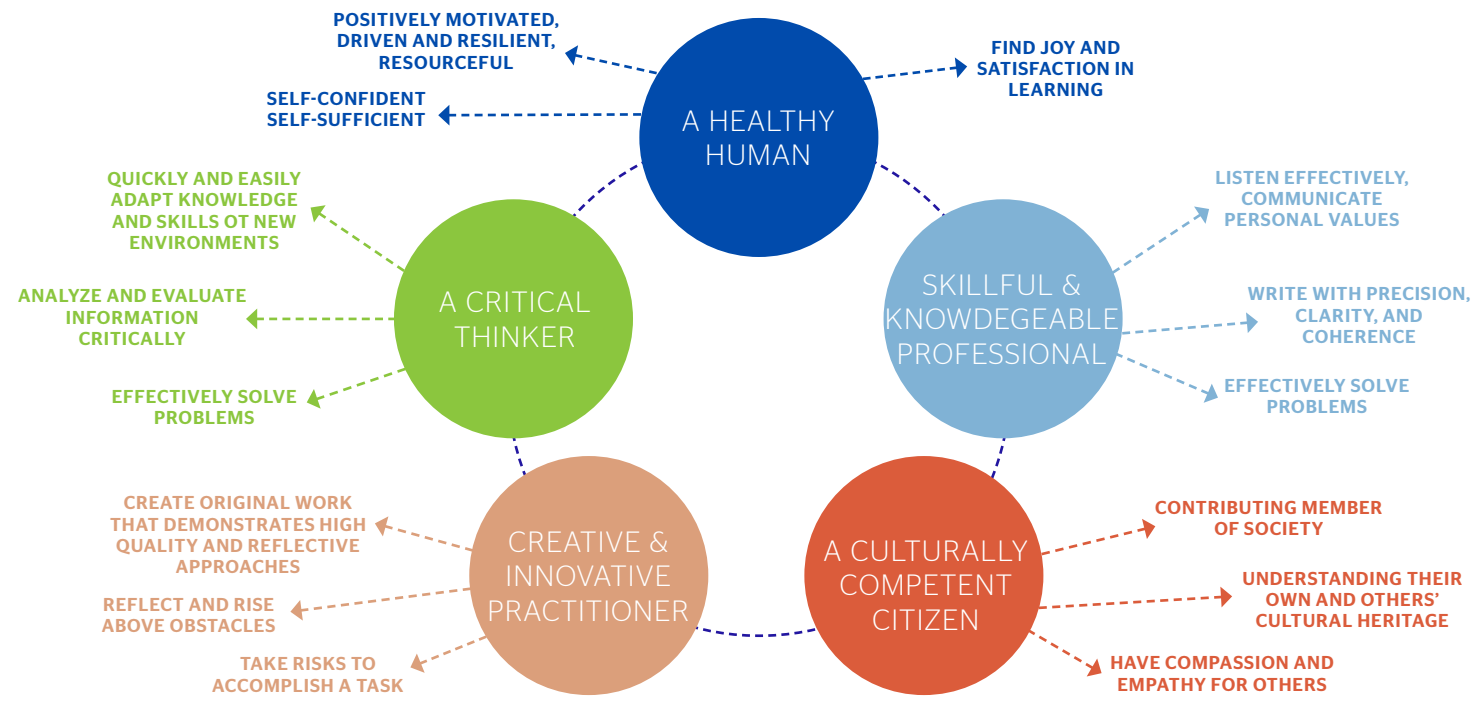
The interior design uses color for wayfinding and references nature to create an inspiring, modern, and comfortable place to learn, gather, and play. With class grades ranging from Pre-K to 8th grade stacked in three floors it was critical to create a sense of change from floor-to-floor. The design of the classroom wing utilizes three shades of green, ranging from a playful, vibrant shade at the ground floor for PreK & K, to a muted forest green at the middle school level.





"The school's layout promotes collaboration, helping children develop self-regulation, effective communication and listening skills."

-Principal Douglas



## Profile of a Graduate

Graduating Cassidy Lions are ready to R.O.A.R with professionalism by uniting the principles of **R**espectfulness, **O**n task, **A**ccountability, and **R**esponsibility

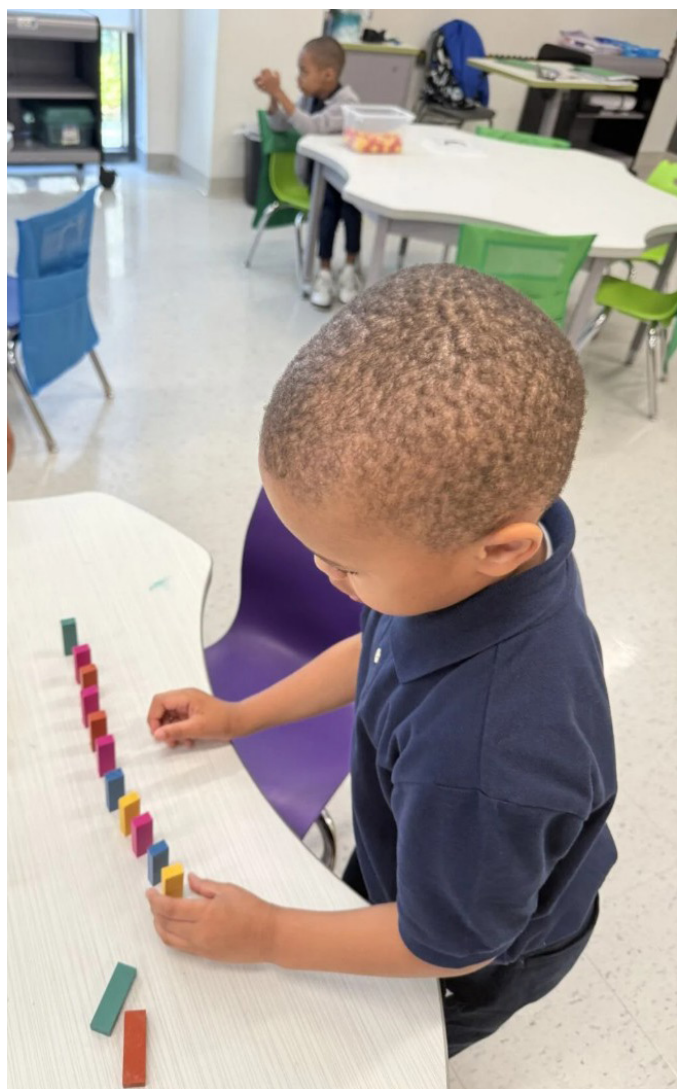


## RESULTS OF THE PROCESS & PROJECT

### ■ Create a new urban center that merges with the local community.

- The Gymnatorium is situated adjacent to the main entry, allowing ease-of-access for off-hours use.
- The state-of-the-art Gymnatorium is equipped with technology and lighting to accommodate school and community functions.
- Corner glazing in the Cafeteria offers expansive views of the neighborhood & playground, including large street-tree's that surround the site.
- Wall graphics in the Cafeteria feature healthy food icons, an idea brought forth by Cassidy students in workshop with the design team.





# STUDENT SUCCESS

## STUDENT EXPERIENCE

MY SCHOOL BUILDING IS IN GOOD CONDITION



MY SCHOOL IS CLEAN:



I FEEL SAFE IN MY CLASSES:



I FEEL SAFE IN THE BATHROOMS IN MY SCHOOL:



THERE IS AT LEAST ONE ADULT AT SCHOOL I TRUST:



## STUDENT PERFORMANCE

ELA PERFORMANCE (ALL GRADES)



THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO SCORED PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON THE STATE STANDARDIZED ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS EXAM.

MATH PERFORMANCE (ALL GRADES)



THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO SCORED PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON THE STATE STANDARDIZED MATH EXAM.

ELA PERFORMANCE (GRADE 3)



THE PERCENTAGE OF THIRD GRADE STUDENTS WHO SCORED PROFICIENT OR ADVANCED ON THE STATE STANDARDIZED ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS EXAM.

REGULAR ATTENDANCE



THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ATTENDED 90% OR MORE OF ENROLLED DAYS

Provide students with advanced educational opportunities and safe learning environments.

\*Student Experience Survey Results from first year in new school compared to previous year. Responses based on students who answered "strongly agree" to the statements listed.



"Every decision about the planning and design was made to remove barriers to learning and foster connections between students, teachers, families, and their community."

- Andrew Donaldson-Evans, Design Principal

## BEYOND THE CLASSROOM



### Development & Outreach

Community outreach was initiated during the design process and continued throughout construction through coordinated engagement events focused around ground breaking, Martin Luther King Jr. day, and steel topping ceremonies. The ground breaking event included students, staff, and community members physically participating in the kick-off of construction. An MLK Day-of-Service event invited volunteers to join the construction company members as they spent the day cleaning the surrounding community. A steel topping ceremony allowed students & staff to sign the final beam, their names permanently etched in the building, visible today in the main stairwell.



### District & Community Goals

The new Cassidy was designed and built with a key goal to create an urban center that merges with the local community. “When families thrive, students thrive, and together, we can build a brighter future for every child in Philadelphia” -Superintendent Watlington Sr. Since opening the community has been able to expand its offerings to families through initiating programs such as the Parent and Family Univeristy and Distinguished Young Gentleman.



### Sustianability & Occupant Well-Being

At Cassidy, sustainability goes beyond the building systems. It's embedded in how the building supports learning, connects to its neighborhood, and creates healthy, inspiring spaces for students and educators every day. Educational signage throught the school building and site teach students and visitors about the LEED Gold strategies and systems, such as green roofs, rain gardens, energy-efficient systems, and daylit learning environments.



"He's going to be safe here, I feel proud to send him here."  
-Zachary Williams, Father

