



**McKINNEY YORK ARCHITECTS**

*Designing for Every Learner:  
Equity, Accessibility, and Belonging in Educational Spaces*

**A4LE - Southern Regional Conference**

Engage  
Inspire  
Belong

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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1. **Recognize** how inclusive design strategies that address sensory experience, accessibility, and cultural context can remove barriers and support student well-being.
2. **Understand** how planning, materials, lighting, and spatial sequencing influence comfort, communication, and learning for diverse student populations.
3. **Apply** design approaches that support neurodiverse learners, bilingual communities, and Deaf students through thoughtful environmental design.
4. **Evaluate** how educational spaces can reinforce dignity, independence, and connection through human-centered, equity-driven architecture.

# INTRODUCTIONS

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**Michelle Rossomando, AIA, RID**  
*President and Principal*



**Navvab Taylor, AIA, RID, LEED AP BD+C**  
*Principal*



**Molly Hubbs, AIA**  
*Associate*



**ENGAGE**



**INSPIRE**



**BELONG**

# PROJECT EXPERIENCE



# DESIGNING FOR EVERY LEARNER

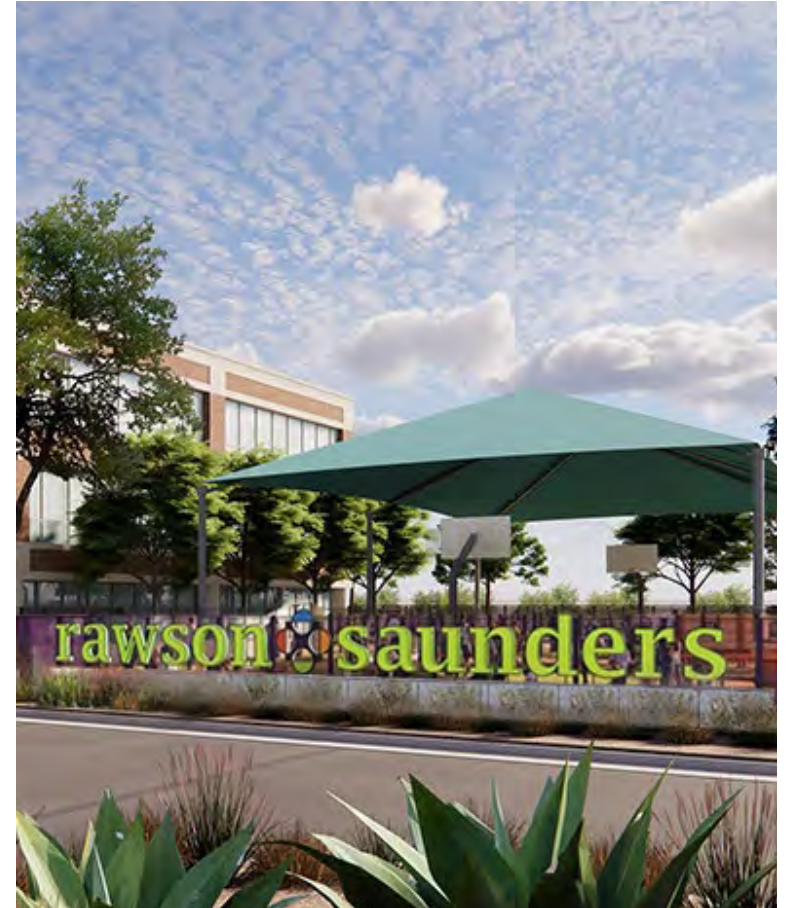
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Allison Elementary School



Texas School for the Deaf



Rawson Saunders School

# AUSTIN ISD ALLISON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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# PROJECT OVERVIEW

## At-a-Glance:

- New school on an occupied campus
- Planned for 522 learners
- Approximately 90,000 SF
- Includes various site improvements
- Open for 1<sup>st</sup> day of classes August 2026



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



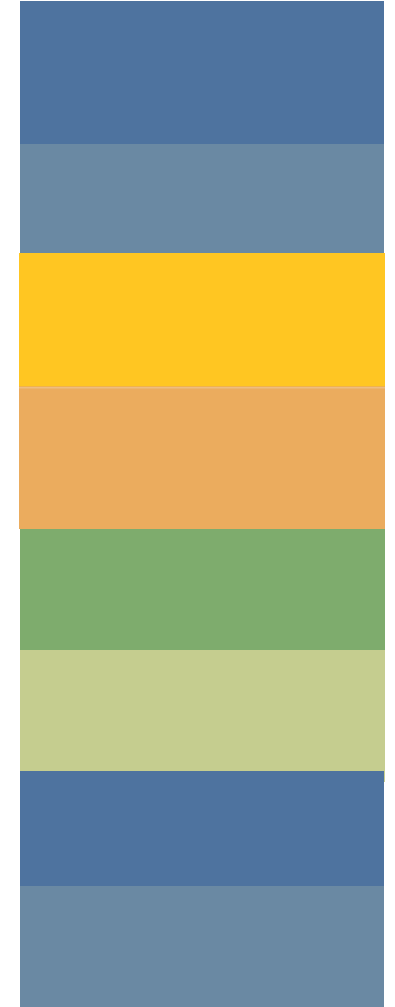
# INCORPORATING CULTURAL IDENTITY - DESIGN CONCEPT

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## ***De Colores (All the Colors)***

*De colores, de colores  
Se visten los campos en la primavera.  
De colores, de colores  
Son los pajaritos que vienen de afuera.  
De colores, de colores  
Es el arco iris que vemos lucir.  
Y por eso los grandes amores  
de muchos colores me gustan a mi.*

*All the colors, all the colors  
How they all bloom in the field in springtime.  
All the colors, all the colors  
On the little birds as they come from afar.  
All the colors, all the colors  
We see in the rainbows that shine in the sky.  
And this love, this great love  
of all the colors, is very special to me.*



# INCORPORATING CULTURAL IDENTITY - CONTEXT

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# INCORPORATING CULTURAL IDENTITY - ARTWORK

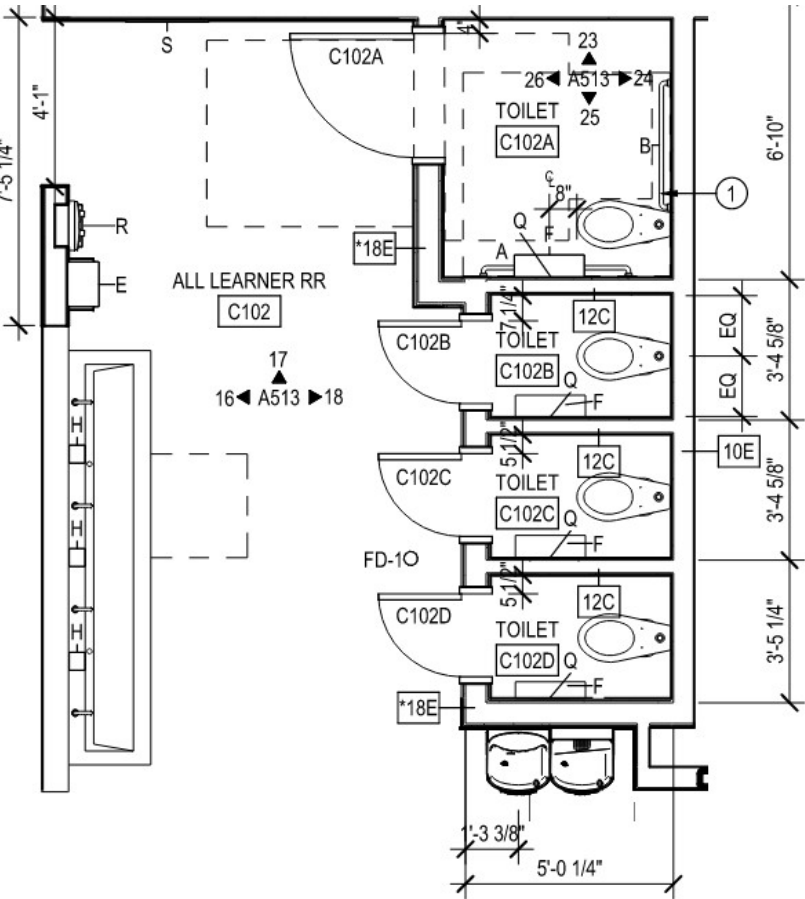
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**FUTURE  
ARTWORK/MURAL  
LOCATION**



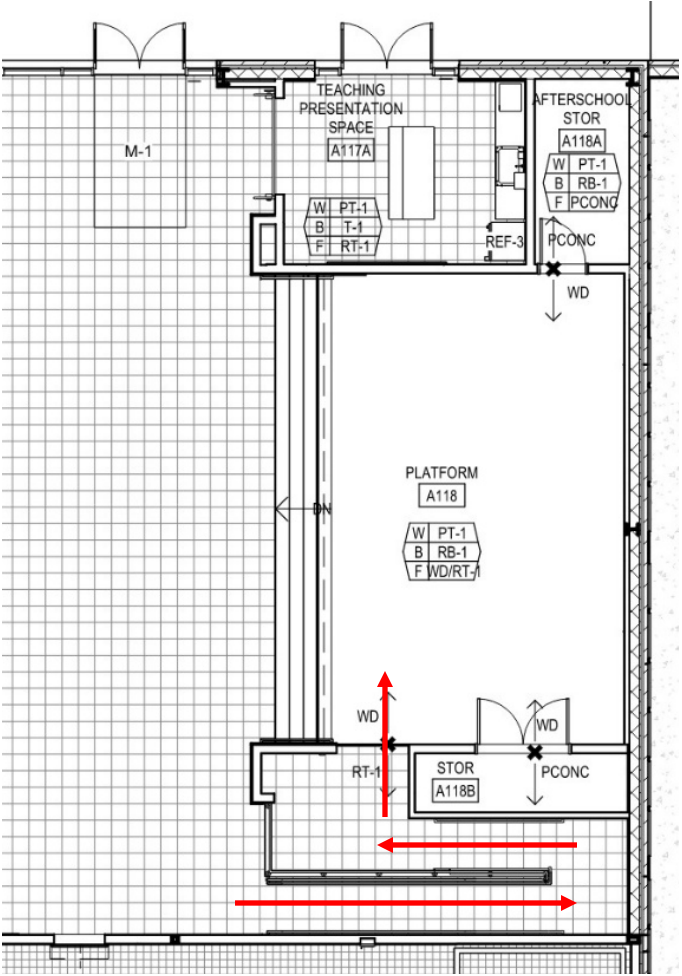
# EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY - RESTROOMS

## Centralized, Open Concept Restrooms



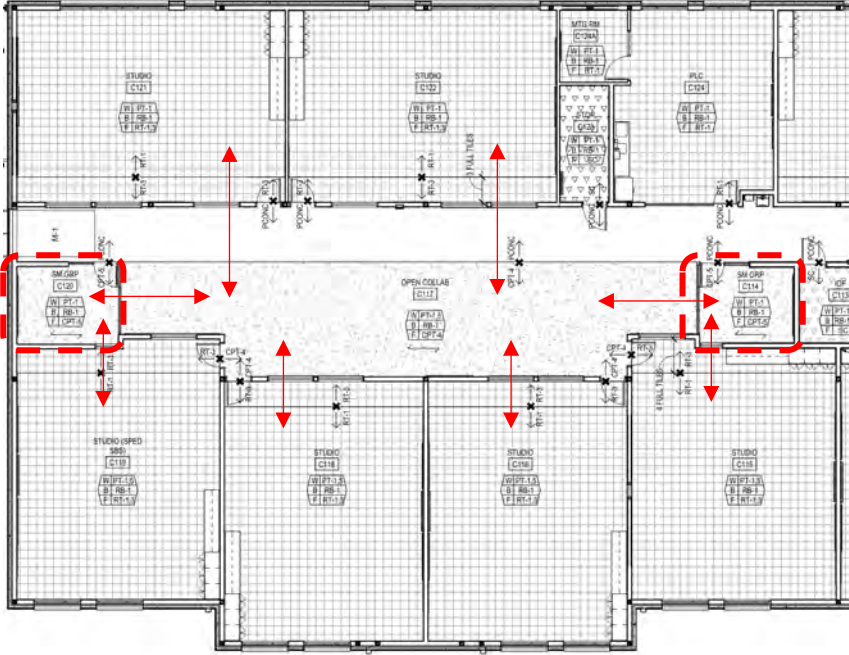
# EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY – STAGE ACCESS

## Accessible Stage Access



# EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY - CLASSROOMS

## Expanded Classroom



# EQUITY & ACCESSIBILITY – GRAPHICS & SIGNAGE

## Bilingual Signage & Wall Graphics



# CULTURAL MEMORY – BLENDING OLD & NEW



# DESIGNING FOR BELONGING – WAYFINDING STRATEGIES

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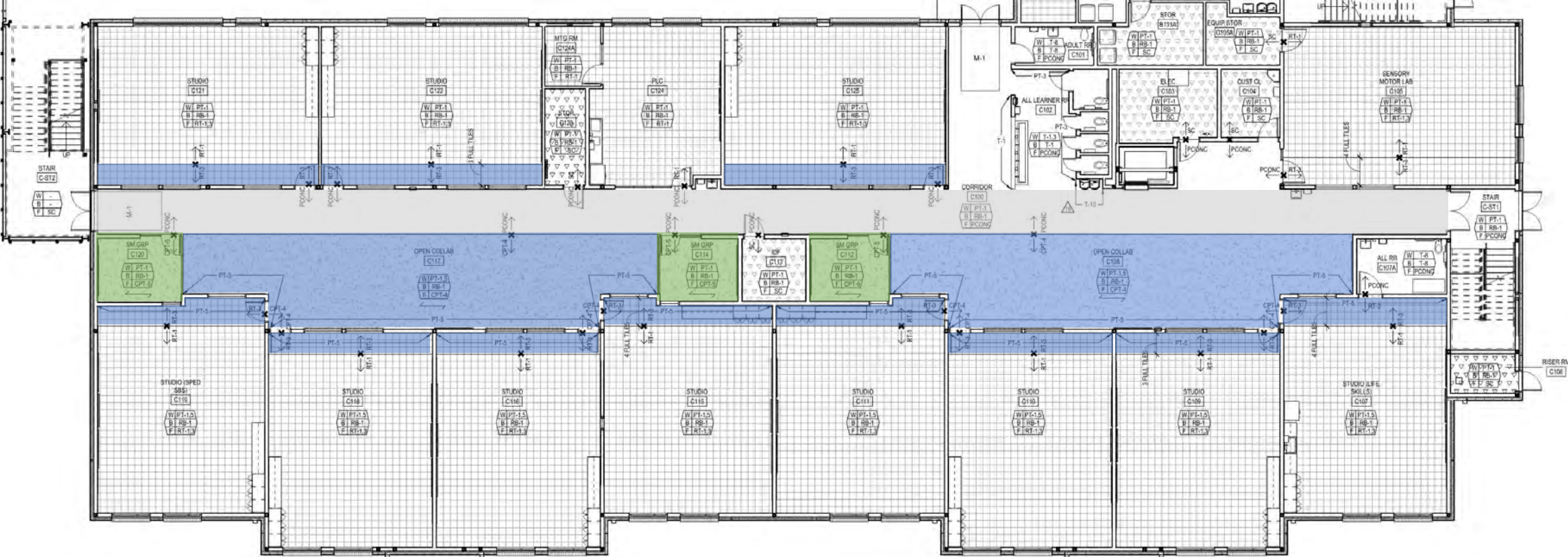


# DESIGNING FOR BELONGING - LEARNING NEIGHBORHOODS

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# DESIGNING FOR BELONGING - LEARNING NEIGHBORHOODS



# EQUITABLE MATERIALS

## Environmental Product Declaration (EPD)

Select products that disclose their life-cycle environmental impact via an EPD.

## Sourcing of Raw Materials

Select products with recycled content and/or FSC wood.

## Material Ingredient Reporting

Select products that fully disclose the potential chemicals of concern and which have a health product declaration (HPD).

## Low Emitting Materials credit

Select products with no or low VOCs to improve indoor air quality.



# EQUITABLE MATERIALS



# TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF



SOUTH 1ST STREET

NEWTON STREET

SOUTH CONGRESS AVE.

NELLIE STREET

WEST ELIZABETH STREET

ELIZABETH ST  
ENTRANCE

KLEBERG  
BUILDING

EARLY LEARNING  
CENTER

MAIN  
ENTRANCE

# DEAF CULTURE & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

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- **Historical Context**

- Many spaces for the Deaf have been designed and controlled by hearing institutions
- This often results in environments that reinforced isolation and disconnection

- **Experience of Space & Need for Connection**

- Everyday experiences in public and private spaces highlight the importance of spatial design that supports visual communication.
- When the environments are not designed for visual communication, the social and cultural disconnection is evident

- **Parallels to Vernacular Architecture**

- While traditional architecture evolves from cultural practices - DeafSpace design evolves from Deaf cultural values and lived experiences



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



# WHAT IS DEAFSPACE?

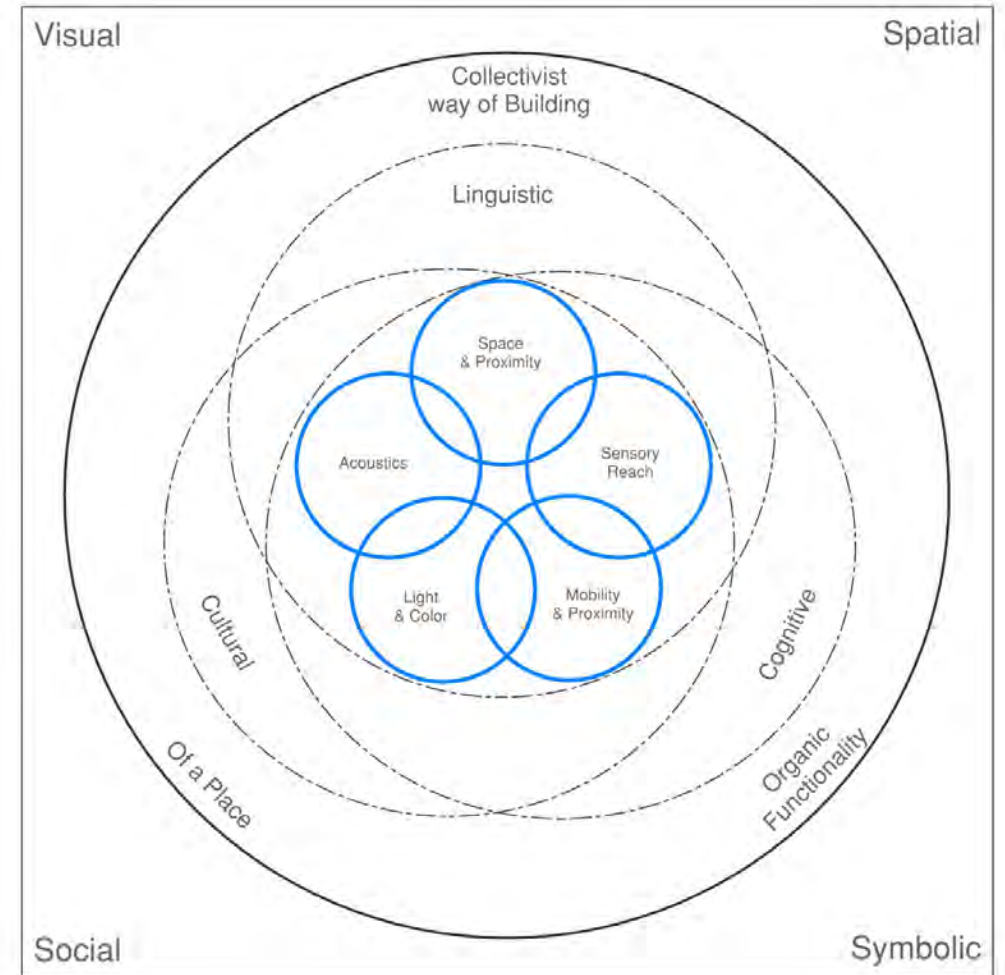
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**DeafSpace** is a design approach developed to guide the design of environments that support a more inclusive and comfortable design for deaf people.

5 Major Categories under the DeafSpace Guidelines:

1. [Space and Proximity](#)
2. [Sensory Reach](#)
3. [Mobility and Proximity](#)
4. [Light and Color](#)
5. [Acoustics & EMI](#)

The Goal of the DeafSpace Design Guidelines is to encourage an architecture that fosters a sense of wellbeing for deaf individuals by facilitating clear visual communication.



# CASE STUDIES

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## Early Learning Center



Age Group: 18 months up to 5 years old

## Kleberg Building Addition and Renovation



Age Group: 18 to 22 years old

# COMMUNITY SPACES

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Early Learning Center



Age Group: 18 months up to 5 years old

Kleberg Building Addition and Renovation

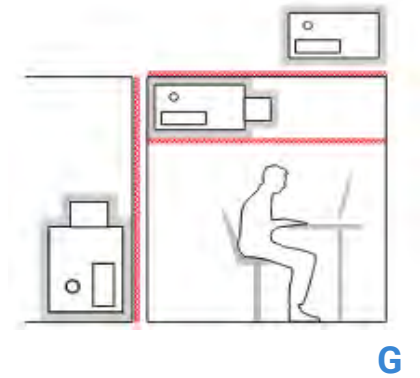
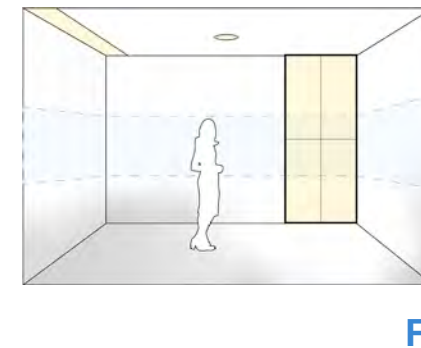
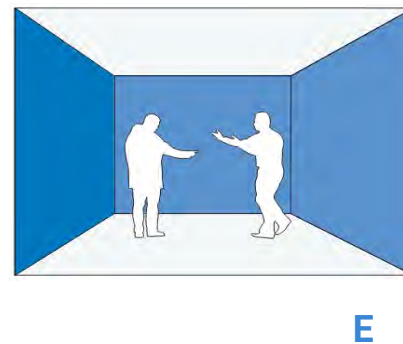
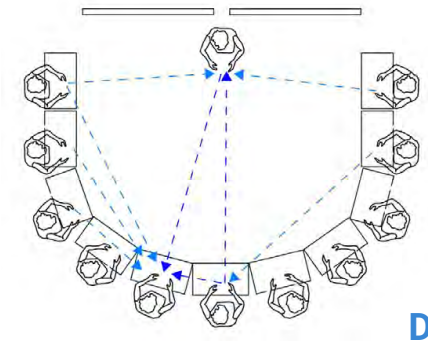
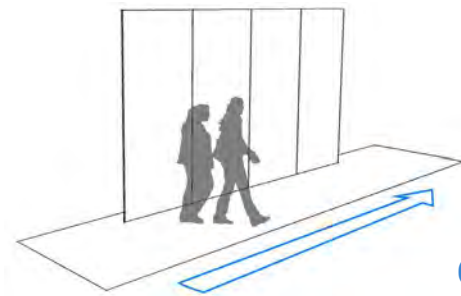
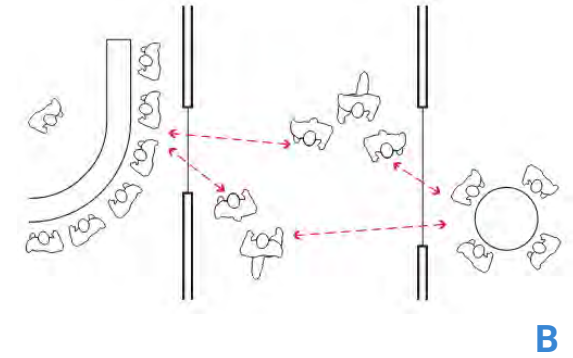
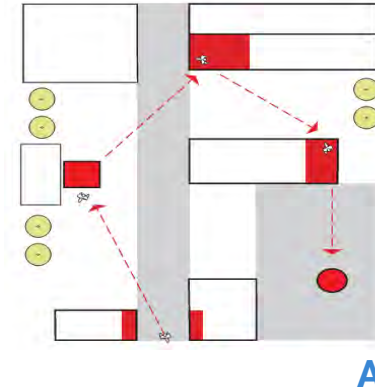


Age Group: 18 to 22 years old

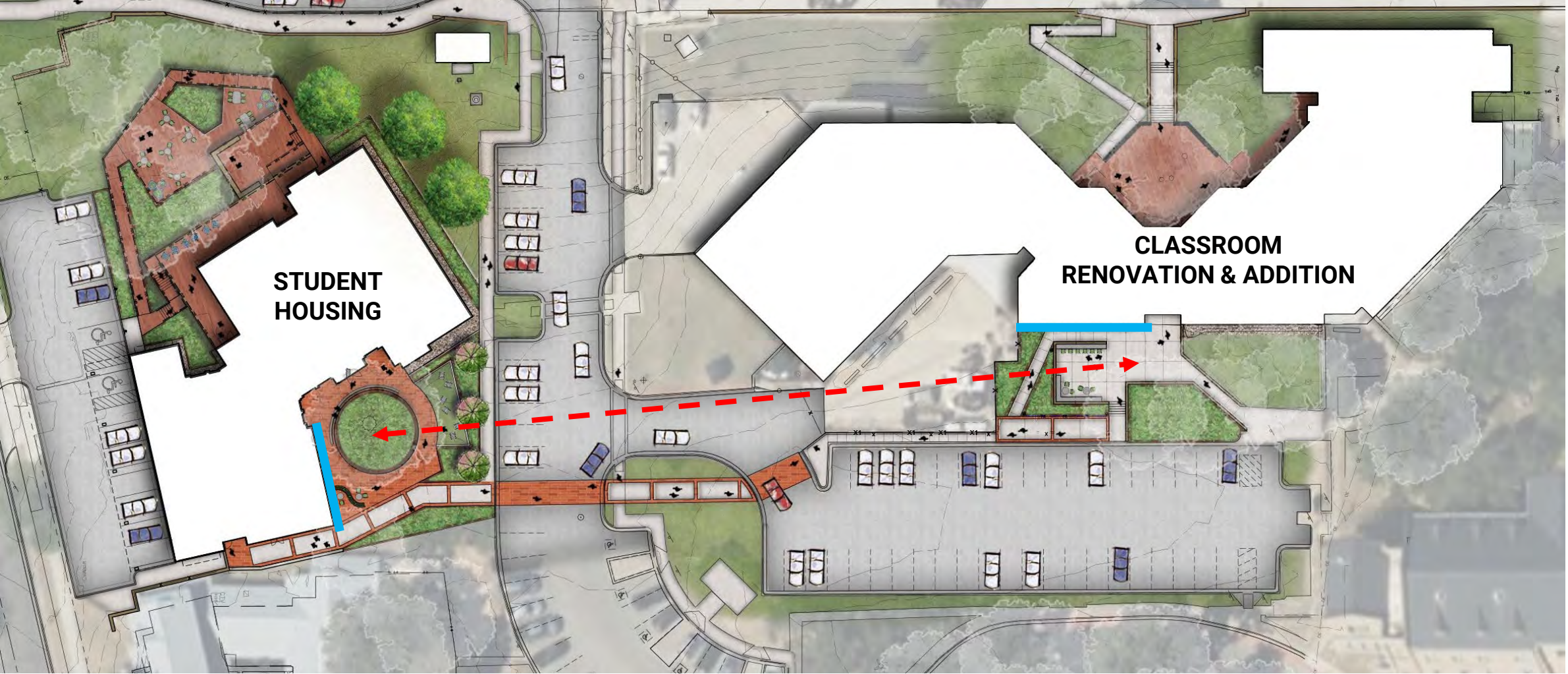
# DEAFSPACE ATTRIBUTES IN DESIGN

## DeafSpace Design Principles:

1. Sensory Reach
  - A. Visible Destinations in Sequence
  - B. Transparency in Movement Spaces
2. Mobility and Proximity
  - C. Rhythmic Visual Elements
3. Space and Proximity
  - D. Optimal Classroom Orientation
  - E. Contrasting Color Surfaces
4. Light and Color
  - F. Daylighting / Surface Glare
5. Acoustics & EMI
  - G. Equipment Noise Isolation



# VISIBLE DESTINATIONS IN SEQUENCE



# VISIBLE DESTINATIONS IN SEQUENCE

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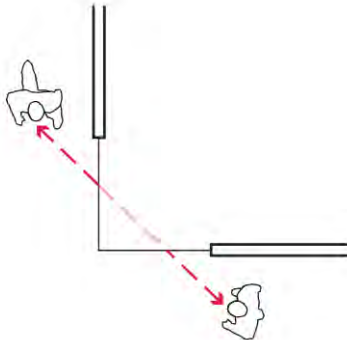
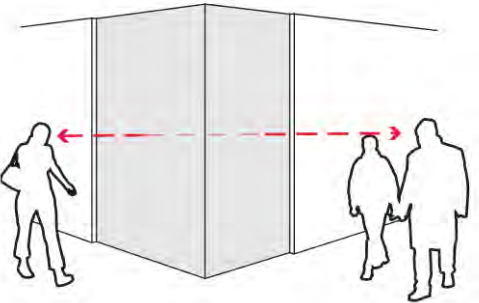
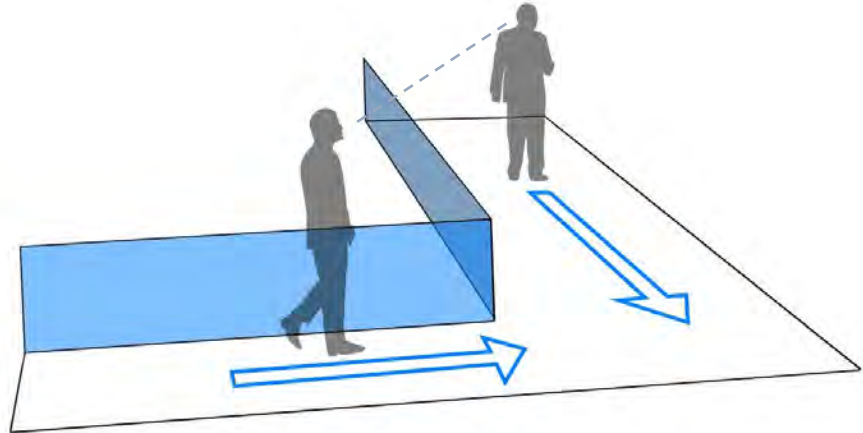
Entry to Student Housing Building



Entry to the Kleberg Building



# TRANSPARENCY IN MOVEMENT SPACES



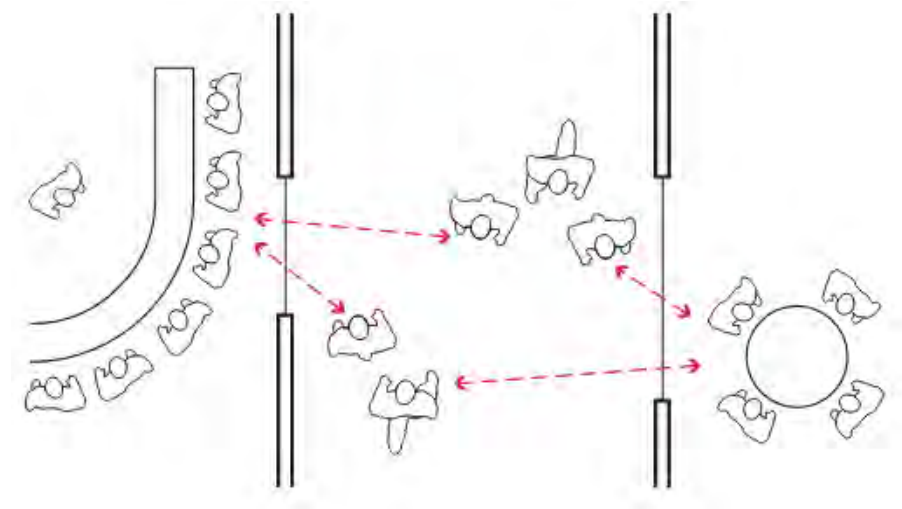
Kleberg Building Floor Plan

# TRANSPARENCY IN MOVEMENT SPACES



# TRANSPARENCY IN MOVEMENT SPACES

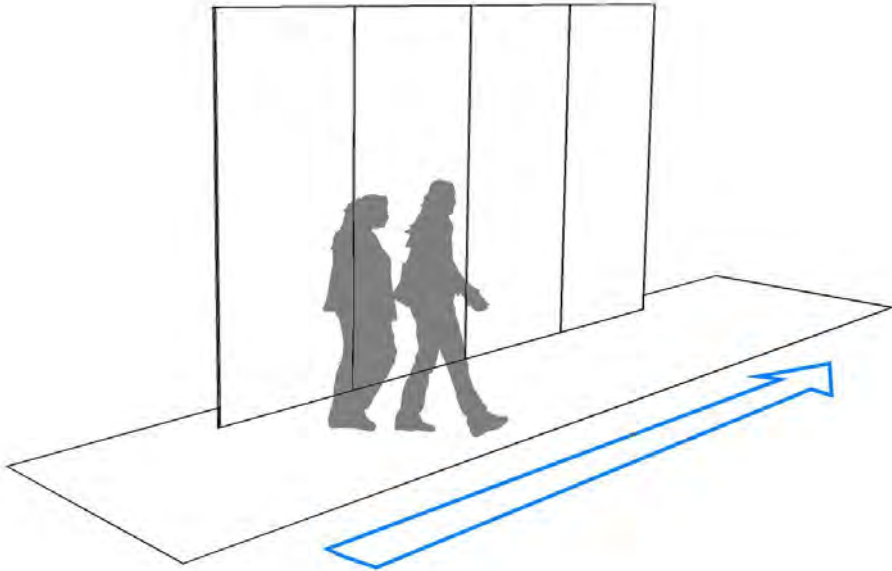
Early Learning Center - PreK Classroom



# RHYTHMIC VISUAL ELEMENTS

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Early Learning Center



Early Learning Center Floor Plan

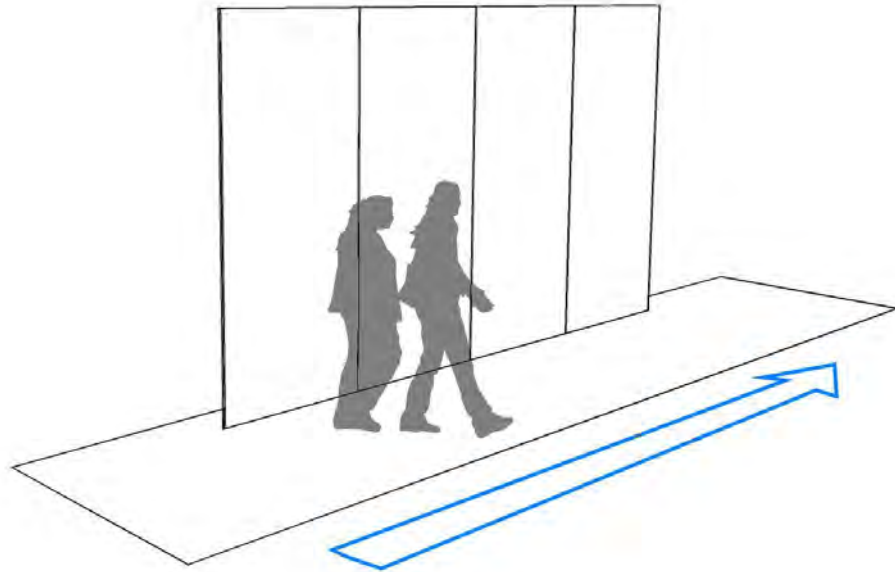
# RHYTHMIC VISUAL ELEMENTS

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# RHYTHMIC VISUAL ELEMENTS

Kleberg Building Addition and Renovation



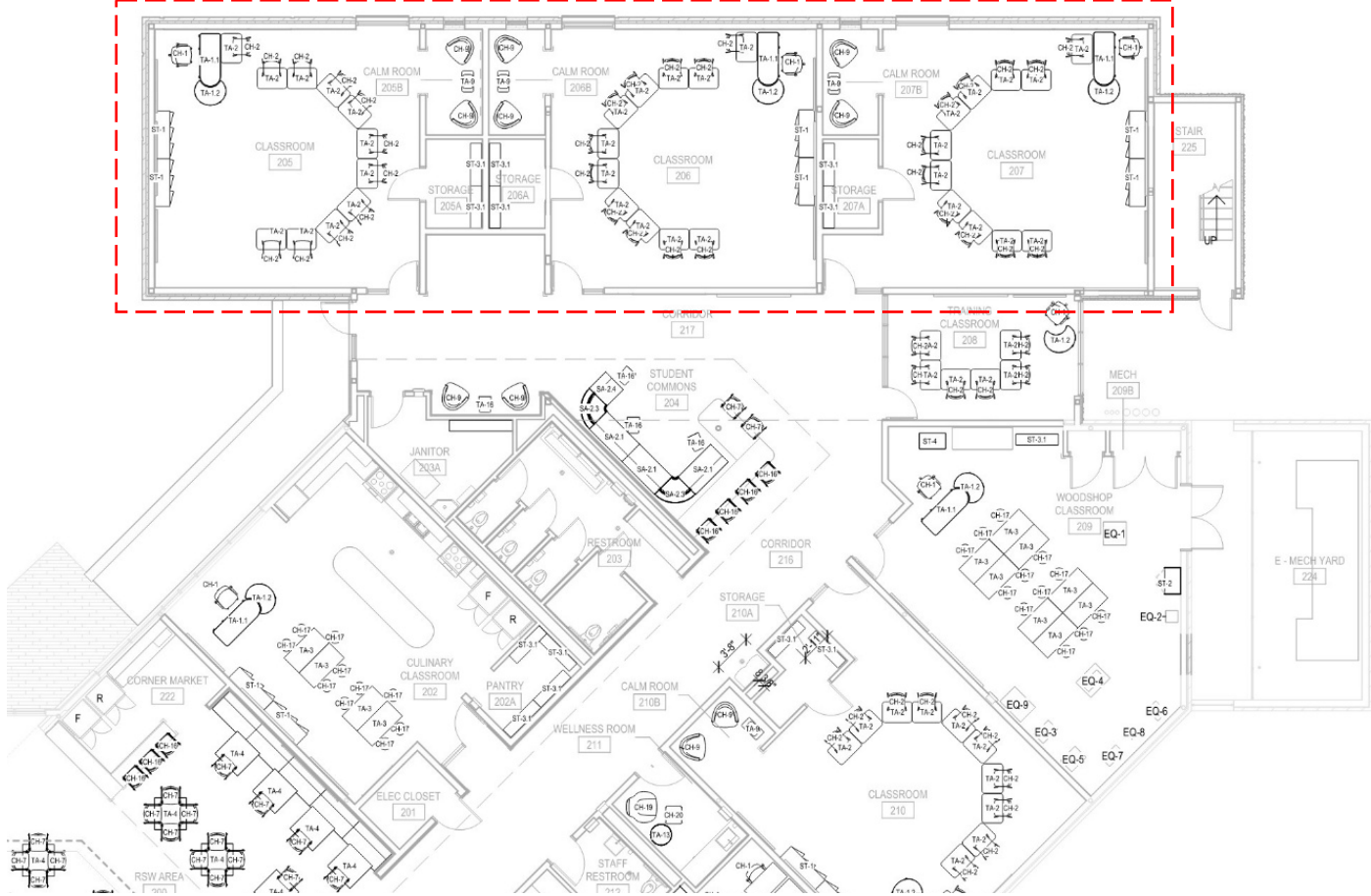
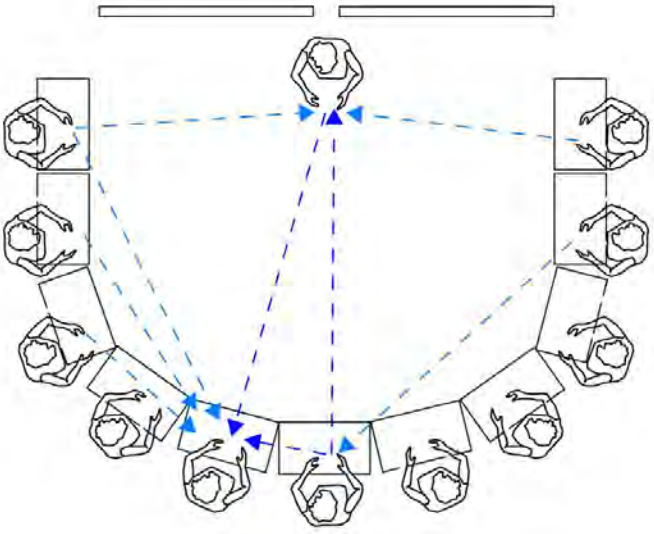
Kleberg Building Floor Plan

# RHYTHMIC VISUAL ELEMENTS

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# OPTIMAL CLASSROOM ORIENTATION

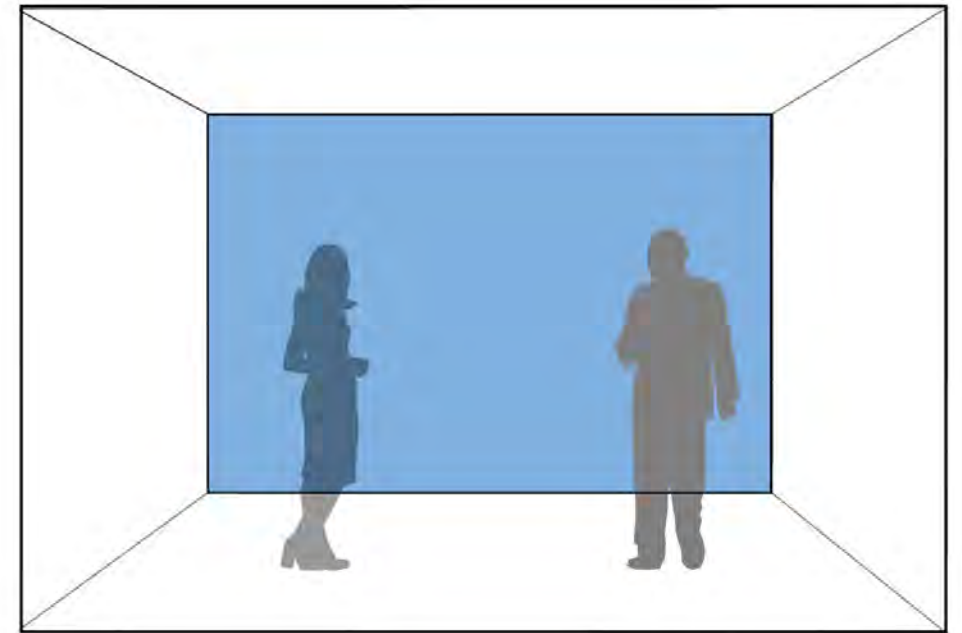


Kleberg Building Floor Plan

# CONTRASTING COLOR SURFACES

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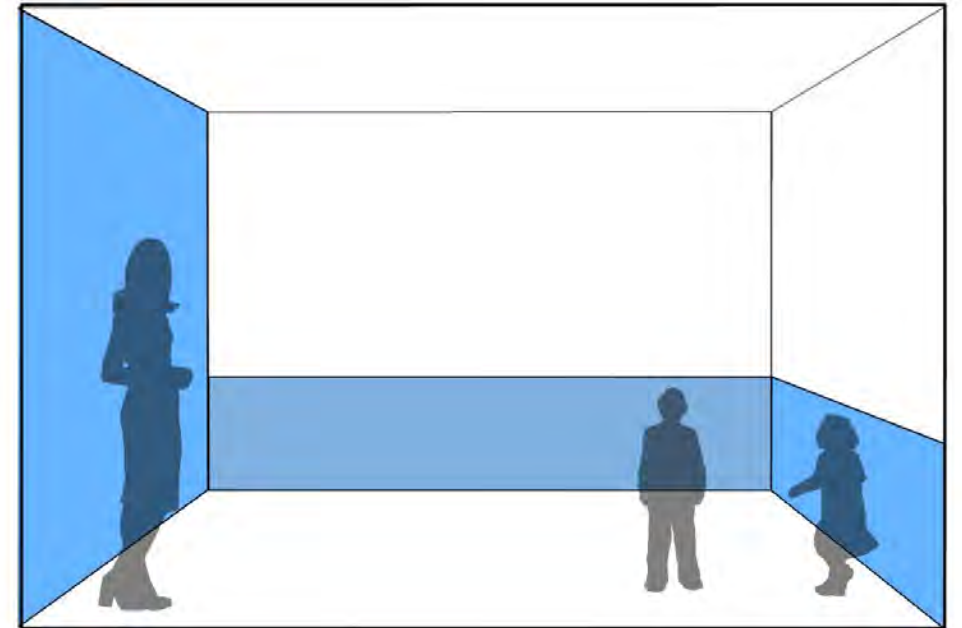
Kleberg Building – Post Secondary Student Classroom



# CONTRASTING COLOR SURFACES

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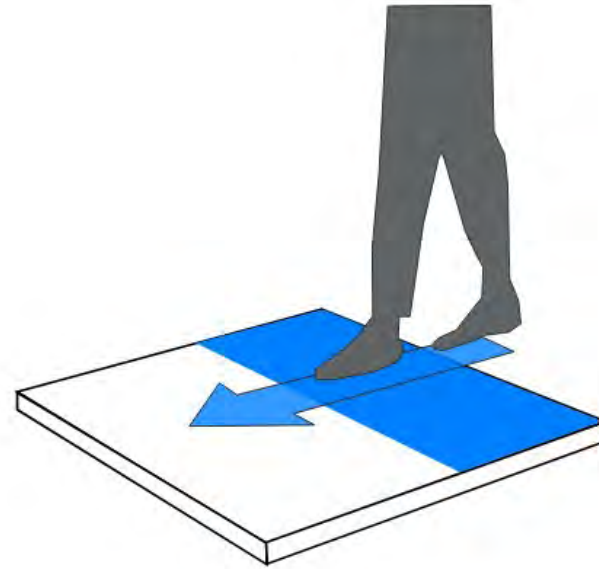
Early Learning Center - PreK Classroom



# CONTRASTING COLOR SURFACES

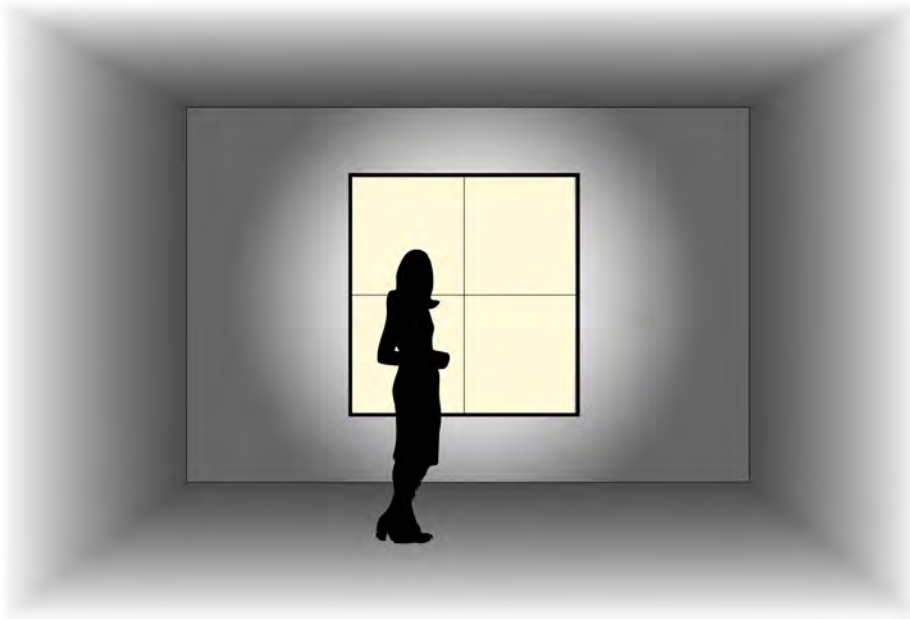
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Early Learning Center – Outdoor Playground

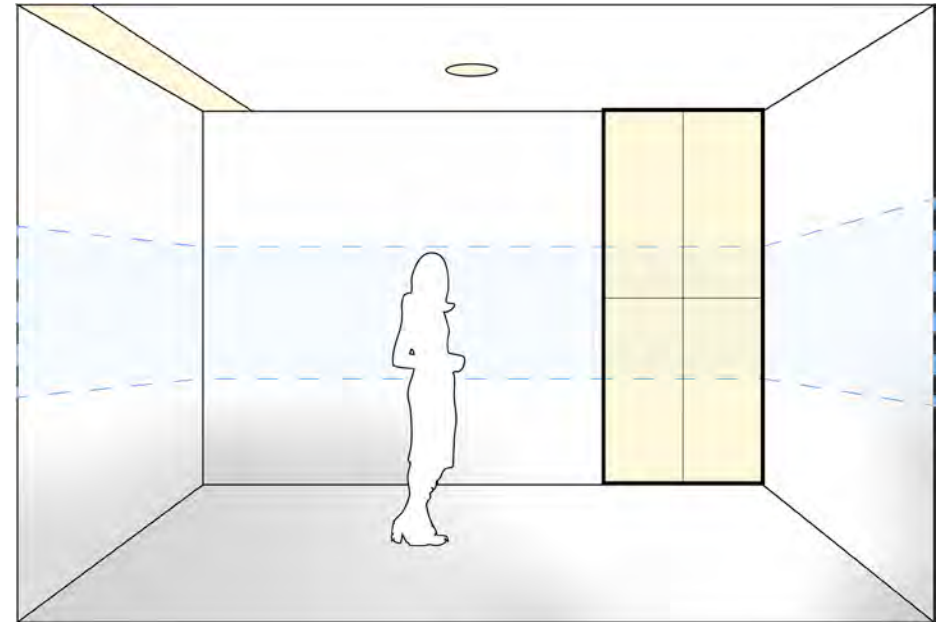


# DAYLIGHTING AND SURFACE GLARE

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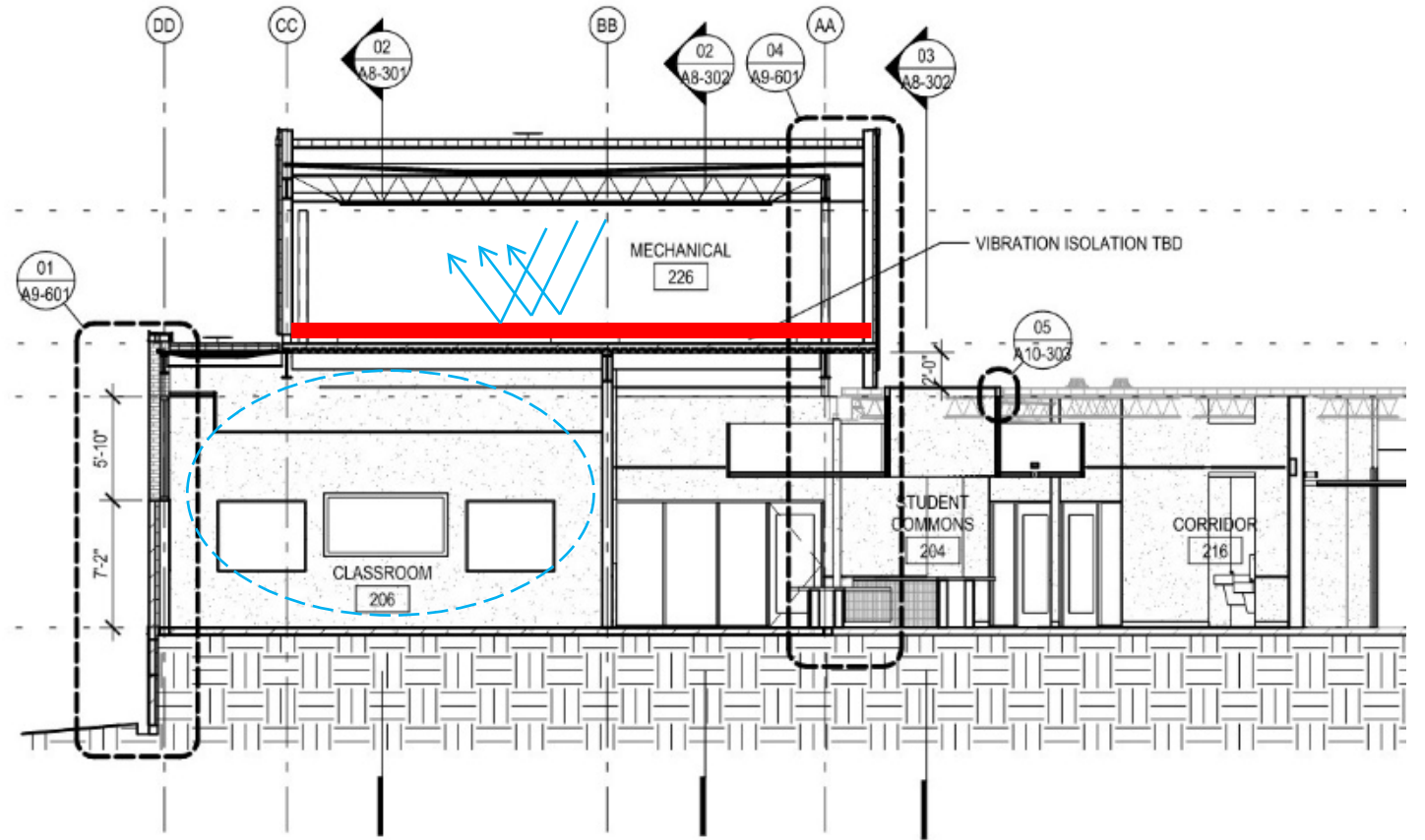
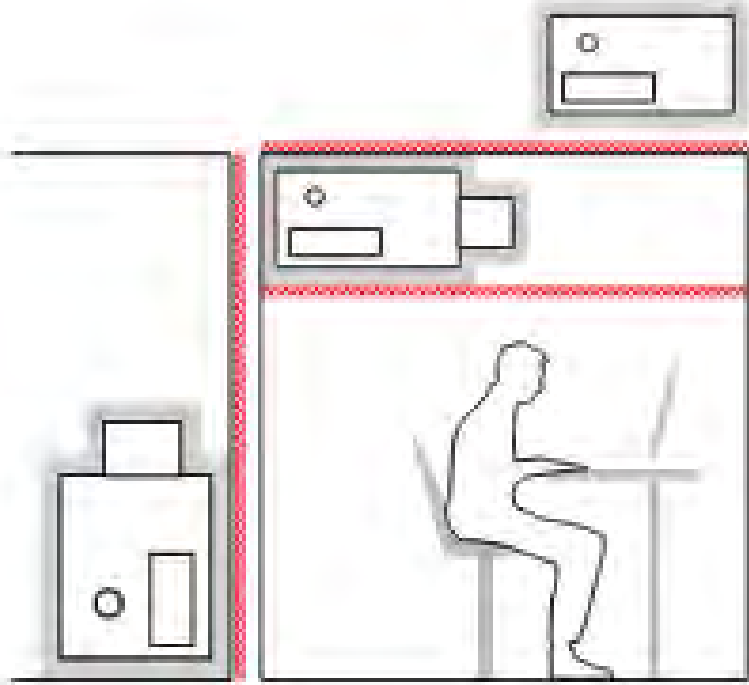


Bad - Backlighting



Good - Even distribution  
of light at 3' to 5' range

# EQUIPMENT NOISE ISOLATION



Kleberg Building Section

# TEXAS SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF

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# RAWSON SAUNDERS SCHOOL FOR DYSLEXIA

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# DYSLEXIA INTRODUCTION

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*Dyslexia affects 20 percent of the population and represents 80–90 percent of all those with learning disabilities. It is the most common of all neuro-cognitive disorders.*

– Yale Center for Dyslexia & Creativity

Muglexia Mugs by designer Henry Franks



# PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN FOR DYSLEXIA

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1. Prioritize physical & visual comfort
2. Reduce sensory discomfort
3. Maximize natural daylight and connection to the outdoors
4. Maintain clear, simple spatial organization
5. Provide clear circulation and wayfinding
6. Designate distinct areas for different activities
7. Provide flexible, varied learning settings

Typeface created by designer Dan Britton to simulate reading difficulties faced by people with dyslexia.

A	B	C
D	E	F
G	H	I
J	K	L
M	N	O
P	Q	R
S	T	U
V	W	X
Y	Z	

# DESIGN CONCEPT

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This renovation is emblematic of each student's educational journey, creating a **welcoming, inclusive, and adaptable** learning environment that supports dyslexic students by **fostering confidence, connection, and optimism.**

# THE NEW BUILDING!

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Challenges with an office building conversion:

1. Corridor width
2. Wind bracing
3. Security requirements
4. Electrical requirements
5. Enhanced acoustics.
6. Classroom sizes







WELCOME TO  
RAWSON  
SAUNDERS  
INSTITUTE  
LEARN FROM EXPLORE

# DESIGN STRATEGIES

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Prioritize Organization



Provide clear wayfinding

# OPTIMAL CLASSROOM SEATING ARRANGEMENTS

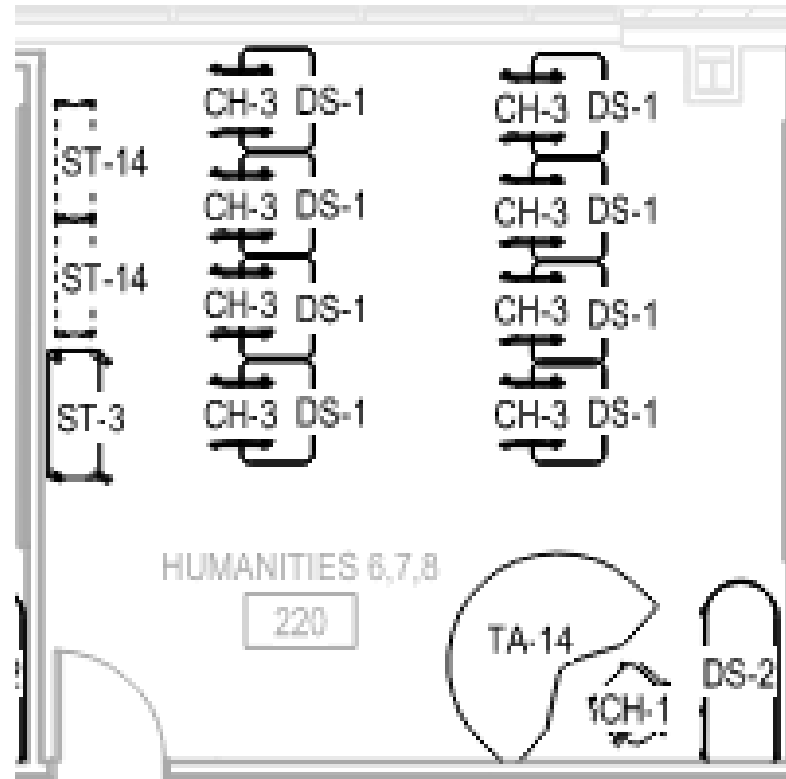
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Intimate student-to-teacher ratios:

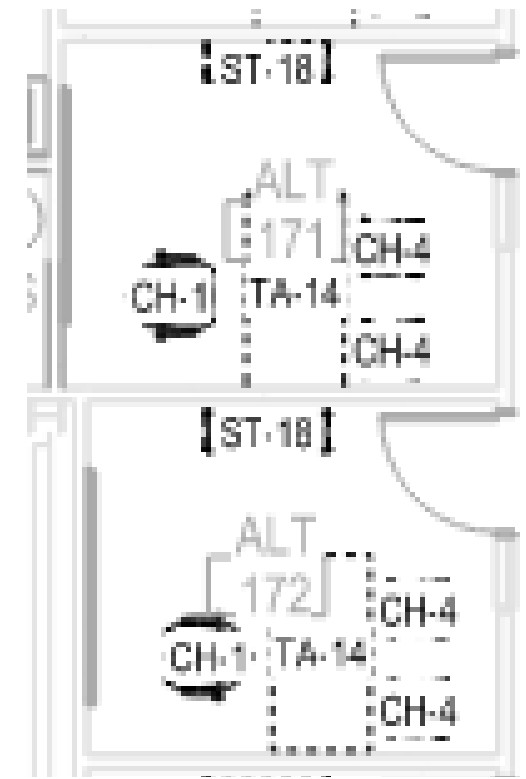
- 8:1 Typical Classrooms
- 2:1 Academic Language Therapy
- 4:1 Math Classrooms

Minimize distractions

- Perpendicular to the windows.
- Teaching wall is typically opposite the door



Typical Classroom



Academic Language  
Therapy Rooms

# MAXIMIZE NATURAL LIGHT

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# FLEXIBLE SEATING



# FLEXIBLE SEATING



# SIMPLE COHESIVE PALETTE W/ POPS OF COLOR

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# PROXIMITY TO NATURE

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# OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

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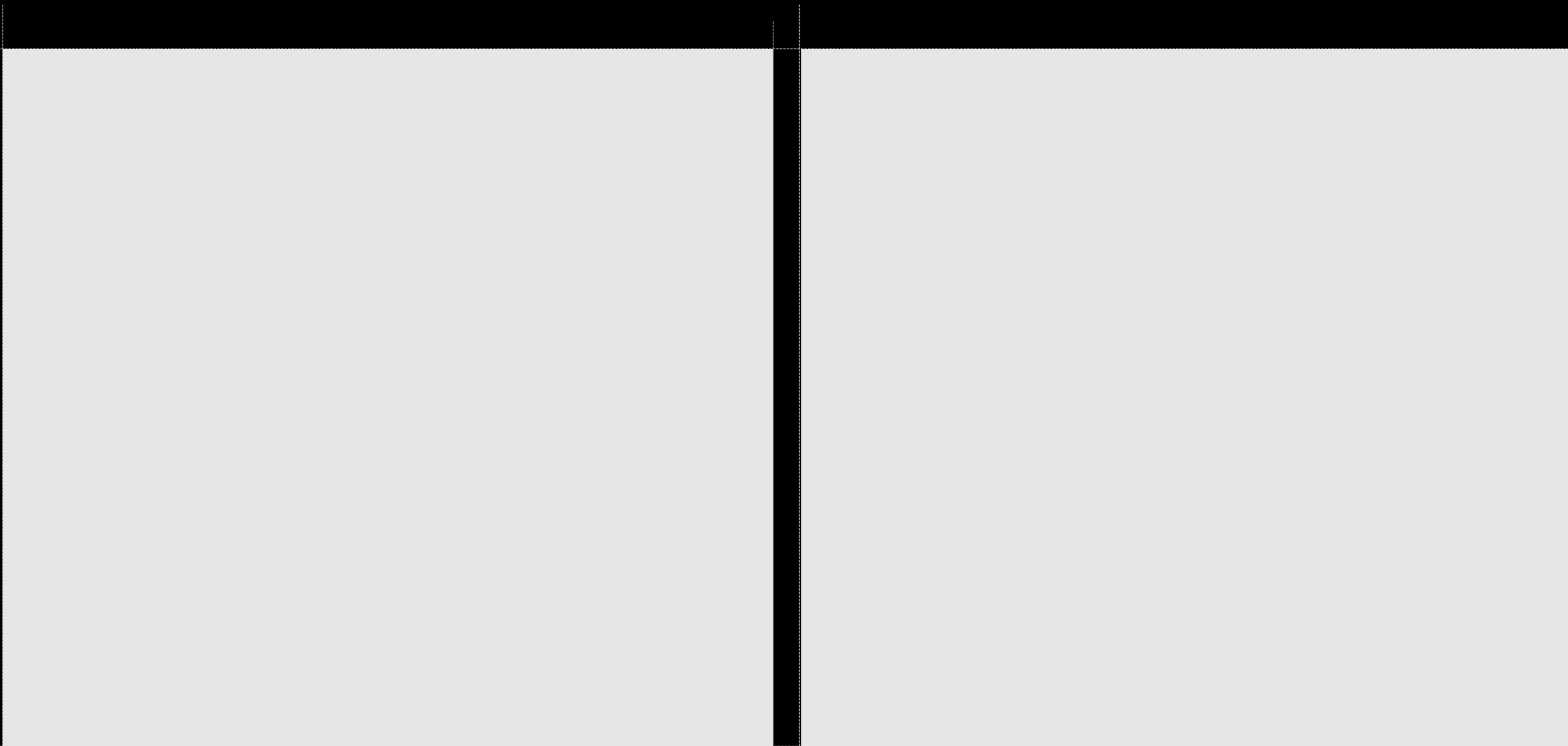
An architectural rendering of a school courtyard. The scene is filled with students and staff. In the foreground, two students with backpacks walk away from the viewer on a wooden deck. To the right, a group of students is playing a game. In the center, a group of children is gathered around a garden bed. The background shows a modern school building with large windows and a covered walkway. The text "LESSONS LEARNED?" is overlaid in the center in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font.

**LESSONS LEARNED?**

**THANK YOU! QUESTIONS?**

# PAGE LAYOUT OPTION

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PROJECT EXAMPLE – MULTIPLE IMAGES – NO HEADING