



# ROBERT SMALLS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

BEAUFORT, SOUTH CAROLINA

## SETTING THE COURSE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new Robert Smalls Leadership Academy (RSLA) in Beaufort, SC harnesses an inspiring story of a hero's journey to unite a diverse learning community around a common sense of pride and possibility, and spark change across a school district. In connecting deeply with the history of Robert Smalls and Beaufort, the school becomes a teaching tool, a community hub, and a catalyst for future projects.

In 2018, Beaufort County School District (BCSD) embarked on a mission to improve facilities across the district. BCSD created a Community Project Review Committee of over 40 volunteers which included parents, staff, business owners and community members. These stakeholders were tasked with developing a prioritized list of projects based on facility needs, aging infrastructure, population growth, and historic disparities between the northern and southern sides of the district. Their investigations helped to identify RSLA as a top priority for replacement, with one community member commenting that the condition of the existing school was "a dishonor to the name of Robert Smalls."

In November 2019, voters passed the first school bond referendum in over 11 years, with RSLA as the flagship project. This foundation of community support set the tone for the new Robert Smalls Leadership Academy.

With the community's charge, the district and design team embarked on a journey to use storytelling and history to enhance meaning, enrich community, and inspire action. The design for RSLA focuses on four key actions that radiate throughout the school, community, and district:

- 1 *Honor our history to inspire where we are going.*
- 2 *Lead by example with courage and integrity.*
- 3 *Serve all generations with meaningful engagement.*
- 4 *Sustain our environment and teach our history.*

The new RSLA faced significant challenges due to site constraints and the COVID-19 pandemic, but district leadership, school leadership, and the support of the community resulted in a project that has far-reaching effects across the entire district. From conception to execution, this project exemplifies how learning environments can enhance school pride, create ownership within a community, and provide a framework for meaningful community enrichment.

## DESCRIPTIVE DATA

**DISTRICT:** *Beaufort County School District*

**PHASED ON SITE REPLACEMENT**

**SITE AREA:** *34 Acres*

**BUILDING AREA:** *149,000 SF*

**GRADES HOUSED:** *PRE-K - 8*

**STUDENT CAPACITY:** *938 Students*

**SQUARE FEET PER PUPIL:** *159 SF*

**BUILDING OCCUPANCY DATE:** *Fall 2023*

**SITE COMPLETED:** *Summer 2025*

**CONSTRUCTION COST:** *\$64,762,779*

**COST PER STUDENT:** *\$69,043*

**CONSTRUCTION COST/SF:** *\$435/SF*



## NAVIGATING LEGACY: THE ROBERT SMALLS STORY

Robert Smalls was born into slavery in Beaufort, SC and grew up to be one of the most influential, albeit lesser known, figures of the American Civil War and Reconstruction Era. At the age of 12, Smalls was sent to work in Charleston and ultimately became a deckhand on a Confederate steamship, the CSS Planter. One evening in 1862, when the Confederate crew was away from the ship, Smalls led the enslaved crew and their families to freedom by piloting the ship through Charleston Harbor to the Union Blockade. **Smalls' bravery and unwavering leadership would become a symbol of Black heroism and the potential of all freedmen throughout the Civil War and beyond.** Smalls met with President Abraham Lincoln and was instrumental in Lincoln's decision to permit Black men to enlist in the Union army. Smalls became the first Black Captain in the U.S. Navy, running 17 successful missions in and around Charleston, and he helped recruit thousands of Black men to fight for the Union army. After the Civil War, Smalls rose to the rank of Major General in the South Carolina Militia.

In addition to his distinguished military service, Smalls led by example as an advocate for equal rights, education, and land ownership for freed slaves. He became a key political figure during Reconstruction and was elected to

the SC House of Representatives in 1868, and subsequently served five terms in the US House of Representatives. Smalls' legacy in Beaufort and South Carolina lives on. His home in Beaufort, SC was named a National Historic Landmark in 1974, he was admitted into the South Carolina Hall of Fame in 2010, and there are plans to erect a statue of him at the SC statehouse, the first individual statue to honor a Black person on the Capitol grounds.

**Smalls' commitment to education is one of his most enduring legacies.** In 1925, the first Robert Smalls School was founded in Beaufort to educate Black children from first to tenth grade and drew students from across the Lowcountry, some from over 80 miles away. Over the next four and a half decades, the school would become the pride and joy of the Black community in Beaufort. School leaders, particularly W.K. Alston, crafted a culture rooted in service, dignity, and hope. World renowned artists, educators, and musicians, such as Marian Anderson, would visit the school to perform and inspire. Robert Smalls High School remained the only high school for Black children in the Beaufort area until the high schools were integrated in 1970. Since 1970, the school has continued to operate as first a junior high school and ultimately the kindergarten through 8th grade academy it is today.

### 1839 EARLY LIFE

April 5, 1839 — Robert Smalls is born into slavery in Beaufort, South Carolina. At age twelve, he was sent to Charleston where he worked on the docks and learned maritime skills.

### 1862 THE PLANTER ESCAPE

May 13, 1862 - At age 23, Robert Smalls commandeers the Confederate Ship CSS Planter in the Charleston Harbor, sails past Confederate forts, and delivers it to the Union blockade, freeing himself, his family, and other enslaved people

### 1874 ELECTED TO CONGRESS

Robert Smalls was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, beginning the first of his five non-consecutive terms.

### 1925 ROBERT SMALLS SCHOOL OPENS

The first local school to carry his name, serving Black students in grades 1-10 throughout segregation and into early integration.

### 1970 ROBERT SMALLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Beaufort County Schools were integrated in 1970. As the district grew, schools were restructured and renamed. With the newly integrated Beaufort High School, the Robert Smalls School became a Junior High, serving 7th through 9th grades for many years.

### 2014 ROBERT SMALLS INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY

The school is renamed and expanded from the middle school to now teach international curriculum, leadership, and global studies to students in K-8 grades.

### 1863 CIVIL WAR SERVICE

Robert Smalls serves in the Union Navy, is promoted to captain, becoming the first Black captain of a U.S. Vessel, and participates in multiple engagements.

### 1868 RECONSTRUCTION LEADERSHIP

Robert Smalls returns to Beaufort after the war and purchases his former enslaver's home. Smalls' serves in the South Carolina Senate.

### 1938 WINFRED KENT (W.K.) ALSTON

During his 25-year tenure as principal of Robert Smalls High School, W.K. Alston stands out as a tireless public servant and a central figure in the Beaufort community.

### 1955 SCHOOL PRIDE

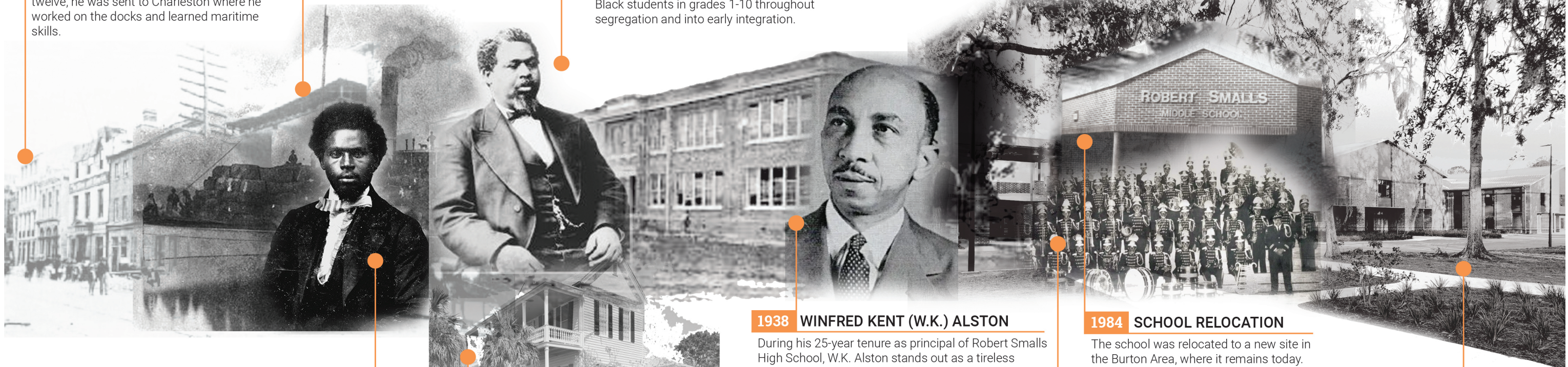
The Robert Smalls High School band became the only African American band to march in the Cherry Blossom Festival Parade in Washington, D.C.

### 1984 SCHOOL RELOCATION

The school was relocated to a new site in the Burton Area, where it remains today.

### 2023 ROBERT SMALLS LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

The school is renamed "Robert Smalls Leadership Academy" to align with the school's Leader In Me program. The new building opens and demolition begins on the 1984 structure.



## A COMPLEX GEOGRAPHY:

**ROBERT SMALLS & HIS LOWCOUNTRY JOURNEY**

The school is located on Port Royal Island between Port Royal Sound and downtown Beaufort, not far from Smalls' birthplace and the original site of the 1925 school building. As one of the Lowcountry's Sea Islands, Port Royal Island has a deep history rooted in colonialism, agriculture, militarization, and maritime economies. Today, the school's enrollment zones include a highly diverse but predominantly low-income population.

The existing one-story school building, designed in 1982, was oversized for the current student population, and featured a maze-like corridor system that was inefficient and disorienting. In 2020, the building was only 60 to 70 percent utilized and enrollment had dipped sharply due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**LEGEND**

- 1** 1839 Robert Smalls is born in Beaufort, South Carolina
- 2** 1851 Robert Smalls is sent to work in Charleston, South Carolina
- 3** 1863 Piloting the CSS Planter, Robert Smalls navigates the confederate-backed Charleston Harbor and sails to freedom
- 4** 1925 The first school named in Robert Smalls' honor opens in Beaufort, SC as the only public school for Black students in the county
- 5** 2023 Location of Robert Smalls Leadership Academy

**ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT ZONES** ←

**MIDDLE SCHOOL ENROLLMENT ZONES** ←

ATLANTIC OCEAN

**PORT ROYAL SOUND** ←

**CHARLESTON, SC**

**2**

**3**

CHARLESTON COUNTY

**BEAUFORT, SC**

**5**

**4**

**1**

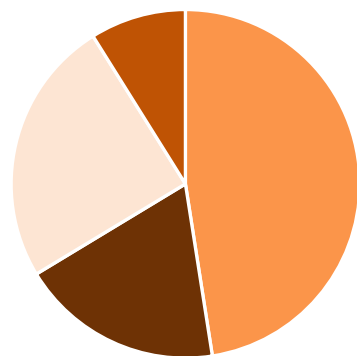


## COMMUNITY COMPASS: DEMOGRAPHICS & SCHOOL CULTURE

The school population is highly diverse with a large percentage of Black, White and Hispanic students. The local community also has a high percentage of non-native English speakers with over 15% of the school population classified as multi-lingual learners. While diverse in ethnicity and language, most of the student population is classified as impoverished with rates fluctuating between 75 and 80 percent. **RSLA is a proud Title 1 School** and school leadership continuously looks for opportunities to engage and support students and their families beyond the classroom.

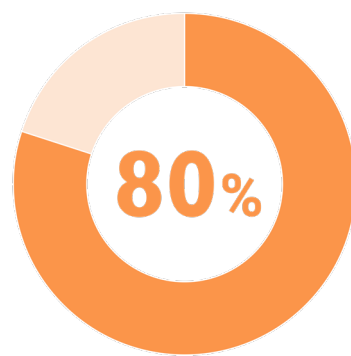
To empower new generations of students with tools for success, the school has adopted the LeaderInMe® Curriculum. This world-wide program promotes the belief that every student and teacher achieves by “seeing, feeling, teaching, and living the seven habits” of highly effective people. The framework provides students, faculty, and families with tools to tackle any obstacle and promotes a “whole-child” mindset. Similar to Smalls’ journey and example, **LeaderInMe® supports the idea that every child possesses their own genius and everyone can lead.**

DEMOGRAPHICS 2020-21



■ BLACK ■ WHITE  
■ HISPANIC ■ OTHER

STUDENTS IN POVERTY



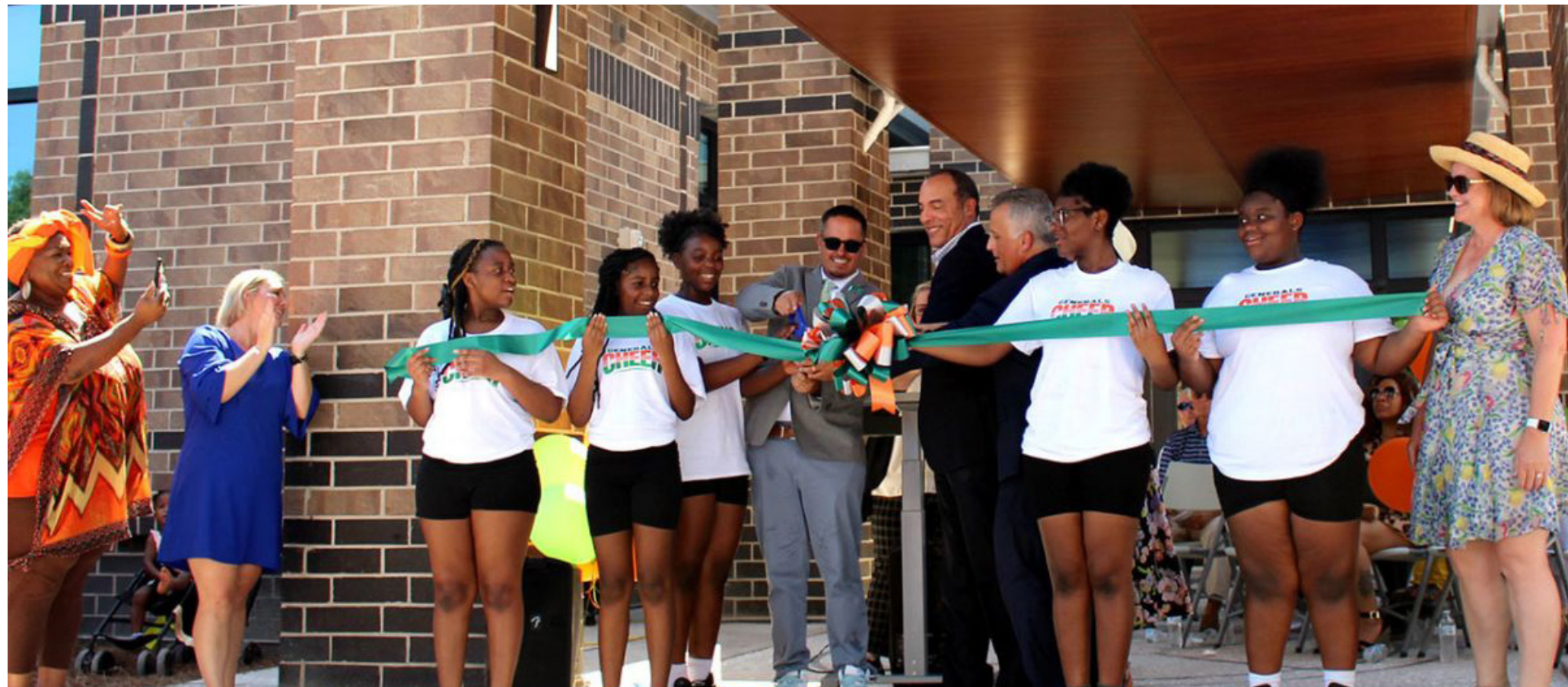
■ 2020 - 2021



STUDENT EXPRESSION: Performing Arts



SCHOOL PRIDE: Athletics



A NEW CHAPTER: New Robert Smalls Leadership Academy Ribbon Cutting Ceremony



HISTORY & IDENTITY: Existing School Mural

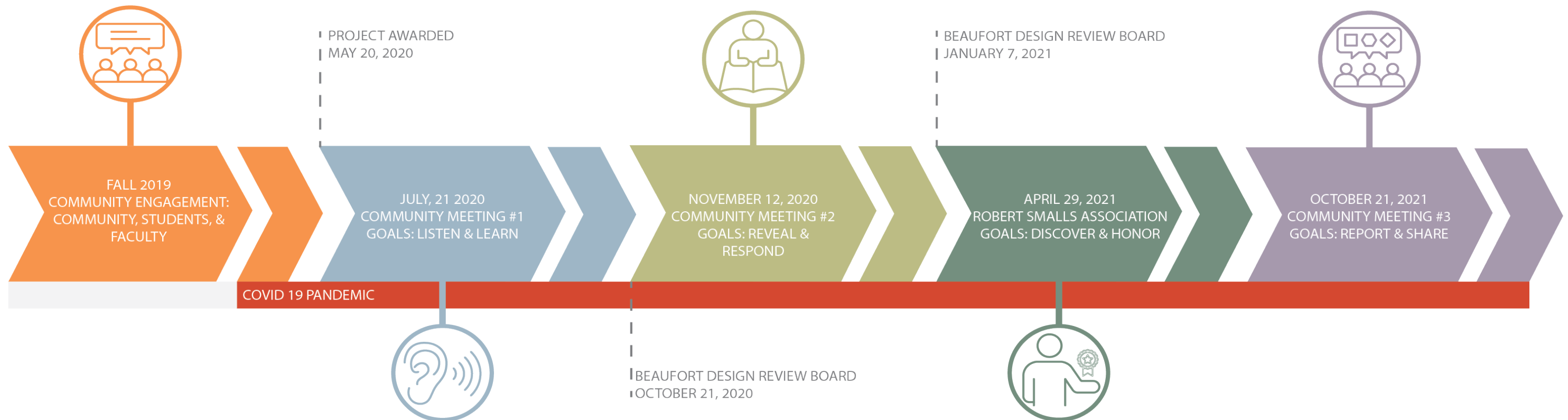
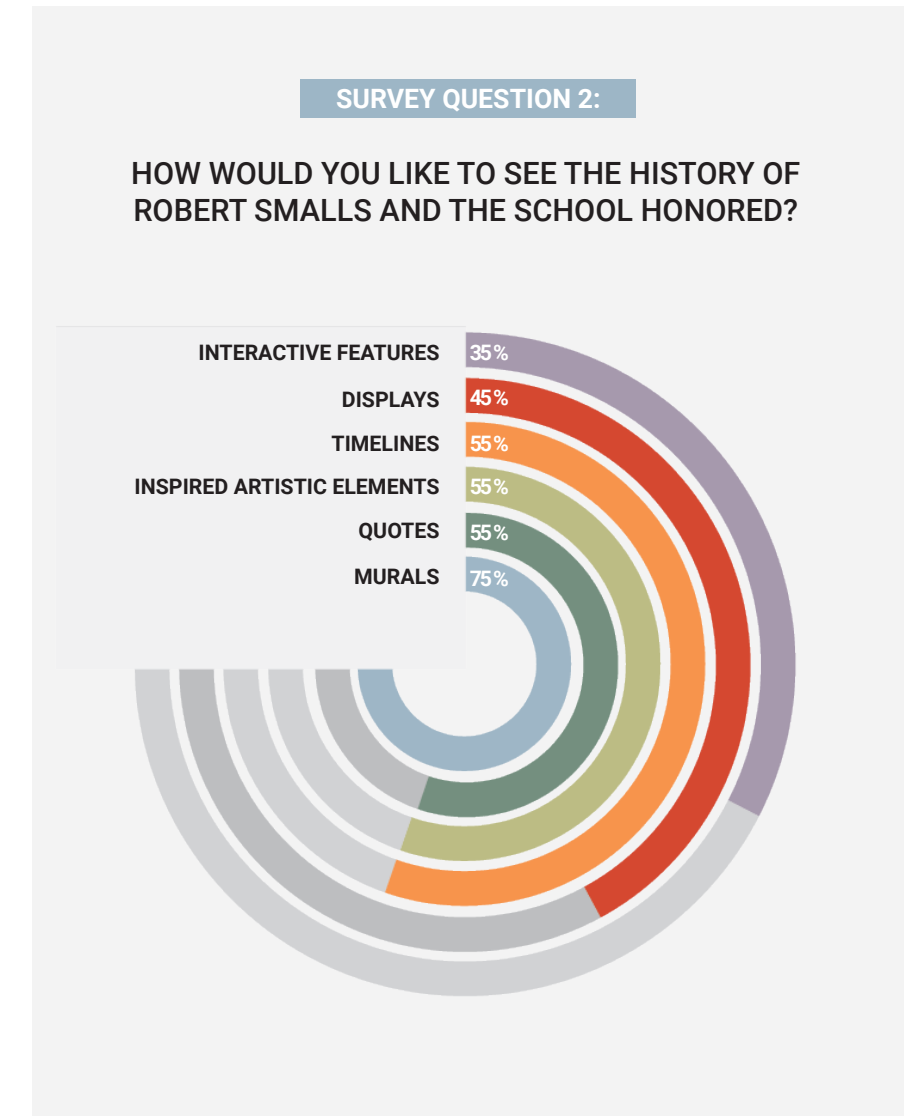
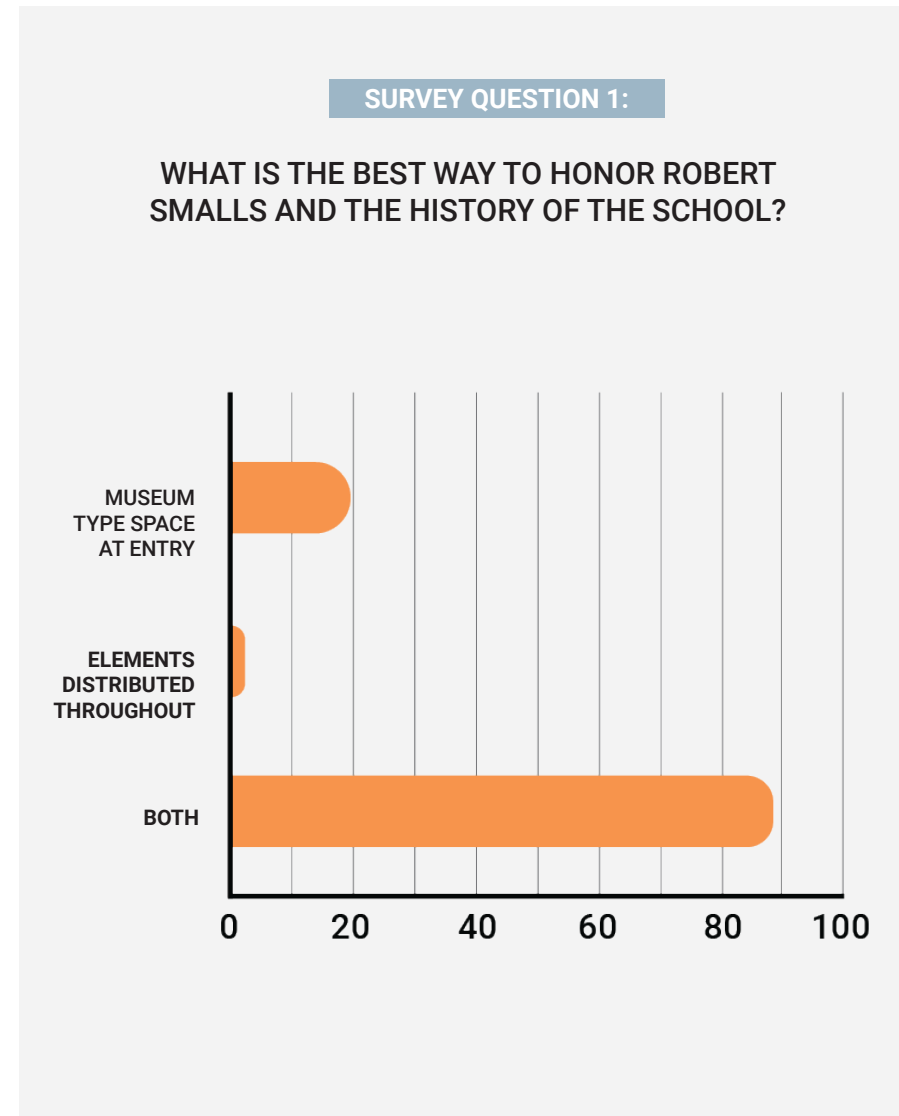
## NAVIGATING TOGETHER: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement was critical to the project's success. Before selecting the design team, the district hosted listening sessions with students, faculty, and the community to hear their vision for the new school. These meetings delivered a clear message: **Honor Robert Smalls and the history of the school, and include the community throughout the design process.**

With this change, the design team held community meetings at each stage of the design process. The first meeting was focused on listening to the community, the second offered concepts that aligned with community feedback, and the third meeting focused on revealing the design solutions and celebrating the building to come. Questionnaires in English and Spanish were also available digitally and in hard copies at the school office.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the design team and district utilized virtual collaboration tools such as Zoom meetings with online polls and open chats to listen and learn from the community, school leadership, and the Robert Smalls Association. The Robert Smalls Association was formed in 1976 to connect students who attended Robert Smalls High School prior to 1970. **This organization was instrumental in understanding the culture and pride of the original school,** and provided invaluable resources, imagery, and stories that were incorporated into the building.

All these meetings directly influenced the design and execution of the school. The community's desire for murals, timelines, and inspired artistic elements directly contributed to the design. **As a result, the school embodies the potential of community-driven design solutions, the community feels pride and ownership of the project, and the process has set the tone for other major projects across the district.**



## SHAPED BY PLACE: SITE CONSIDERATIONS

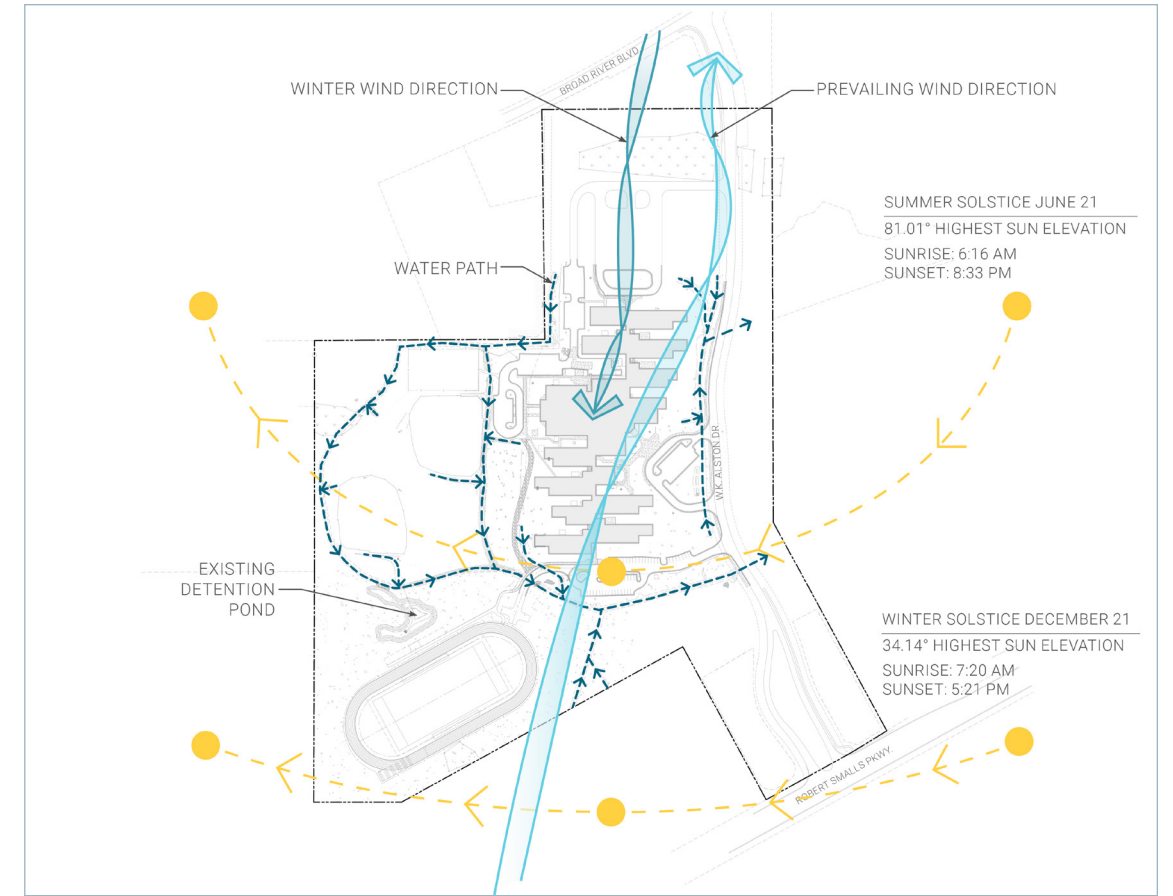
Because the school was an onsite replacement, the site for the new RSLA was very challenging. The existing school needed to remain in operation during construction, creating additional complexity for site access, circulation, and student safety. Limited buildable area meant that the project would need to be completed in phases, with the new school nestled onto the western side of the site. The design team studied the existing stormwater, sun, and prevailing wind patterns to help inform the building and design. Two major site components that needed to be preserved were the track and football field, and the existing grand trees. The new school thoughtfully responds to both elements, enveloping them into the final site solution.

“  
A new building means new opportunities to *improve* and *connect*.  
”

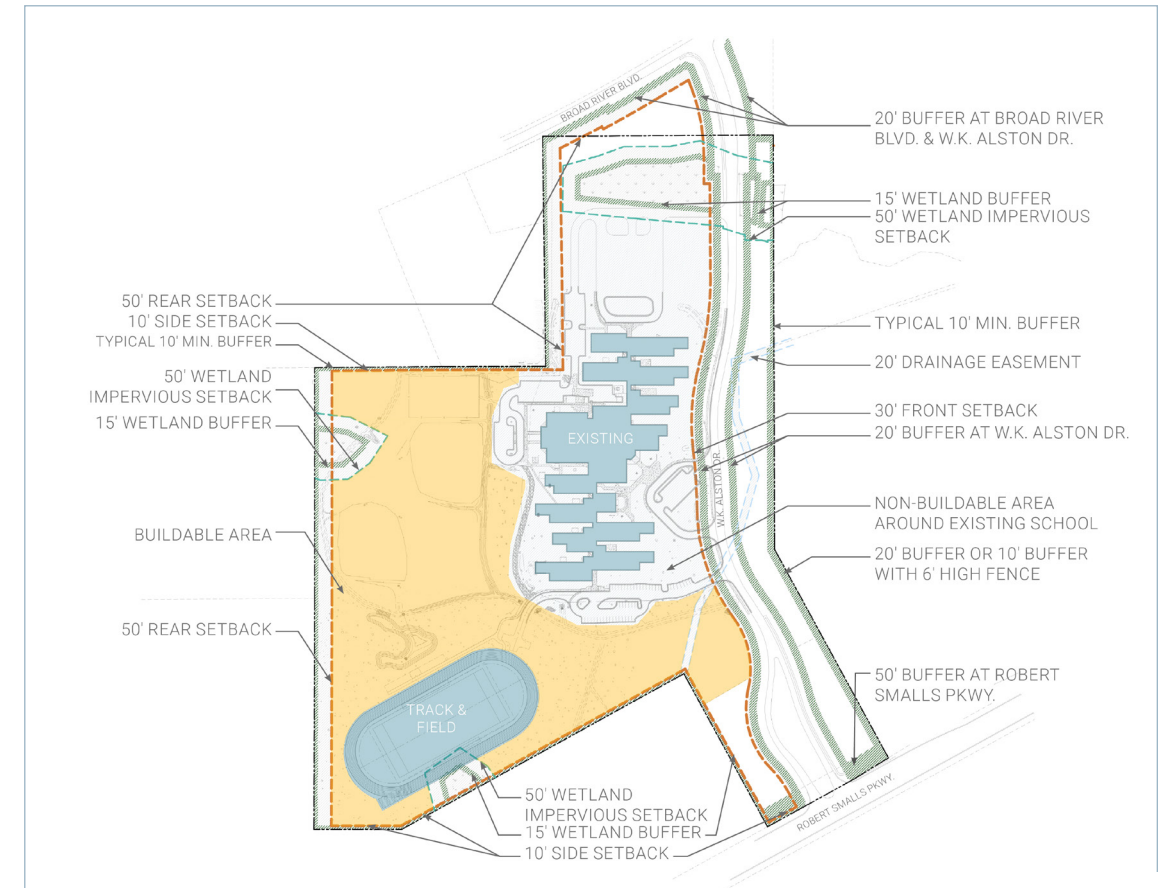
Lisa Harwood | 6th Grade Student, 2021



AERIAL OF THE EXISTING ROBERT SMALLS SCHOOL



SUN, WIND & WATER



BUILDABLE AREA

## ANCHORED WITH INTENTION: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- 1 HONOR**  
*Pay proper honor to the legacy of Robert Smalls. Saturate the environment with transferable lessons of his life, his exemplary leadership qualities, and his dedication to community service. Trace these qualities through the history of the school and former Principal, W. Kent Alston.*
- 2 LEAD**  
*Formulate a design that amplifies the school's purpose of leadership and the needs of the students.*
- 3 SERVE**  
*Serve all generations of the at-large community with opportunities for participation and engagement.*
- 4 SUSTAIN**  
*Create an environment that is appropriately modern, "green" and sustainable - one that practices principles of responsible building and itself is a tool for learning.*

Based on community input, site investigations, and conversations with the district, the team developed a project mantra and four guiding principles. The mantra for the project, **"Grounded in History – Reaching for the Future,"** united the guiding principles into a cohesive thought that can be traced throughout the building. At each crossroads, choices were passed through the lens of these four principles to result in the best decision for the students, staff, and community. The guiding principles build upon each other and focus attention on the past, the present, the greater community, and the environment. Honoring Robert Smalls and the legacy of the school became a key objective and a **conduit for embodying the school's leadership mission**, for setting an example of community service, and for fostering stewardship of the environment.

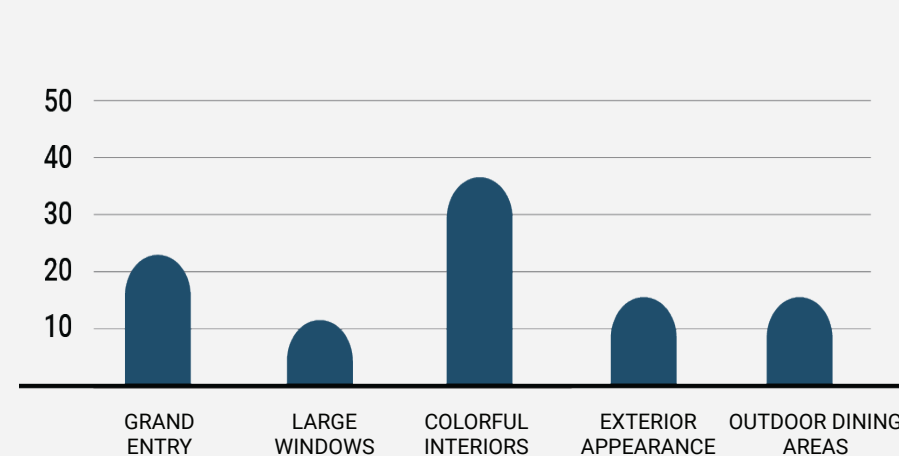
The COVID-19 pandemic created numerous project roadblocks and difficult decisions. Procurement lead times were unreliable and delayed. Material costs increased exponentially. Uncertainty and fear over the future permeated every meeting. Despite these obstacles, **the district and school leadership held fast to the project's mantra and guiding principles.** Their commitment to the community and optimism in the face of adversity exemplified the lessons from Robert Smalls' life, the history of the school, and the LeaderInMe® Program.



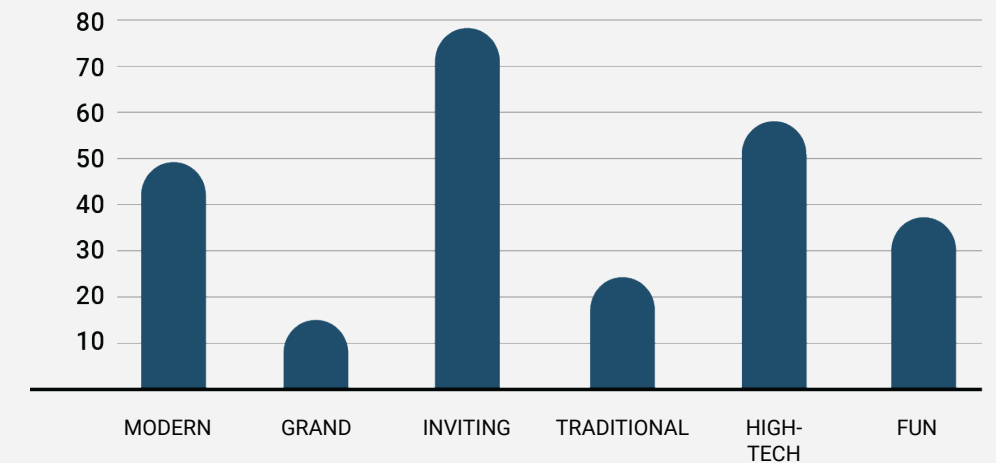
**"Grounded in History – Reaching for the Future."**

CAMPUS AERIAL: Shaped by trees and light

**SURVEY QUESTION 3:**  
 WHICH BUILDING ELEMENT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?



**SURVEY QUESTION 4:**  
 WHICH WORDS BEST DESCRIBE THE STYLE ELEMENTS YOU WOULD LIKE FOR THE NEW SCHOOL?

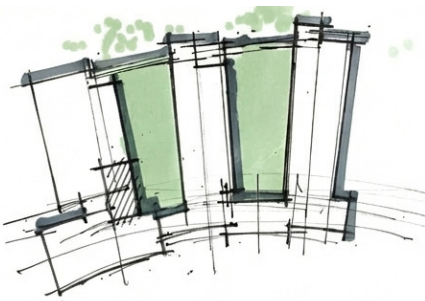


## SETTING THE COURSE: COLLABORATIVE DESIGN

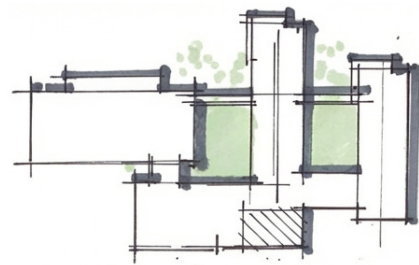
The design solution for the school was a collaborative effort between the design team, the district, and the community. The team examined massing and programming solutions through the lens of the guiding principles. The design team focused on three conceptual program organizations to analyze the relationship between the building and the site, classrooms and gathering spaces, quiet zones, and social areas.

The team tested each concept to see which solution best supported the school's mission and enriched the community, and evaluated each concept with the same set of questions:

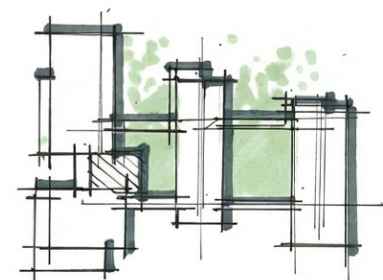
1. Does it provide opportunities to honor Robert Smalls and the history of the school?
2. Does it meet students' needs?
3. Does it serve the community at large?
4. Is it a sustainable solution?
5. Does it thoughtfully respond to the community's feedback?



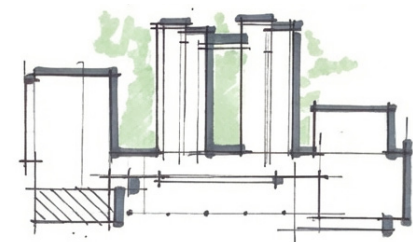
1 'BEND'



2 'ROTATED'



3 'STAGGER'



4 'SPINE'

Upon considering these questions, the Hub & Spoke Scheme was deemed the best solution. This concept looked at key hubs of activity dotted along a central spine, thereby activating all areas of the building with opportunities for learning, collaboration, and gathering, while maintaining clear sight lines and circulation.

The Hub & Spoke concept created grand public spaces and a welcoming entry to honor Smalls. It met students' needs for a safe learning environment and was tailored to students' growth and development with the elementary students on the first floor and middle school students on the second floor. **It provides multiple, flexible spaces for simultaneous community events within the building and across the site.**

*"We knew going into this project the importance of community involvement in the design process. Our goal was to develop a building that the community could be proud of."*

Robert Oetting | COO Beaufort County Schools

The concept addresses sustainability by allowing for natural daylight throughout the building, by providing ample outdoor rooms for outdoor learning, and by utilizing the optimal solar orientation for the classroom wings. Lastly, the Hub & Spoke concept directly responds to the community's feedback and their vision for the campus.

The chosen scheme also engages thoughtfully with the existing site features. The new building embraces the track and football field, as the cafeteria wing cants to address it. The existing tree grove becomes the foreground for the new main entry and helps the school feel rooted within the site.



SELECTED 'HUB & SPOKE' SCHEME



CONCEPTUAL MASSING

## PLANNED WITH PURPOSE: PROGRAM RESOLUTION

The final solution for the building is a series of bars connected by a central spine and intermittent hubs that support various activities. The southern bar holds the school administration, music classrooms, cafeteria and performance platform, and is canted to reinforce the relationship between the new building and the track and field. This area is the first activity hub. Buses drop off directly into the cafeteria so that students can start their day with a hot meal. The interior middle school music classroom is designed to be adaptable and can easily morph to accommodate various programs from music, to dance to theater. The cafeteria spills outward to the north for middle school play and outdoor dining.

Located just inside the front door, the Media Center and main lobby form the second major hub of the building. The two-story lobby serves as a threshold into the Media Center and connects the first and second floors with a monumental stair. **This hub and its relationship to the exterior are the heart of the school.**

Moving north up the central spine, students reach the second bar and the first academic wing. This wing holds Pre-K through 2nd grade on the first floor and has direct access to the elementary playground tucked between the wings. Middle school classrooms, science labs, and the Gateway to Technology (GTT) classrooms are located upstairs.

Next along the spine is a series of nooks, gallery walls, views to the front of the school, and the art classroom. The elementary and middle school art classrooms stack and project as a jewel box between the academic wings, creating another major hub. The elementary art classroom expands outward into the play area to **blur the line between art, academics and play.**

The third bar is the second academic wing. Third through fifth grade classrooms are located on the first floor with middle school classrooms above. This wing reinforces the rhythm of the building and creates additional outdoor rooms and views to nature.

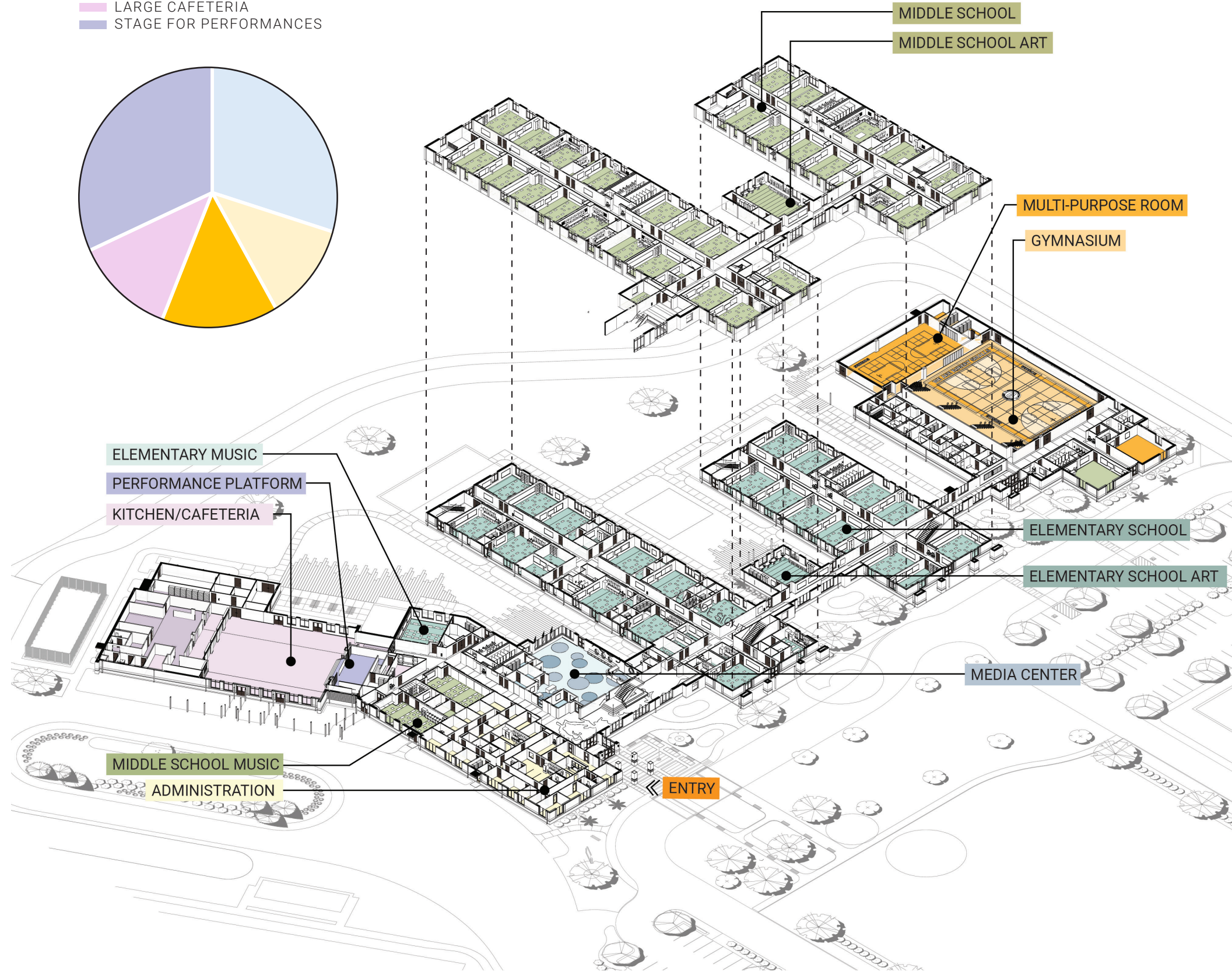
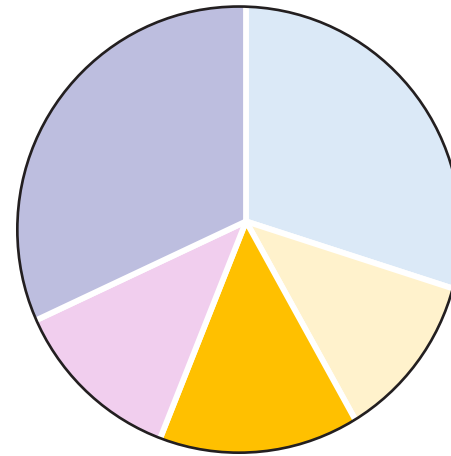
The central spine extends further north to reach the gymnasium wing which contains a health classroom, weight room, full sized gymnasium, multipurpose PE room, supporting facilities, and a play porch. The gymnasium is the final hub within the building, connecting students to learning through play and instilling confidence and collaboration through team sports. The play porch on the back of the wing creates opportunities for outdoor play with a large covered outdoor amenity for all ages.

The project's guiding principles drove the project's form, which responds directly to and is shaped by the community's input. The form provides places to honor Smalls and the history of the school in meaningful ways that help inform the architecture of the building. **It not only meets students' needs for instructional space, but also provides areas beyond the classroom where they can begin to find their own genius.** The layout allows for multiple community events of varying scales simultaneously across the campus and provides ample daylight into the building while respecting the natural landscape.

### SURVEY QUESTION 5:

#### WHAT PROGRAM SPACE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

- LARGE MEDIA CENTER
- LARGE GYMNASIUM
- SEPARATE MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM
- LARGE CAFETERIA
- STAGE FOR PERFORMANCES



## BUILT FOR BALANCE: SUSTAINABILITY & WELLNESS

Sustainability and wellness were key drivers for the design and operation of the new school. The team conceptualized the project as a **high-performance building** that focused not only on the sustainability of the building itself, but also on the site and the building occupants. Site strategies for heat island reduction, stormwater management, native landscaping, and bioswales were key components of the site design. Maintaining grand trees and embedding the building within the landscape informed the building footprint and roadway improvements.

The team considered geothermal mechanical systems and insulated concrete forms (ICF) early in the design process, but the limited site area available and the phased demolition of the existing building made these options unsuitable. Alternative methods such as closed loop water source heat pumps, optimal solar orientation for the academic wings, high efficiency windows, sun shading, an easily accessible mechanical platform, and a tight thermal envelope contributed to the district's energy goals.

**The occupants' experience was critical to the exterior and interior design of the project.** Access to natural daylight and exterior views were prioritized from every spot in the building. Corridors, stairways, and classrooms are filled with natural light. Indoor air quality was also an important factor for the district, community, and design team as the COVID-19 pandemic was ever present. Fresh air, low VOC materials, and state-of-the-art filtration were implemented throughout the project.



SEAWEED SUNSHADES FILTER LIGHT INTO MEDIA CENTER



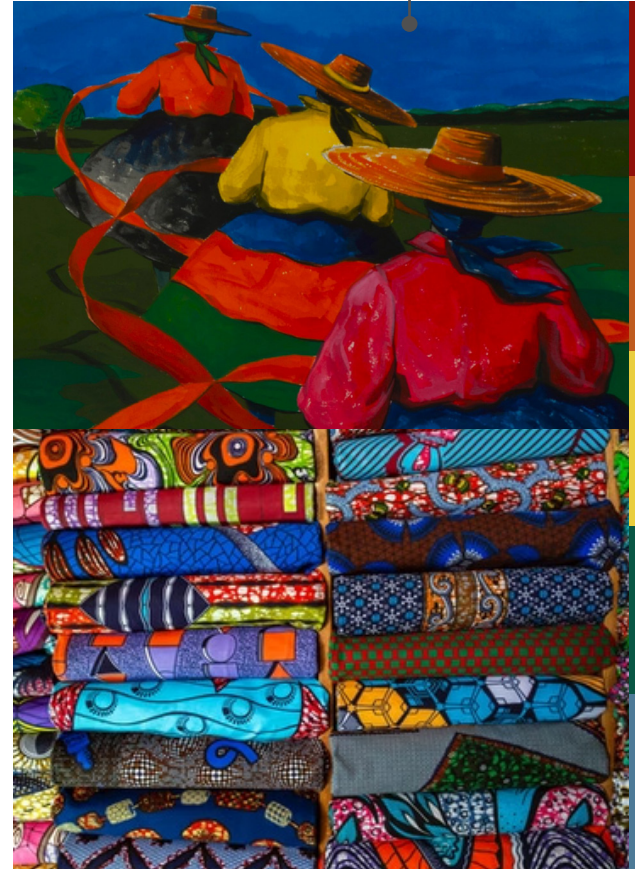
ACCESS TO NATURAL LIGHT & VIEWS TO NATURE THROUGHOUT THE BUILDING

## THE TEXTURE OF PLACE: MATERIALS & LANGUAGE

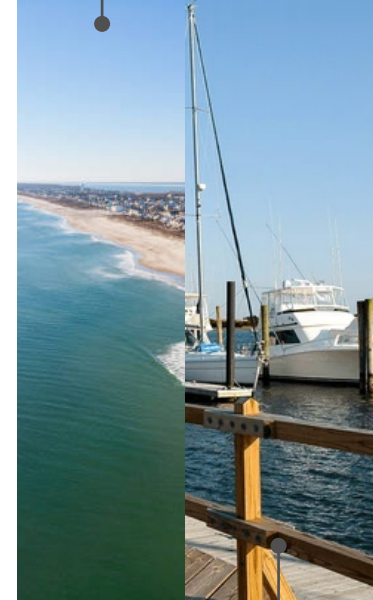
Materiality, texture and detailing were key considerations in the design of the building exterior. The team selected exterior materials which **reflect the colors of the Lowcountry marsh and native oak trees**. Colorful accents and nautical detailing pay homage to the vibrant sea island culture and Robert Smalls' nautical service. Bold black brick grounds the building and signifies transition points in the floor plan where people can gather. Picture windows with the school's orange hint at the activity and excitement inside. The Savannah Gray field brick is mottled and earthy, **highlighting the richness of the land** and grounding the education wings. Crisp white brick denotes special program areas around the building and provides a canvas for glazed brick accents on the west side of the building. Wood-look slats and siding nod to traditional building techniques and provide warmth to the building.

**The team utilized exterior materials to help tell the story of the building and to create a place that was grounded and aspirational.**

GULLAH GEECHEE TRADITIONAL WEAR



OCEAN



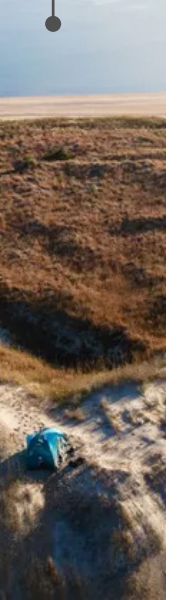
SWEET GRASS BASKETS



TIDAL WETLAND



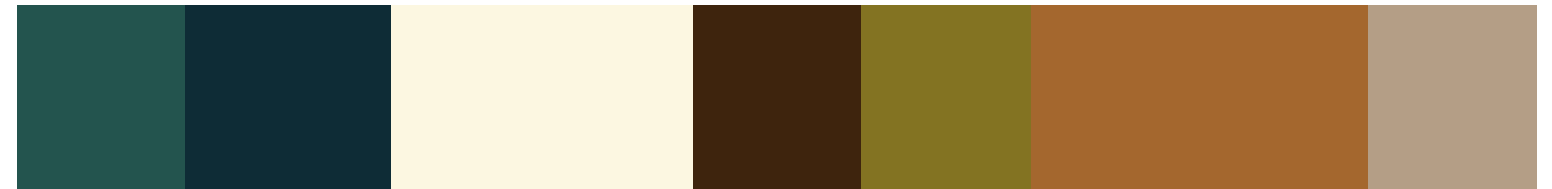
DUNES



NODS TO NAUTICAL

NATIVE OAK TREES

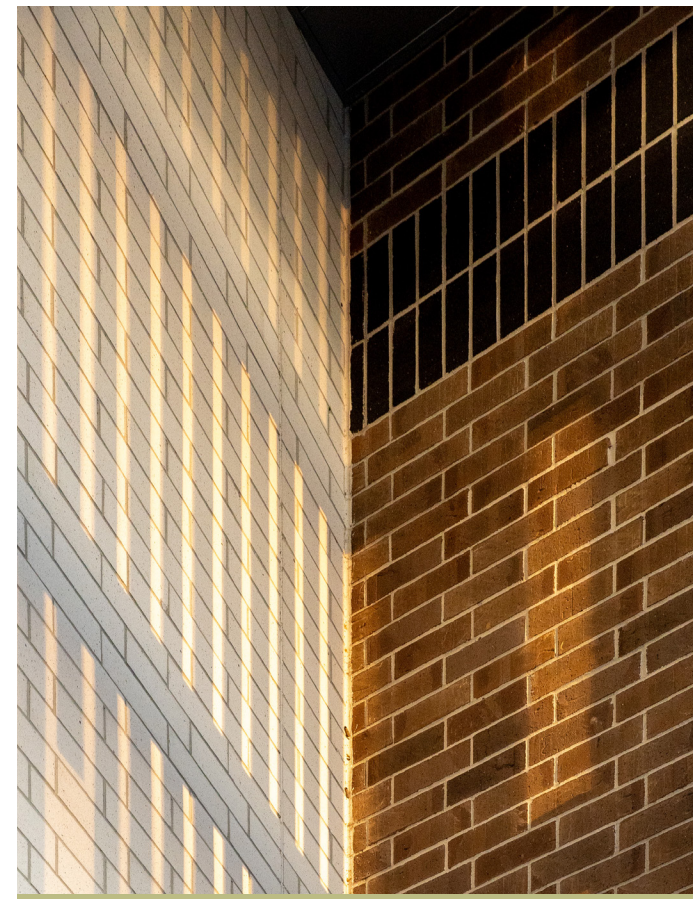
LOWCOUNTRY MARSH



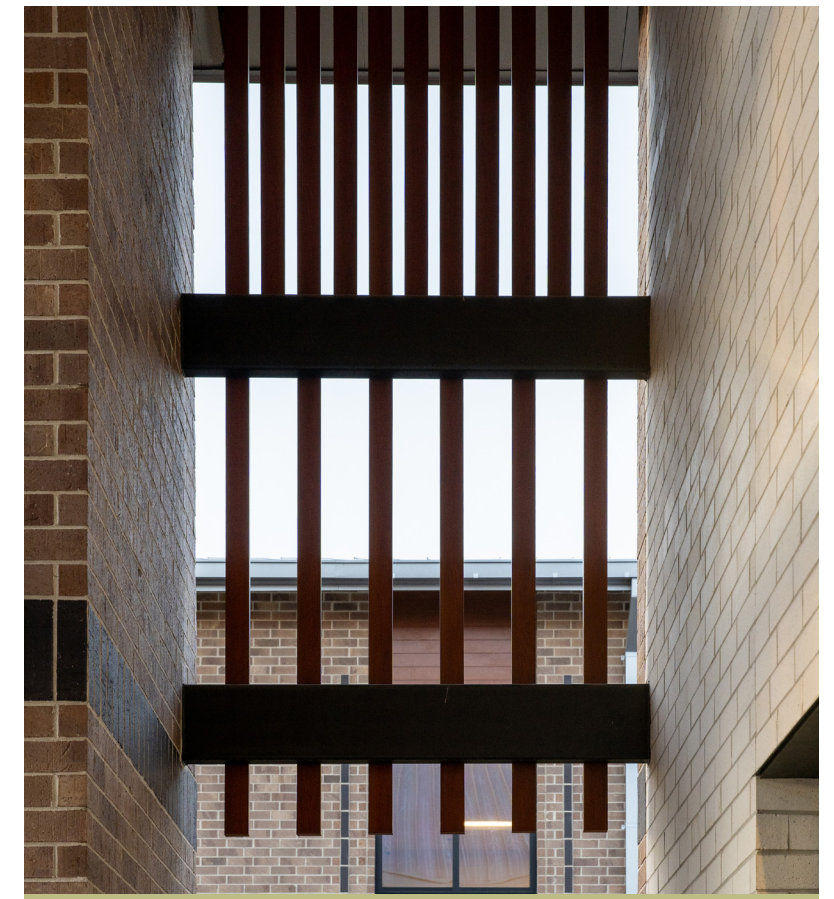
SAIL INSPIRED STEEL ENTRY



COLORFUL ACCENTS



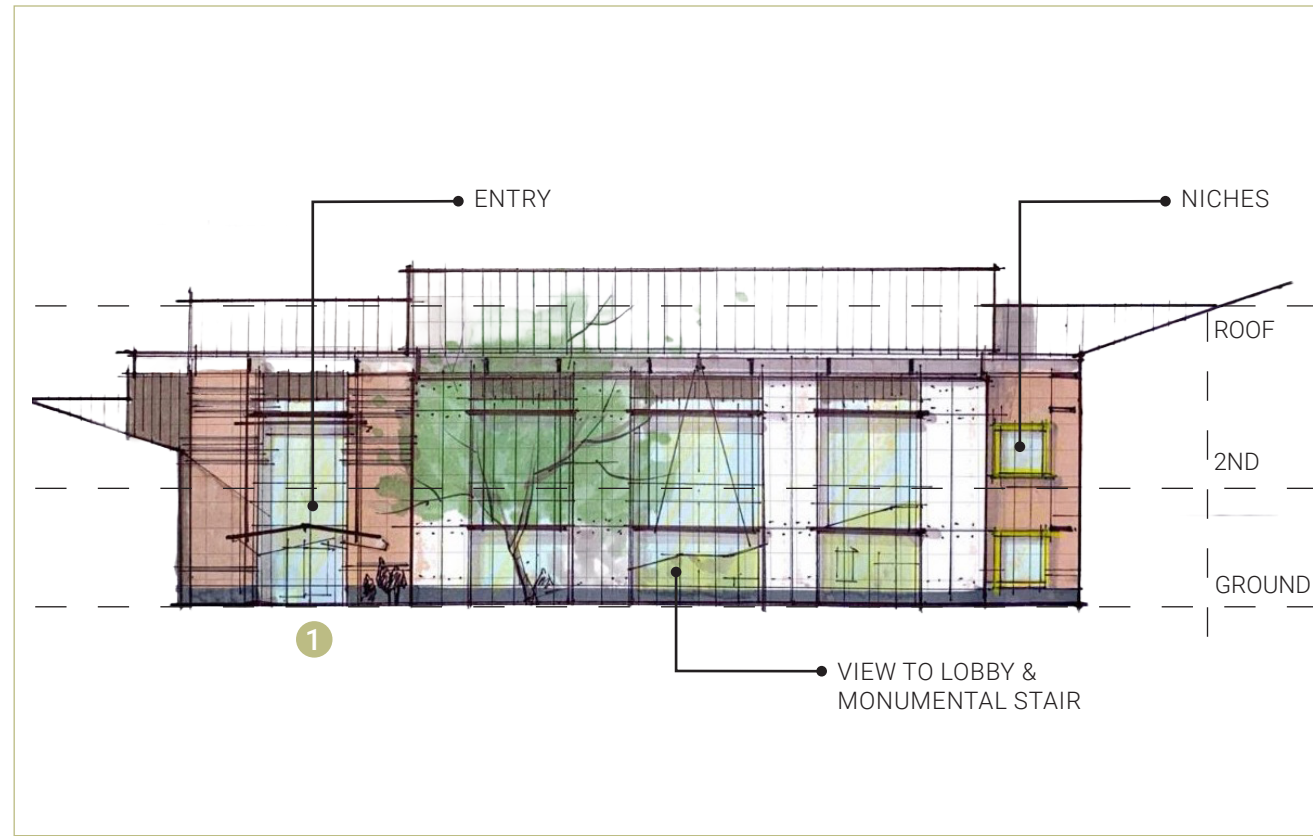
BRICK TRANSITIONS



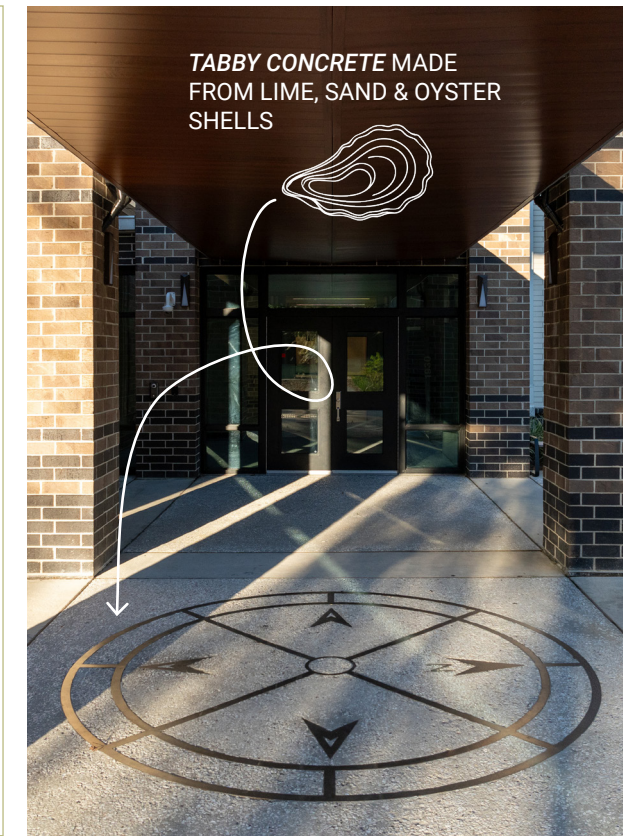
WOOD LOOK BATTEN: *Filters light & adds warmth*

## A LANDMARK OF BELONGING: ALL ARE WELCOME

The exterior materials set the tone for the building, but the entry tower and garden **highlight the spirit of the school and the community within**. The design team developed dozens of concepts for the entry and reviewed each with the district through the same lens used for the building's massing and organization. Does the entry honor Smalls and the history of the school? Does it welcome and engage students and the broader community? The final solution is both **celebratory and accessible**. The tower references Smalls' nautical past through its detailing and material expression, while a bow-shaped canopy reaches outward to greet visitors and guide them inside. A compass rose inlaid in tabby concrete, a traditional Lowcountry material made from lime, sand, water, and crushed oyster shells, creates a textured and reflective surface that subtly connects the entry sequence to the coastal environment and the region's historic building practices. The top of the tower is articulated to evoke rigging and shipbuilding, reinforcing the maritime narrative. Beside the tower, one of several pocket gardens softens the east elevation and anchors the building, forming a planted base for the expansive glazing into the main lobby. **The layered composition of tower, landscape, glazing, and views into the colorful interior creates an entry sequence that is both welcoming and grand.**



EAST ELEVATION CONCEPT SKETCH



COMPASS INLAY AT ENTRY



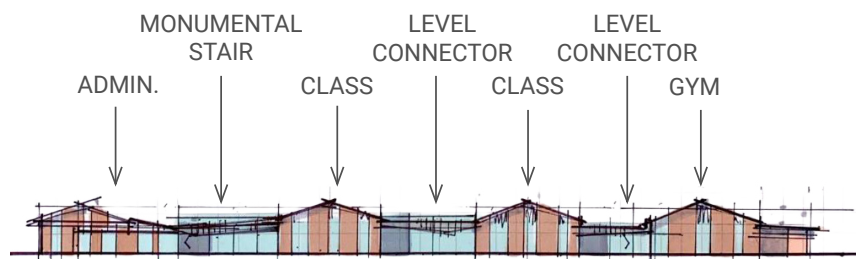
## ANCHORED IN PLACE: LOWCOUNTRY DESIGN

The South Carolina Lowcountry is hot, humid and prone to extreme weather. Over centuries, building typologies and practices have been developed to address these environmental conditions. **Porches provide shade and protection from the elements.** Building orientation is critical to address sun exposure and capture prevailing winds. Sloped roofs shed water and create attic spaces for stack effects and natural cooling. Materials should be durable, regionally available, and when possible, renewable.

The RSLA design takes **cues from traditional Lowcountry design** to support the functionality and sustainability of the building. Porches are incorporated at the ends of the classroom wings to offer shading and protection as students are dropped off and picked up. The classroom wings are oriented east/west in the optimal solar orientation for the climate and sloped roofs harken back to traditional typologies while shedding water quickly and creating interstitial spaces for mechanical equipment.



1 ELEVATION CONCEPT SKETCH



2 ELEVATION CONCEPT SKETCH



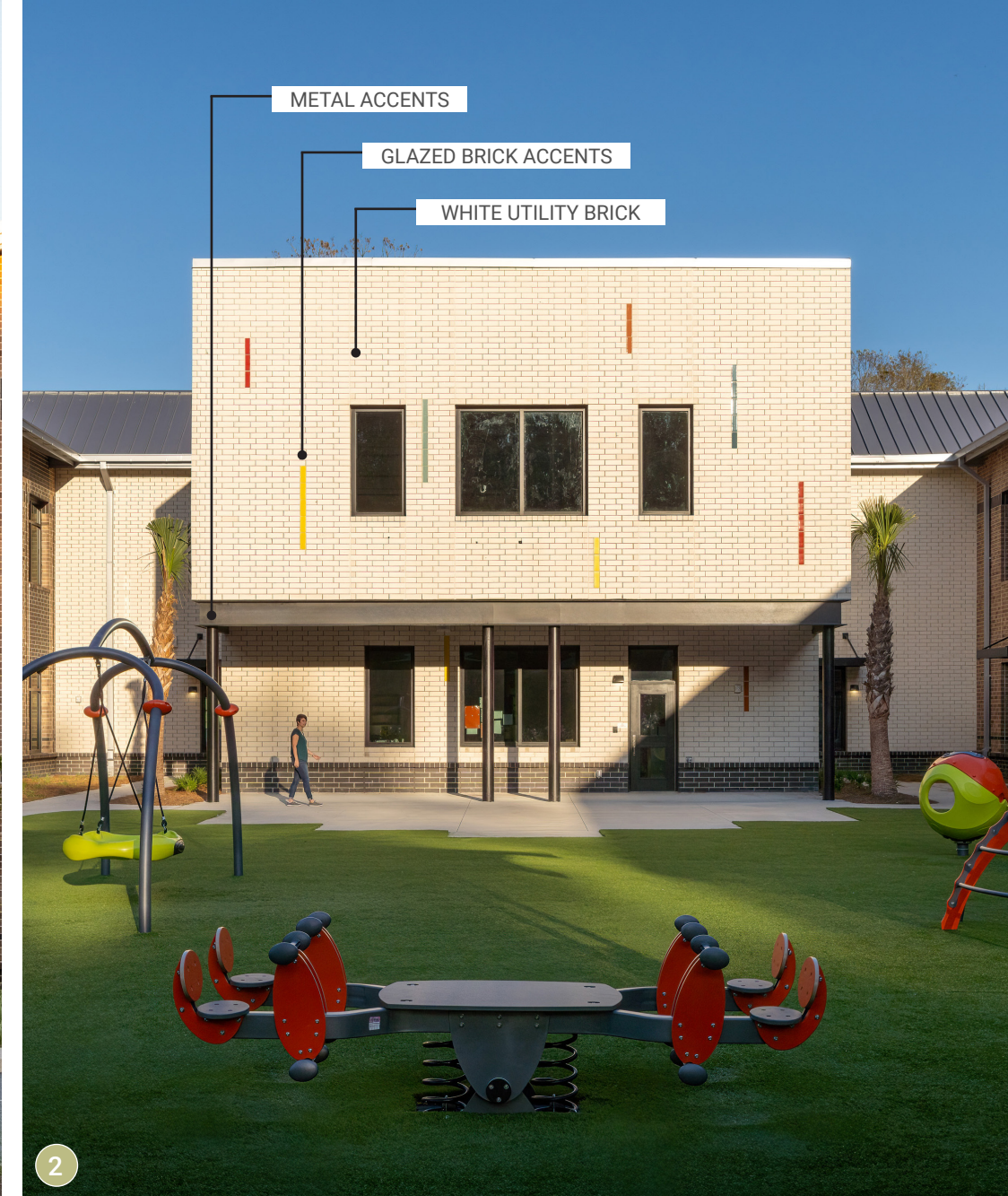
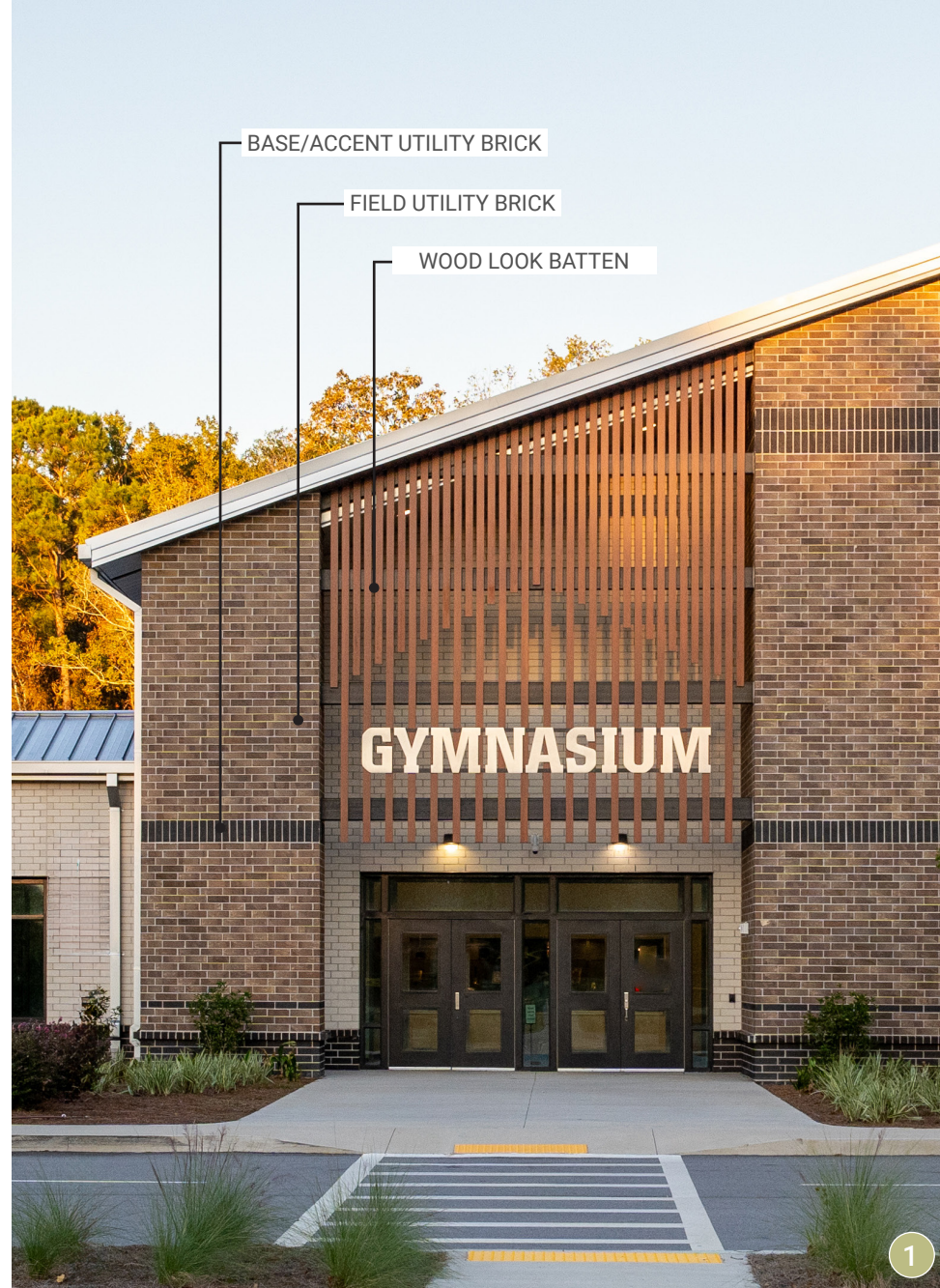
## NAVIGATING THROUGH FORM: COLOR AS EXPRESSION

Originally, the scale of the building was a concern for the team. Due to the limited site area, the east and west elevations are exceptionally long, and a two-story solution was required to fit the required program. The team wanted to be sensitive to the impact such a large building would have on the youngest students and visitors. **If the school was to feel safe and become a hub for the community, it would need to be accessible, inviting, and easy to navigate.**

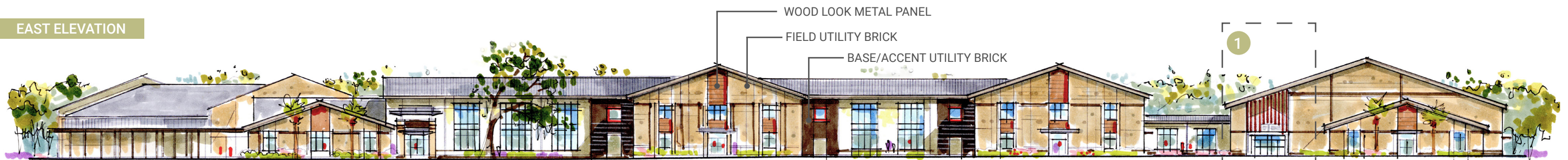
To accomplish this, the team pulled the major program wings forward and pushed the central spine back, thereby diminishing the impact of the overall building length and creating a more **approachable scale and rhythm.** The gable forms feel familiar and friendly, eliminating any institutional feelings. The pocket gardens along the east elevation provide visual relief and soften the building's overall appearance.

Wayfinding is enhanced through materiality, color, and special features. The entry tower and gymnasium entrance are celebratory, but unique, making it clear for everyone who approaches the building where the main entry is located and where to go for athletic events. Special program areas and transition zones are highlighted with white brick and colorful glazed brick accents to emphasize the building's form and support intuitive wayfinding.

The forms and materials selected tell the story of the building. The design addresses the community's vision for the building and the project's goals. The resulting building feels simultaneously inviting and grand. The forms and materials are grounded and regionally authentic, while infusing modernity and fun into the design.



EAST ELEVATION



WEST ELEVATION



## FIND YOUR GENIUS: WHOLE CHILD LEARNING

RSLA follows a traditional education model for classroom instruction layered with the LeaderInMe® Program. **The LeaderInMe® Program focuses on the seven habits of highly effective people and is less of an instructional model, and more of a cultural mission.**

The entire school community embraces the habits:

- ① *Be Proactive*
- ② *Begin with the End in Mind*
- ③ *Put First Things First*
- ④ *Think Win-Win*
- ⑤ *Seek First to Understand, Then to Be Understood*
- ⑥ *Synergize*
- ⑦ *Sharpen the Saw*

Students are encouraged to find their own genius and the spaces within the building are designed to support that journey. Technology labs, science labs, art rooms, the gymnasium, music rooms, and the performance platform provide opportunities for students to explore learning through a variety of learning modalities and activities. **The school focuses on arts, athletics, and academics to provide a well-rounded experience for all students.** By layering in the history of Smalls, celebrating the history of the school, and creating a platform for meaningful community engagement, **the school goes beyond the typical classroom to create a holistic education environment where all students can thrive.**



ART ROOM



SCIENCE LAB



GYMNASIUM






CAFETERIA & PERFORMANCE PLATFORM

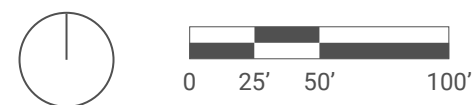
## ANCHORED IN EXPLORATION: NOOKS & DISCOVERY

Since RSLA follows a traditional education model for classroom instruction, the design team and district worked to expand learning outside of the classroom to provide opportunities for collaboration and gathering. **The central spine and interstitial spaces between the buildings became key opportunities for dispersing collaboration throughout the building and site.**

The team created nooks within the Media Center and along the central spine to provide small break-out areas, quiet study time, and artwork displays. Nooks were sized to accommodate a variety of age groups from the youngest Pre-K students to 8th graders. **These spaces offer comfort and protection, while still being highly visible and easy to monitor.**

**The interstitial spaces between the classroom wings and other site features are just as important to the environment of the school and community.** Outdoor areas are used for large group gatherings, small club activities, play, sports, and community events. The flexibility and accessibility of the campus allow for expanded curriculum opportunities such as gardening clubs and engagement with the community at large through summer camps, volunteer opportunities, and academic conferences.

-  OUTDOOR AREAS FOR COLLABORATION OR INDEPENDENT STUDY
-  INTEGRATED NOOKS FOR LEARNING & DISCOVERY
-  1 CAFETERIA
-  2 MEDIA CENTER
-  3 THE GROVE & GREAT LAWN
-  4 ART PATIO & KINDERGARTEN PLAYGROUND



⑤ ACCESS TO FRESH AIR & ENDLESS DISCOVERY



⑥ MOMENTS FOR LIGHT, BOOKS & GROWING MINDS



⑦ OUTDOOR DINING & PLAY AREAS

## EMBRACE THE JOURNEY: EXPERIENTIAL TIMELINE

From the very first community meeting, a visual timeline was identified as a critical feature of the project. **Memorializing the story of Robert Smalls and the history of the school was a driving factor in determining the success of the project and showing the community that they were listened to, cared for, and critical to the success of the school.**

The timeline is located along a key circulation path within the building. Students, faculty and staff walk past the timeline every day on their way to the cafeteria. Visitors engage with the timeline as a central spoke off the main lobby that connects key gathering spaces. Designed as a kaleidoscope of portals, students travel through time and space to learn about Robert Smalls and the history of the school. **To make the lessons transferable, the design team looked for opportunities to convey the story in multiple ways, through imagery and text.** Bold colors and imagery denote different time periods, and the text beckons people in to learn more, providing opportunities for discovery over time. The scale of the viewer was instrumental in determining the height of the imagery and size of the text so that the timeline offered something for all ages and abilities.

The timeline became a key layer in activating spaces beyond the classroom. A strategically placed window between portals peers into the Media Center's Maker Space to offer connection and discovery. The variation in portal heights, color and alternating graphics pull you into the space and encourage engagement and movement.

The design team and district took great care in crafting the timeline. **Creating a museum quality exhibit required thoughtfulness, dedication, attention to detail, iteration, and execution.** Hand sketches, digital renderings, research, and full-scale mockups were all created to ensure that the installation captured the essence of Robert Smalls, the school, and the community.



CONCEPT DESIGN



FINAL INSTALLATION



TESTING SCALE & LEGIBILITY

Font type: Helvetica [95 Black]  
Font size: 12"  
Average Reading Distance: 170'-0"

Font type: Baskerville Old Face [Regular]  
Font size: 77 pt [3/4"]  
Kerning: 60 pt  
Average Reading Distance: 8'-0"

All portals include a descriptive list of imagery and illustrations featured on each panel

FULL SCALE TEXT  
**1839**  
**April 5**

Robert Smalls was born in Beaufort, SC to Lydia Polite, an enslaved person for the McKee family.

Font type: Helvetica [47 Light Condensed]  
Font size: 25 pt [1/4"]  
Kerning: 25 pt  
Average Reading Distance: 3'-0"

***“This school gives us the  
chance to learn and lead.”***

Giancarlo Guillen | 6th Grade Student, 2021

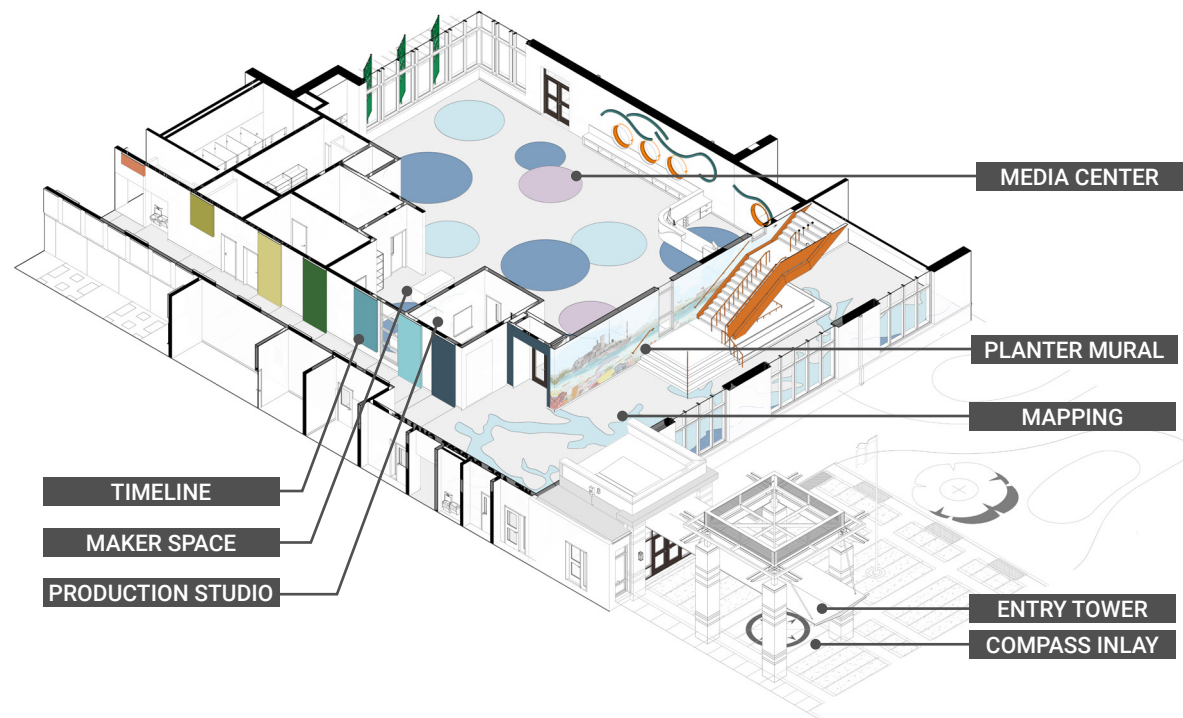


## FIND YOUR BEARING: PLANTER MURAL

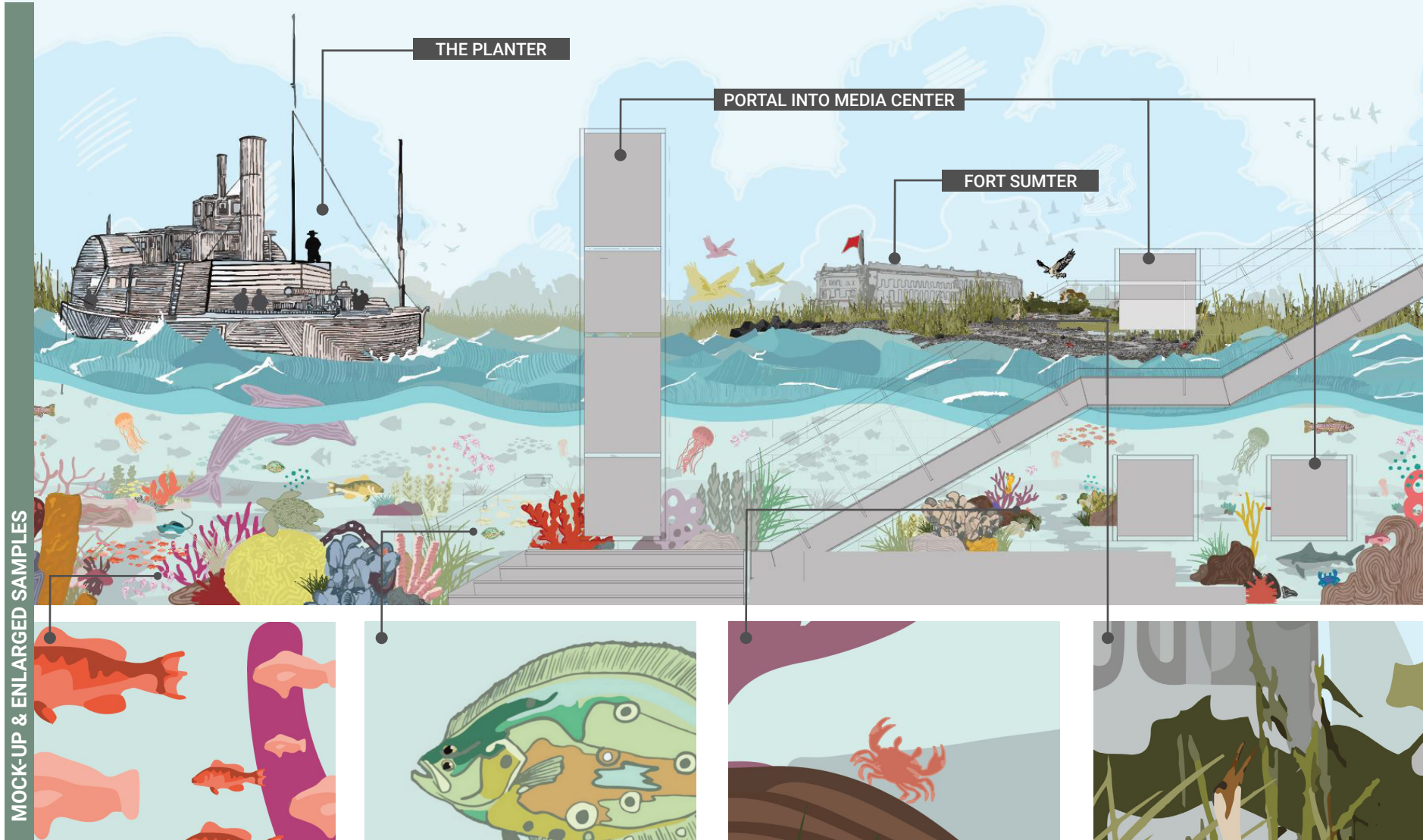
During the community engagement meetings, murals stood out as by far the most cherished medium to the RSLA community. The existing school was covered in student artwork and murals reflecting the LeaderInMe® Program and history of Robert Smalls. **75% of respondents wished to see murals as part of the new school and continue the school's tradition.**

The Planter, the ship Robert Smalls commandeered and ultimately Captained, became the clear choice for the lobby mural, but the ship itself was not enough. The design team and district worked through many iterations to refine the content of the mural and layer in meaning in a variety of ways.

The Planter is the main focal point of the mural as it rides above the surface and anchors the left side of the image. One shadowed figure stands tall at the front of the ship, looking out over the sea, inviting kids to imagine themselves within the story. Fort Sumter appears further along the wall to orient you to a time, place and action. Below the waterline, local sea life is abundant and colorful, offering opportunities for lessons in ecology and **celebrating the vibrant ecosystem of the lowcountry.**

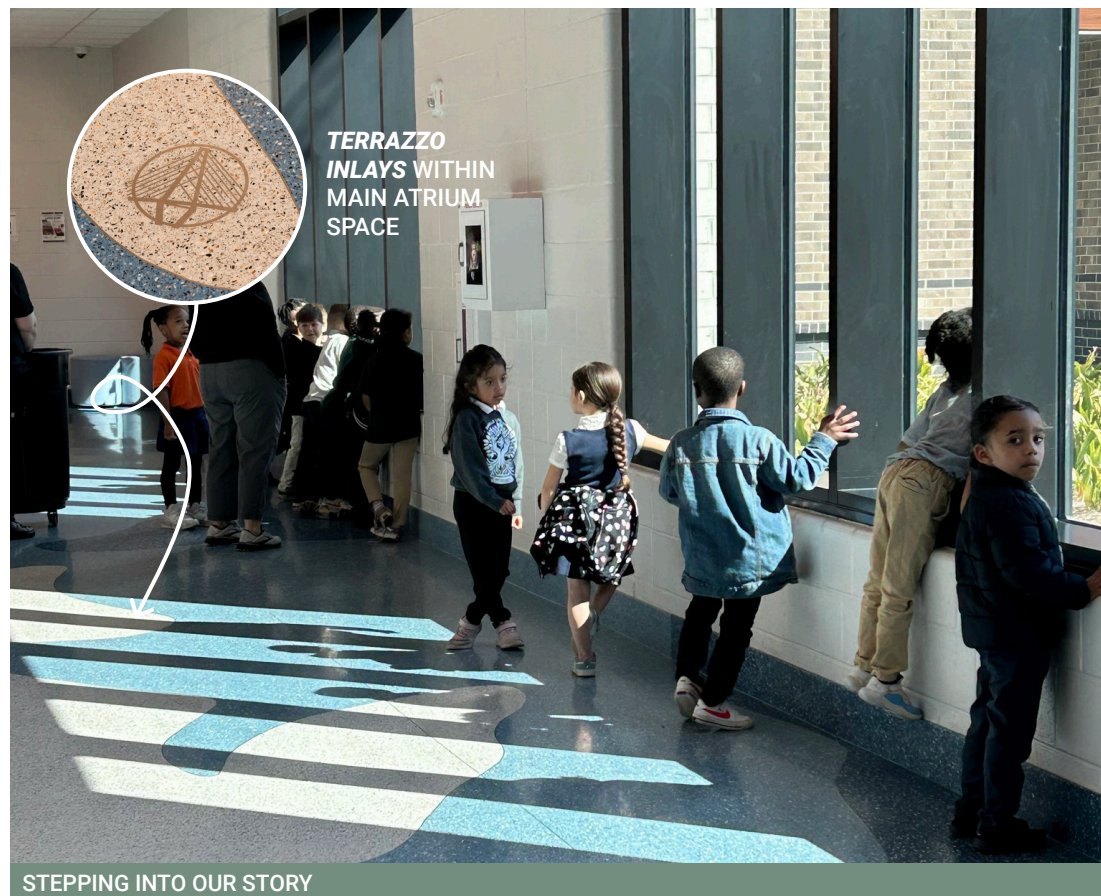


The monumental stair is anchored to the wall, providing opportunities to engage directly with the mural. Windows are placed along the path with views into the Media Center, and learning steps are incorporated beneath the stair. The monumental stair uses the school's secondary orange color to draw attention and energy into the space. **The overall composition is colorful and inviting without being overwhelming.** The artwork itself was hand drawn, touched up digitally, and then printed. The art style is expressive and embraces linework and pattern to create an image that is tactile and joyful.



## CHART YOUR COURSE: TERRAZZO MAPPING

The lobby floor presented the perfect canvas for layering in additional learning opportunities and interactive features. Chosen for its durability, beauty, and design flexibility, terrazzo was selected as the ideal material for the lobby floor. **The terrazzo floor features local shell and glass chips to highlight sustainable regional materials and root the lobby in local ecology.**



For the design of the floor, the team worked with the district to create a map of the South Carolina coastline from Beaufort to Charleston using three colors of terrazzo to signify the land, the continental shelf, and the Atlantic Ocean. Metal emblems were designed and inlaid into the floor to signify key geographical locations. Charleston, where Robert Smalls made his daring escape, is marked with a contemporary symbol of Charleston – the Ravenel Bridge. Fort Sumter, where the Civil War began and where Robert Smalls navigated his crew and family to freedom, is marked with a cannon. Port Royal Island, Robert Smalls' birthplace and location of the original school, is marked with an anchor – the symbol of Port Royal Island, and the school itself is marked with the school's General logo.

**Each day students can be seen walking the map and interacting with the inlays.** Teachers use the map as a teaching tool for geography and history. The administration highlights the map for visitors, using it and the mural to tell the story of Robert Smalls.



## FIND YOUR HARBOR: MEDIA CENTER

One of the most important spaces to the community was the Media Center. Early community feedback pointed to the Media Center as **the heart of the school** and a space that needed to support more activities than traditionally required. With this directive in mind, the design team envisioned a Media Center that layers nautical themes, flexible furnishings, and playful elements to create a welcoming collaboration space that goes beyond the traditional library. Located at the front of the building directly off the main lobby, the Media Center becomes a celebrated space that hosts book readings, parent meetings, a maker space, and club activities.

### Intentional design choices make the Media Center fun and whimsical without being overwhelming or distracting.

Peek-through windows connect the Media Center to the lobby along and beneath the monumental stair in unexpected ways. Pin connection columns, a light up wave wall, bubble patterns, porthole windows, a wave inspired circulation desk, and seaweed patterned sunshades reinforce the nautical inspiration within the space. Seating nooks with integrated shelving were created along the perimeter to **encourage students to take ownership of the space** and provide choices to the users.

“This school represents who we are and who we’re becoming.”

Principal Bradley Tarrance | Robert Smalls Leadership Academy

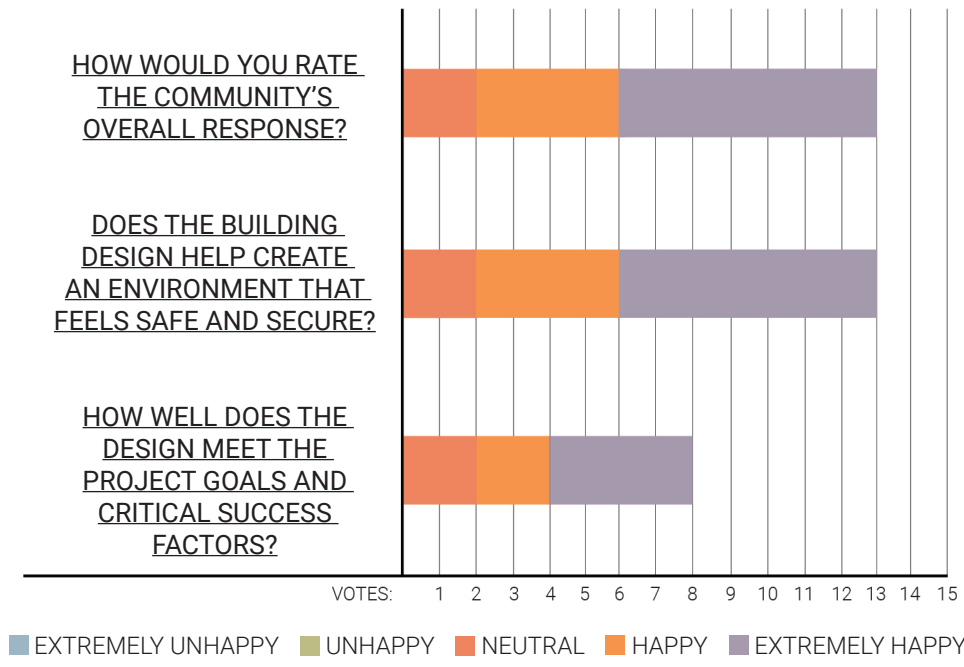
- 1 WAVE WALL
- 2 PORT HOLE WINDOWS
- 3 SEAWEED SUNSHADES
- 4 BUBBLE FLOOR & CEILING PATTERN
- 5 CAST CONNEX PIN CONNECTION COLUMNS
- 6 WAVE DESK



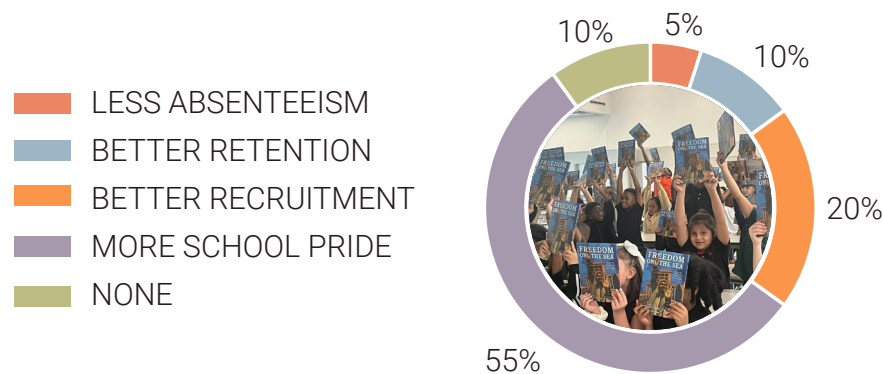
## TRACKING IMPACT: RESULTS & POST OCCUPANCY DATA

To understand the far-reaching effects of the project, the team used a variety of resources. The team reviewed SC School Report Cards from before and after the opening of the school, and conducted a post occupancy evaluation with teachers, administrators and staff members. The team also collected anecdotal evidence from discussions with the principal and district leadership, and the design team has visited the school periodically for building tours, conferences and general check-ins.

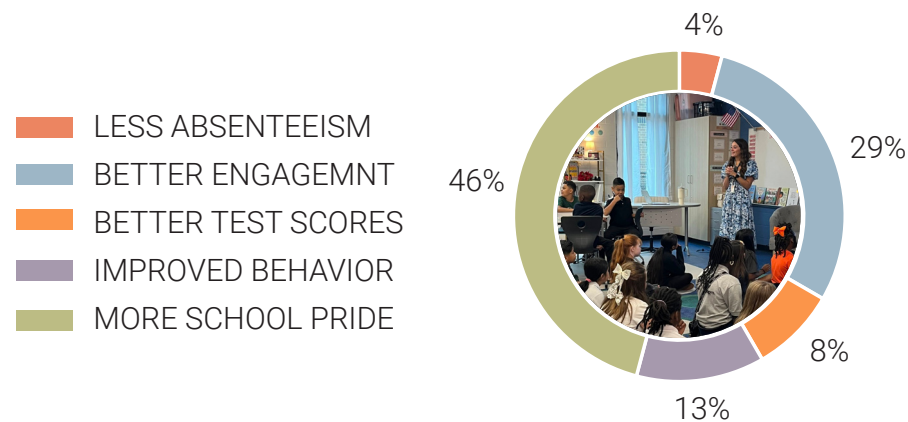
The SC School Report Cards show that students' and teachers' perception of safety is now on par with the district and state, and students' perception of their environment now surpasses the district average. The post occupancy evaluation of teachers and staff shows **increases in school pride, engagement and recruitment**, and consensus that the building addresses the guiding principles of the project.



### HOW HAS THE NEW BUILDING POSITIVELY IMPACTED THE FACULTY AND STAFF'S HEALTH AND ATTENDANCE?



### IN WHAT WAYS IS THE NEW BUILDING SUPPORTING STUDENT DEVELOPMENT?



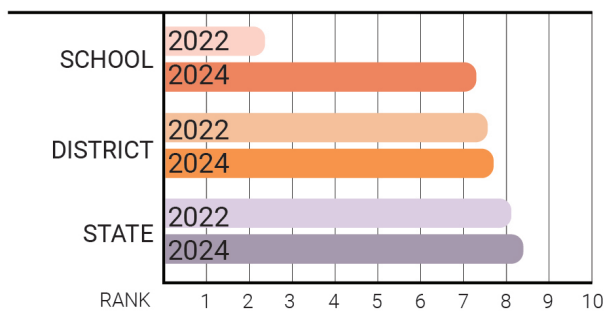
ACADEMIC GROWTH



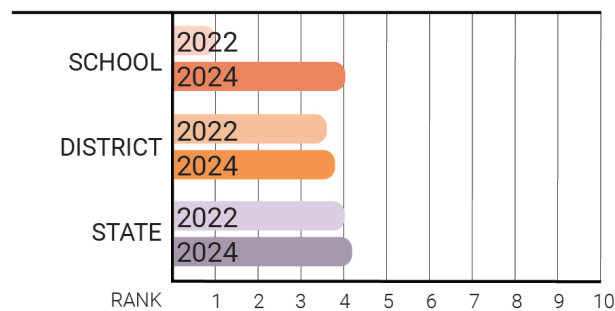
STUDENT PARTICIPATION & ENGAGEMENT

### POST OCCUPANCY SURVEY QUESTIONS

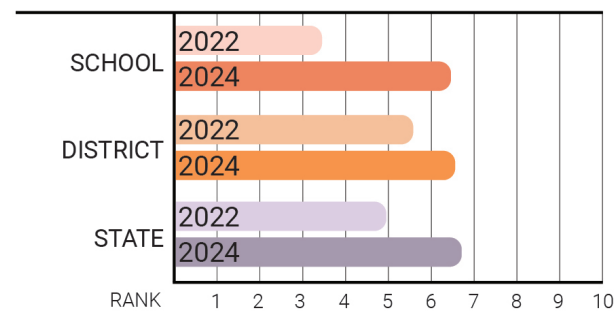
#### TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY



#### STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIO-PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



#### STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY



### SOUTH CAROLINA REPORT CARD DATA

## ROOTED IN HISTORY: RISING TOGETHER

Shining a light on Smalls and the history of the Robert Smalls School in Beaufort, brought **pride, ownership, and energy** to two communities that are historically disenfranchised and forgotten. The Robert Smalls Association understands firsthand what it is like to be left out of important conversations, and the current community's high poverty rate and high percentage of non-native English speakers also understand what it is like to be seen as the "other." Through this project's collaborative design process, both groups were encouraged to speak and were heard; they now feel ownership of the project. This sense of ownership fuels meaningful participation and community support that enriches the education experience for all the students, faculty, and staff at the school. **Pride and ownership open the campus to unexpected usages.** On weekends, families use the great lawn for picnics and recreation. During the week, families are invited into the building for wrap around services and community events.

“The school has become the hub for our entire community. We have classes from birth – parenting. We have three laundry facilities, a food pantry, and a community group that holds block parties to bring us together. The school and the process in developing the vision of the school allowed access to alumni, parents, students, and community members. It truly has allowed the community to KNOW that this is THEIR school and we work for OUR community.”

Principal Bradley Tarrance | Robert Smalls Leadership Academy

Robert Smalls Leadership Academy is more than a building, more than a school, and more than a place. It is a community that brings people together to lift each other up. It is a community that values its history and uses it as inspiration for the future.

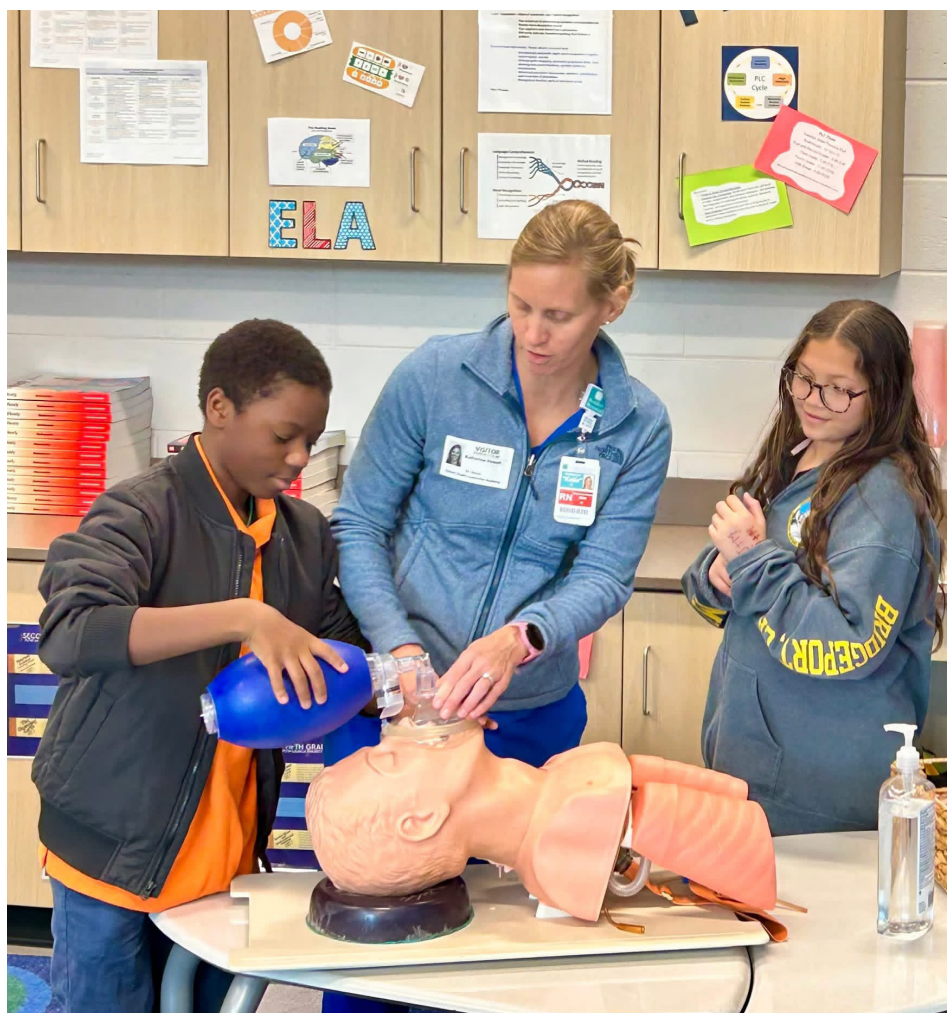
**At Robert Smalls Leadership Academy all are welcome, all are valued, and all can lead.**



COMMUNITY SERVICE: TRASH PICK-UP



AUTHORS ROBERT EDWARDS & MICHAEL BOULWARE MOORE WITH PRINCIPAL TARRANCE (CENTER)



CPR COURSE FOR STUDENTS



COMMUNITY EVENT: LATIN FOOD FESTIVAL

***“As Generals, we lead through academics, arts, and athletics. Now our building reflects that.”***

Principal Bradley Tarrance | Robert Smalls Leadership Academy, 2021

