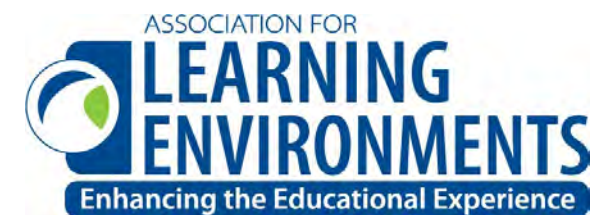




**A4LE SOUTHERN REGION**

**From 6 Weeks to 6th  
Grade: Inspiring  
Curiosity in Learning  
Every Step of the Way**

April 21, 2026



**CORGAN** 

# Introductions



**Jason Mellard**

Senior Project Manager, Vice President



**Paige Russell**

Project Architect, Associate

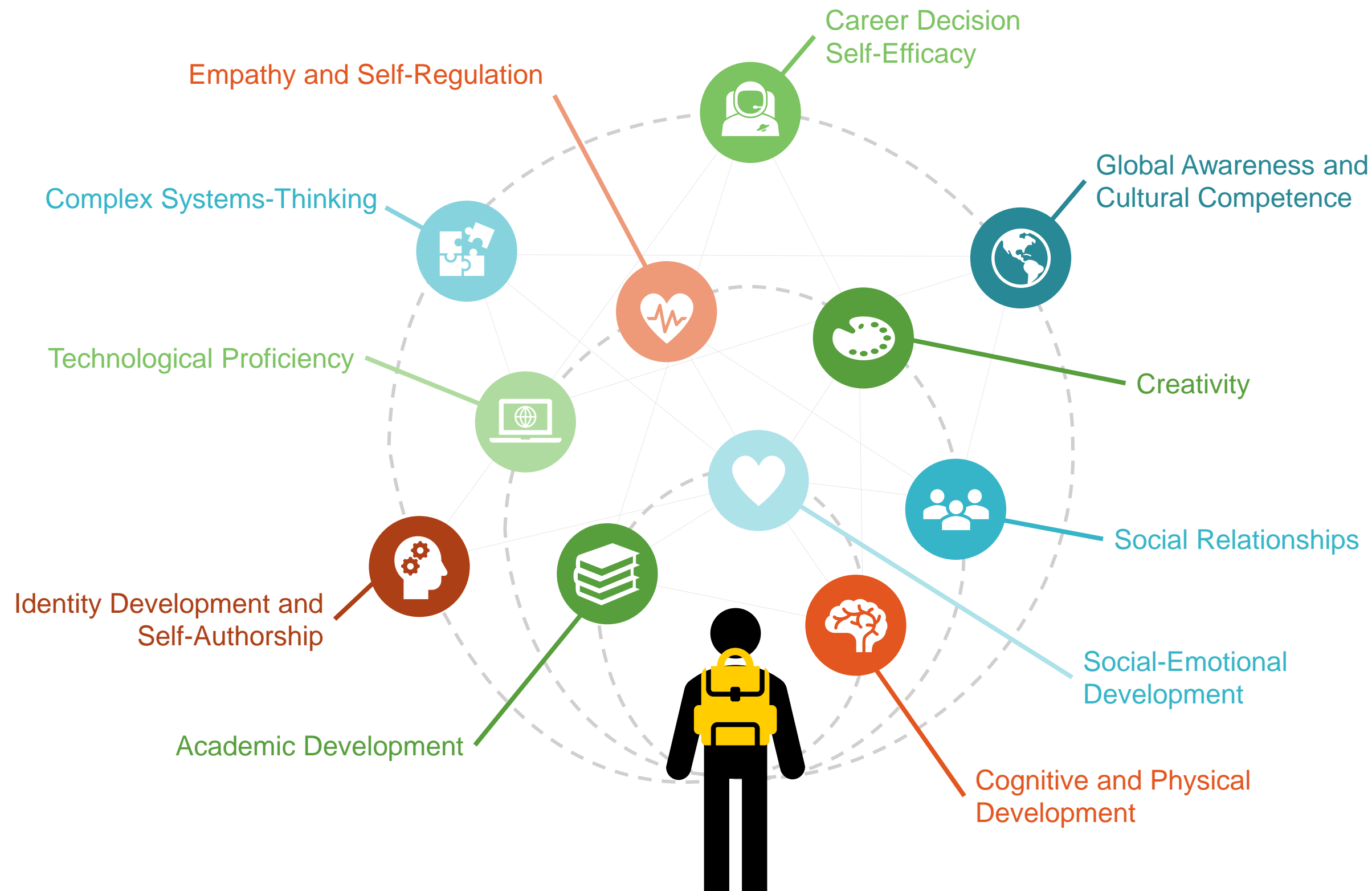


**Design Framework:  
How Children Learn  
as They Grow**



From 6 Weeks to 6th Grade: Inspiring Curiosity in Learning Every Step of the Way

# Educating the Whole Person



Focusing only on supporting academic outcomes does not reflect the **full spectrum** of learning and development that occurs in school

Education and Design must address and support **academic, social, emotional, physical, self, cognitive, and career development**

From 6 Weeks to 6th Grade: Inspiring Curiosity in Learning Every Step of the Way

# The Power of Place: What is Our Environment Communicating to Us?



## BELONGING

Place Attachment  
Safety and Security  
Connection  
Identity  
Pride



## VALUE

Show students they are valued and cared for by providing a high-quality learning environment



## HEALTH

Nature  
Holistic Support  
Biophilia  
Restoration  
Quality Environment



## BEHAVIOR

Cues in the environment guide behavior.  
Encourage learning, exploration, and interaction.



## OPPORTUNITY

Experiences  
Tools  
Technologies  
Connections  
Possibilities



# Designing for Young Learners

1

## SAFETY & COMFORT

Prioritize physical safety and emotional well-being, creating spaces where students feel secure, supported, and ready to learn.

2

## SENSORY-RICH ENVIRONMENTS

Multi-sensory spaces that invite exploration, encourage interaction, and support how young learners understand the world around them.

3

## CHOICE & AGENCY

Design should be open-ended rather than prescriptive. Create opportunities for a broad range of learning experiences.

4

## LEARNING EMBEDDED IN SPACE

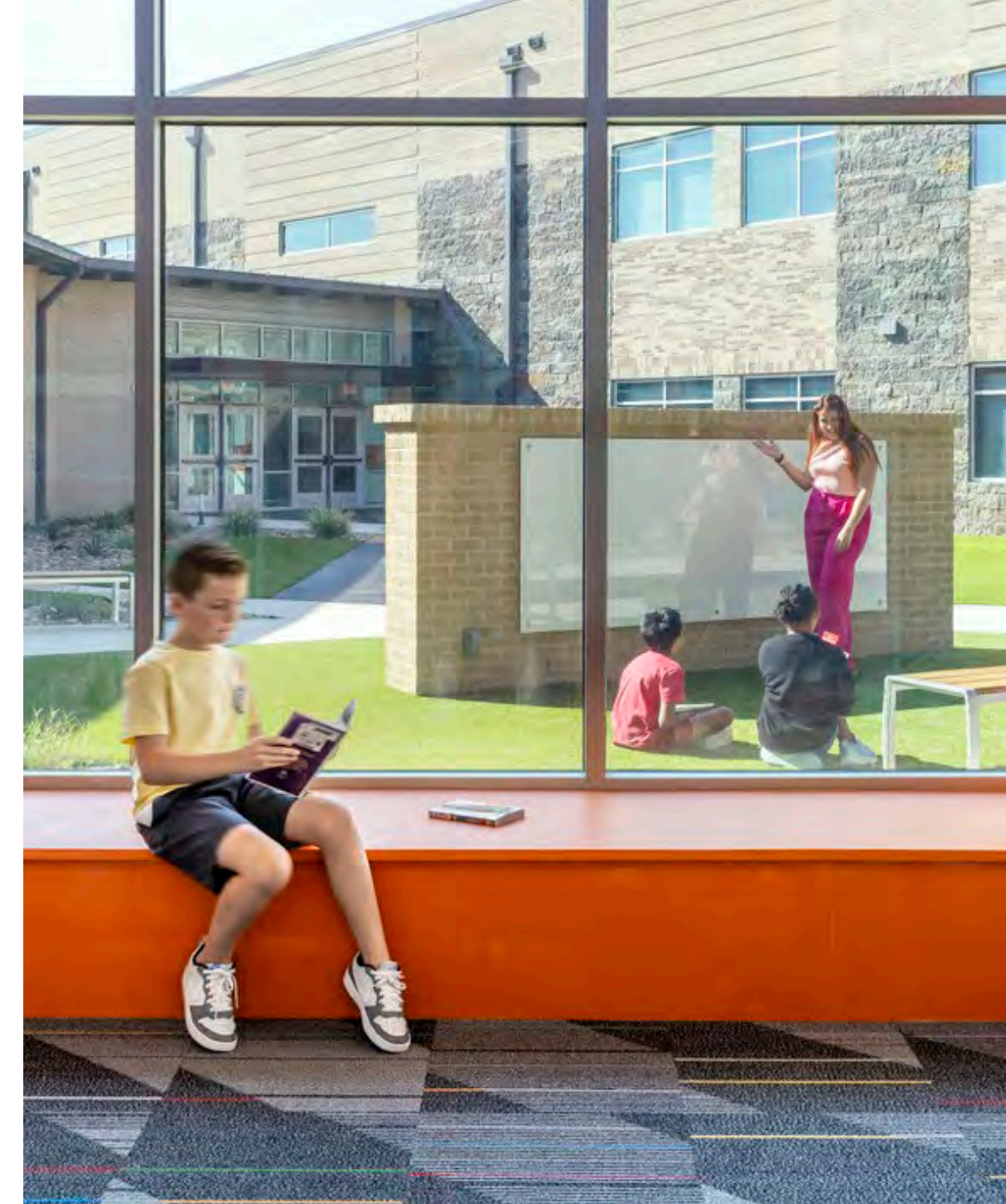
Support curiosity, creativity, and student-led learning with opportunities to observe, experiment, and discover.



6 Weeks – 3 Years



Pre-K/Early Childhood  
(Ages 3-5)



Elementary School  
(K-6)


## CONSTANT STRATEGIES

- Sense of belonging
- Comfort
- Engagement

## EVOLVING STRATEGIES

- Scale
- Autonomy
- Complexity

**Irving ISD:  
Baby University**  
*6 weeks – 3 years*



Little ladybugs,  
small and bright,  
spreading smiles left and right

The image shows a woman in a dark top and blue skirt carrying a young child on her hip. They are walking past a blue wall decorated with a cursive poem and a yellow sun illustration. The wall also features white cloud graphics. The lower portion of the wall is made of light-colored tiles.



# Key Themes



## Sensory Comfort

*Calm spaces that gently engage the senses.*



## Attachment & Security

*Design that builds trust through closeness.*



## “Home away from home”

*Where learning begins with belonging.*

# Right-Sized Spaces for Growing Senses



# Design Strategies

## Sensory Comfort



1

### CHILD-SCALE ENCLOSURE

Creates a sense of safety and spatial containment

2

### TACTILE WARMTH

Natural materials invite touch and floor-level exploration.

3

### FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Children can explore independently without overstimulation

# Observable Spaces That Support Secure Exploration



# Design Strategies

## Attachment & Security



1

### TEACHER VISIBILITY

Clear sightlines support constant connection and reassurance between children and teachers while allowing independent exploration.

2

### NESTED COMFORT ZONES

Small, defined areas provide emotional refuge and a predictable sense of place within larger shared rooms.

3

### CONSISTENT ELEMENTS

Familiar materials, furnishings, and routines help create a stable environment that builds trust and reduces anxiety.

# Right-Sized Spaces That Support Secure Exploration



# Design Strategies

## “Home Away From Home”



1

### **FAMILIAR DAILY-LIFE SETTINGS**

Spaces that mirror domestic routines create predictability and ease transitions throughout the day.

2

### **INDOOR-OUTDOOR LIVING**

Direct access to protected outdoor spaces extends the learning environment while reinforcing freedom, comfort, and everyday exploration.

3

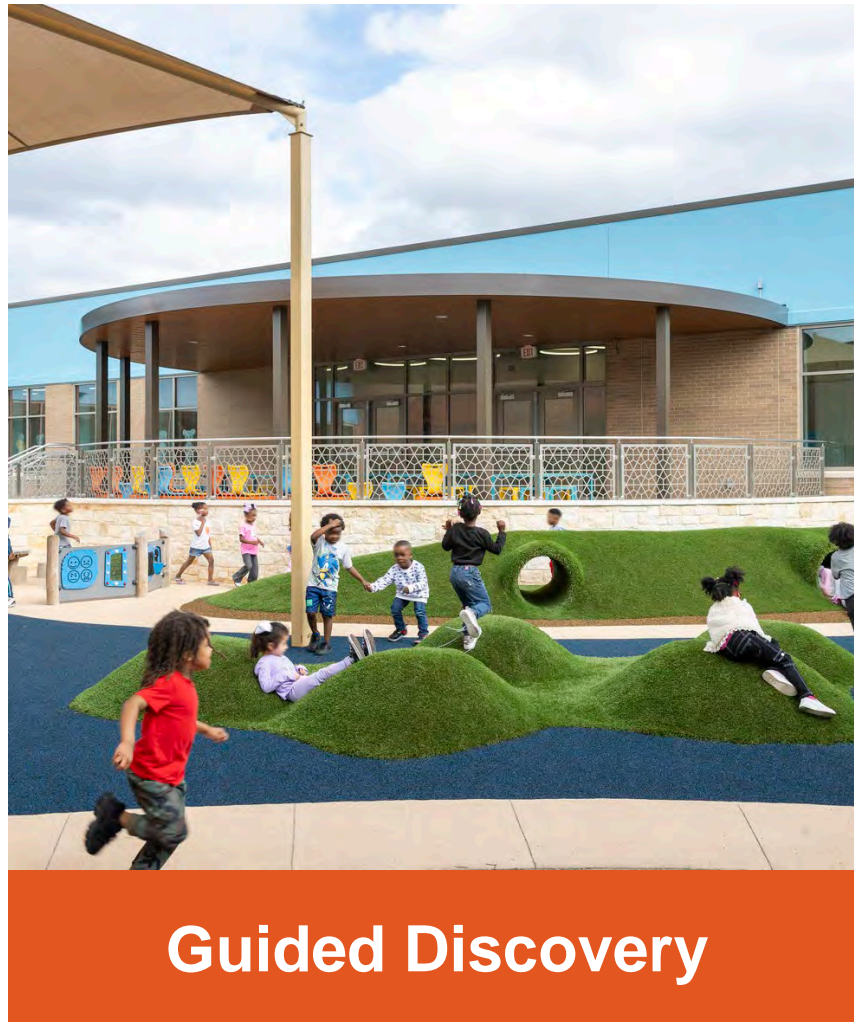
### **EMOTIONAL CONTINUITY**

Consistent visual cues and personalized touchpoints help children transition between home and school with confidence and comfort.

**Texarkana ISD:  
Dunbar Early  
Childhood Center**  
*Pre-K/Early Childhood  
(Ages 3-5)*



# Key Themes



*Spaces that invite discovery with purpose.*

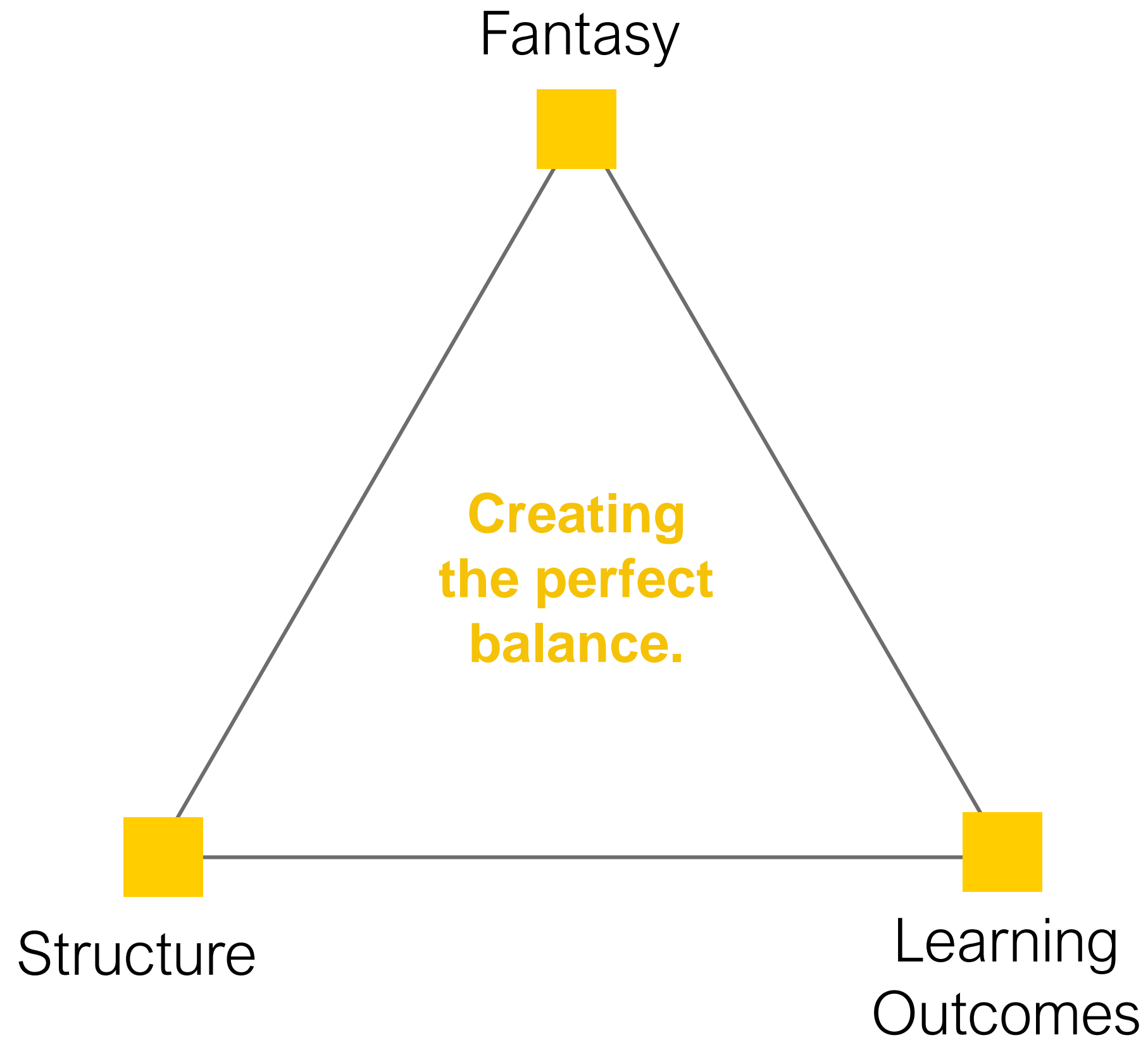


*Where imagination becomes learning.*

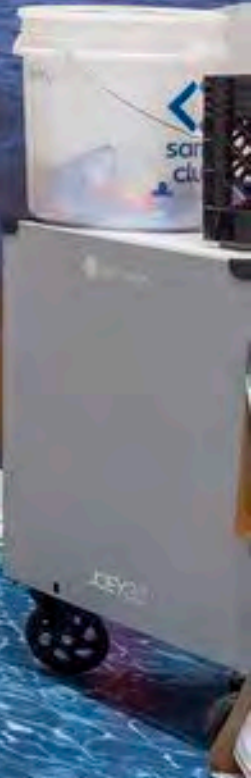
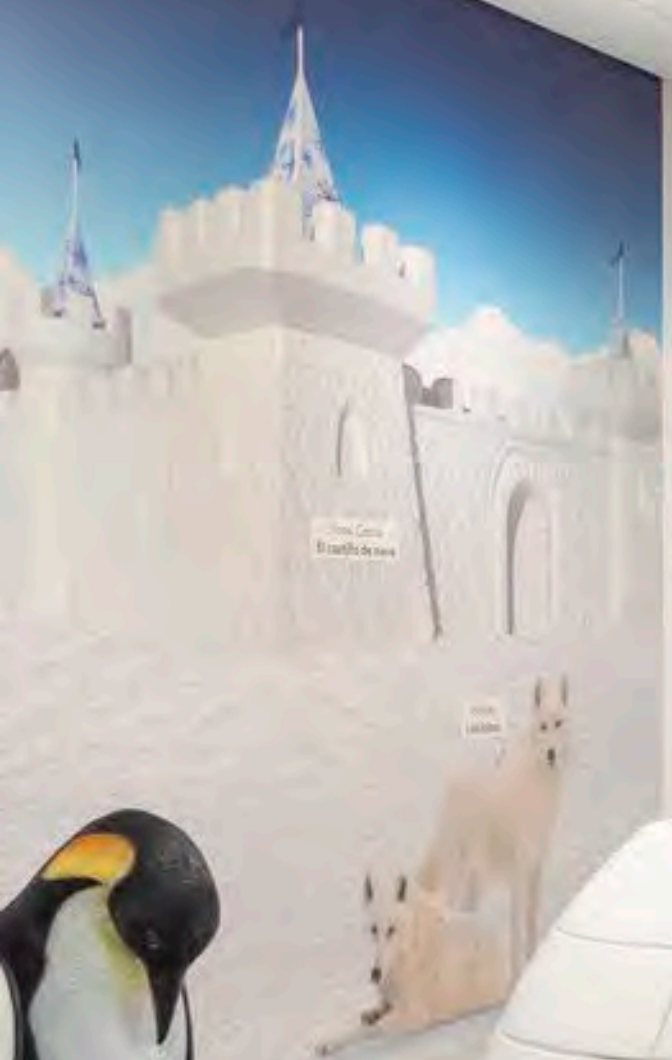


*Learning goals embedded in every environment*

# Designing Immersion With Purpose



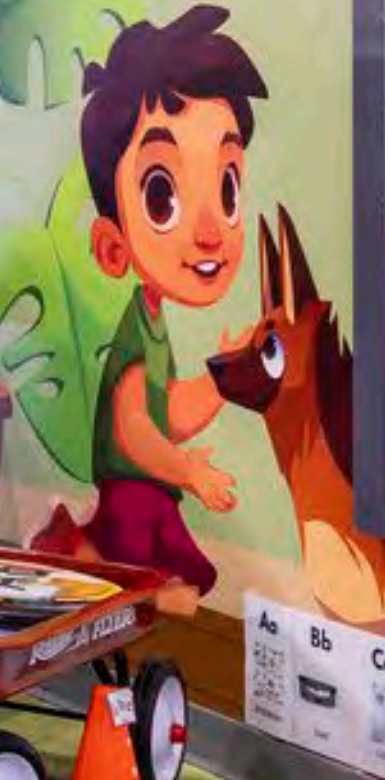




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| iguinea pig | turtle   |
| hamster     | parakeet |
| dog         | ferret   |
| rabbit      | snake    |
| cat         | lizard   |





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El cielo

Concrete Mixer  
La mezcladora de concreto  
La hormigonera

Mini Front Loader  
El Minicargador frontal

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# Environments That Connect Past Knowledge to Future Potential





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DUNBAR  
**BUFFALOES**  
DIST. 2-AAAA  
CHAMPS





PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR EARLY EDUCATION CENTER

Designed to Feel Open,  
Friendly, and Familiar

**Little Elm ISD:  
Lakewood Village  
Elementary School**  
*Elementary School  
(K-6)*



# Key Themes



## Inquiry-Based Learning

*Spaces that spark questions and exploration.*



## STEM Integration

*Hands-on learning embedded in everyday spaces*



## Building as a Teaching Tool

*Design that teaches beyond the classroom.*

# From Exploration to Ownership

*How learning environments support the shift from guided play to student agency*

## **Structured Freedom**

Spaces evolve from teacher-led exploration to learner choice.

## **The Environment Leads**

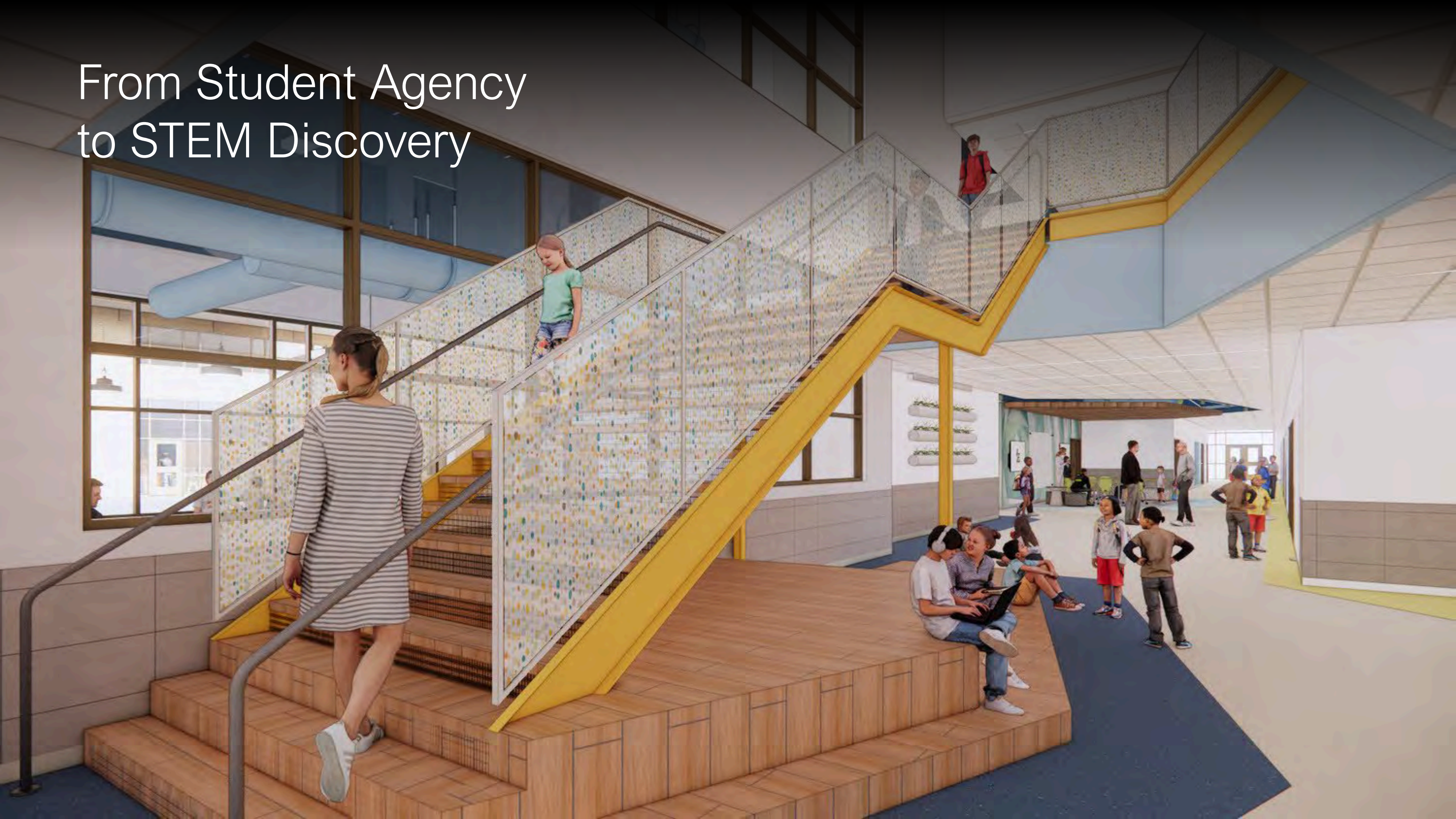
Design cues guide inquiry without constant instruction.

## **Choice Builds Ownership**

Students gain confidence through independent decisions and self-directed learning.



# From Student Agency to STEM Discovery





# The Impact of STEM-Centered Learning

1

Integrated across subjects to connect learning, not separate it.

2

Students learn through questioning, problem-solving, and iteration.

3

STEM experiences build intentionally from grade to grade.

# Flexible Zones That Adapt to How Students Learn





Designed with Purpose, Built to Teach

**Connecting the Dots:  
A Seamless  
Educational Journey**



6 weeks – 3 years



Pre-K/Early Childhood  
(Ages 3-5)



Elementary School  
(K-6)



**CONSTANT STRATEGIES**

- Sense of belonging
- Comfort
- Engagement

**EVOLVING STRATEGIES**

- Scale
- Autonomy
- Complexity

# Key Design Lessons

1

## DESIGN FOR THE WHOLE CHILD

Spaces support learning, well-being, and growth.

2

## SENSORY BALANCE ENABLES BETTER LEARNING

Intentional sensory control improves focus and outcomes.

3

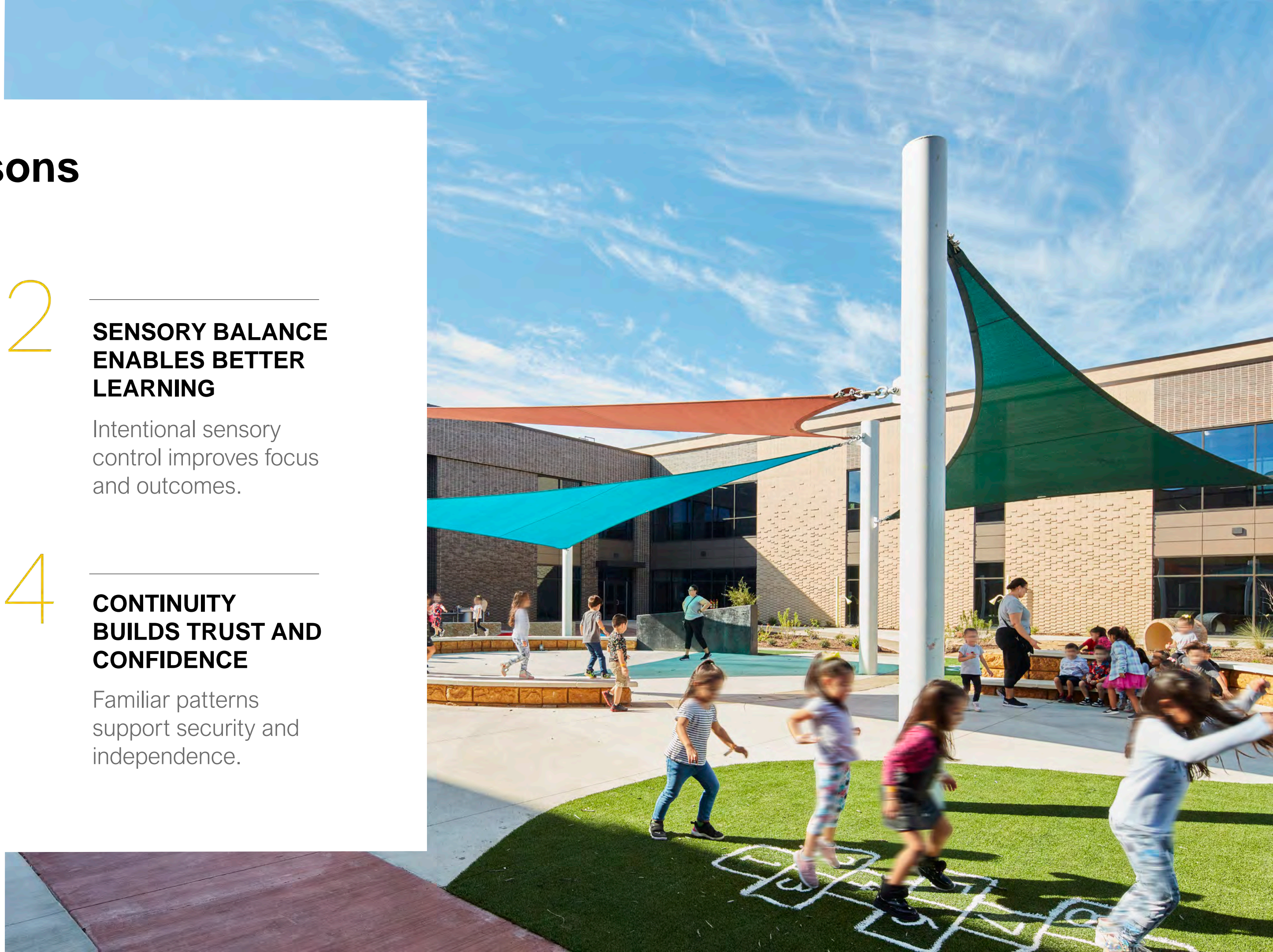
## IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENTS MUST SERVE PEDAGOGY

Engaging environments reinforce pedagogy.

4

## CONTINUITY BUILDS TRUST AND CONFIDENCE

Familiar patterns support security and independence.



Thank you!

