

Little Rock School District

Dr. Marian G. Lacey K-8 Academy

Little Rock, AR



01 Executive Summary

The Marian G. Lacey K-8 Academy represents a vital investment in a historically underserved part of Little Rock that has not seen significant investment in over a generation. The new facility replaces the abandoned McClellan High School with a 1,500 student K-8 school, a response to the consolidation of neighborhood schools.

One of the initial challenges is that there are only 13 acres available for the school, significantly smaller than typical acreage for a similar student population. To overcome this, and accommodate both the new building and circulation, the school was designed to be three stories. Vehicular circulation wraps all

sides with separate entry points for parents and buses, connected by a concourse that links the major public elements and separates academic and student only spaces.

In addition to the building's primary use as an educational facility, it is used to support community needs. The separation between the academic wing and major public uses including the gym, cafeteria, and media center allows the student areas to be secured from the remainder of the building, allowing it to function as more than just a school, but an asset to the whole community.

Flexibility and multi-functional spaces support the changing environment of

education. Access to daylighting and views, fresh air and energy efficiency, passive and active security measures, and allowing for the evolution of the building were important goals for the design. LRSD typically operates buildings for fifty or more years, and this building is designed with longevity in mind.

The building is not just a place of study but also teaches good values through positive role models. Throughout the building there are inspirational stories of local and national women and minority leaders. There is a room dedicated to Dr. Marian G. Lacey, who taught generations of students who have become leaders and innovators in the community.





Project Goals

The primary goal for creating the Marian G. Lacey K-8 Academy is to create equity across all schools within the Little Rock School District and to consolidate underutilized neighborhood schools which were losing students.

The district's leaderships and community members expressed that the new school must:

- Attract students and improve attendance with a modern facility that rivals the competing charter and private schools.
- Provide a significant investment in an underserved part of Little Rock.
- Create a place for lifelong learning and that will be available to the public.
- Create an environment for learning by improving safety and security
- Create a space that is adaptable and can have a multitude of uses. (collaborative and open)
- Support the student needs both academically and emotionally

02

Scope & Budget

Grades Served
Kindergarten – 8th

Student Capacity
1,500

Building Area
238,000 sq ft

Site Area
13 acres

Construction Cost
\$89,000,000

Completion Date
August 2024



64
CLASSROOMS



6
PROJECT LABS



8
FINE ARTS



4
MAKER SPACES



1
LEARNING STAIR



1
MEDIA CENTER



4
SELF CONTAINED



3
CAREER
EDUCATION



1
CAFETORIUM



1
GYMNASIUM

03

School & Community Engagement

Every Voice Matters!

The Little Rock School District is as diverse as the community it serves. This requires an open and honest dialogue about the future of the district and the students. It also required self-reflection and acknowledgement of it's past and how the district can serve all of its students. The design process included a multitude of charettes, presentations, listening sessions, and interviews throughout the city and not just the zone which will feed the new school. The stakeholders included:

- **Administration**
- **Parents**
- **Students**
- **Teachers**
- **Community members**
- **City, County, and State Elected Officials**
- **Alumni**

In addition to focusing on the future of the district, it was important to the community to preserve the history of the former school and the lessons of the longtime and inspirational educator Dr. Marian G. Lacey.



Challenges

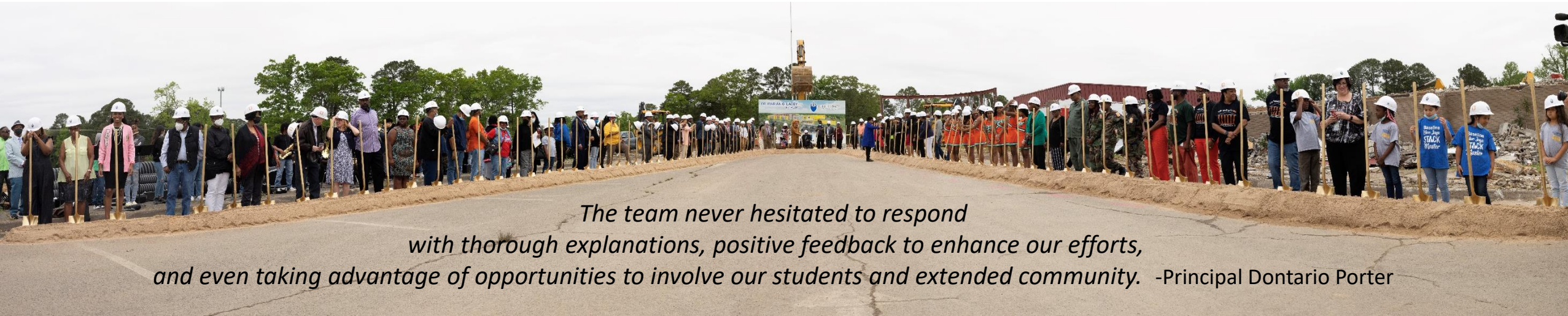
The school faced significant challenges regarding community engagement, particularly concerning the building's history and local control. The existing High School, though cherished by alumni, was deemed unsuitable for reuse due to its poor condition and small size. Additionally, the community's insistence on regaining local control before passing a bond extension necessitated a complex sequence of events: completing the blueprint, reinstating local control, holding a school board election, and finally securing bond approval through a second election.

The project encountered design and demographic challenges in its implementation. The task of accommodating 1,500 students on a 13-acre site that previously held only 800, required creative solutions, including multi-story construction and careful planning of traffic circulation. Further complications arose from merging elementary and middle school populations within an economically disadvantaged area, where language barriers and physical limitations needed to be carefully addressed.

Opportunities

A significant factor in MGL's success was the leadership of a dedicated superintendent who championed public education and educational equity for all students. The initiative also benefited from robust business community engagement, whose members actively advocated for the project through strategic outreach and grassroots voter mobilization efforts.

This project ultimately emerged as a catalyst for educational investment in Little Rock. The extensive planning period allowed for thoughtful facility design, comprehensive stakeholder engagement, and strategic vision development. These elements combined to create an exemplary educational facility capable of competing with existing public, private, and charter schools and facilitating student retention within the district.



The team never hesitated to respond with thorough explanations, positive feedback to enhance our efforts, and even taking advantage of opportunities to involve our students and extended community. -Principal Dontario Porter

04

Learning Environment

Educational Vision

The educational vision aimed to create a consolidated K-8 learning environment by merging two deteriorating schools in an underserved community, optimizing resources while providing students with a modern, functional facility. The new building was designed to inspire student pride and compete with nearby charter and private schools, addressing both enrollment challenges and the need for an engaging educational space.

Goals

1. Uplifting and Cheerful environment to support emotional well being and encourage participation
2. Flexible and Multi-use spaces.
3. Multiple sized spaces for individual and group learning.
4. Create equity across the district.
5. Support for a diverse and multi-lingual student body.
6. Secure and Resilient.
7. Be available for use by the community.





Supporting the Curriculum

The building's design directly supports curriculum delivery through practical, multipurpose spaces. Standard classrooms feature movable furniture and integrated technology to support both traditional instruction and group work, while specialized rooms for science, technology, and arts provide the necessary equipment and space for hands-on learning. The media center combines traditional library resources with digital tools, enabling both research skills development and technology instruction.

The layout also reflects the school's instructional needs through purpose-built spaces that serve specific educational functions. Science labs include proper ventilation and safety equipment for experiments, art rooms provide appropriate lighting and cleanup areas, and music rooms feature acoustic treatments and storage for instruments. Additional learning spaces include career education workshops with industry-standard equipment and special education classrooms with adaptive learning tools, ensuring all aspects of the curriculum can be effectively delivered to every student.

Variety of learning and teaching styles

The school's design prioritizes adaptable learning spaces that accommodate diverse teaching methods, featuring flexible classrooms that can be configured for group activities, individual study, or traditional lectures. This versatility extends to larger communal areas like the media center and cafeteria, which can host multiple classes and grade levels simultaneously for collaborative learning experiences.

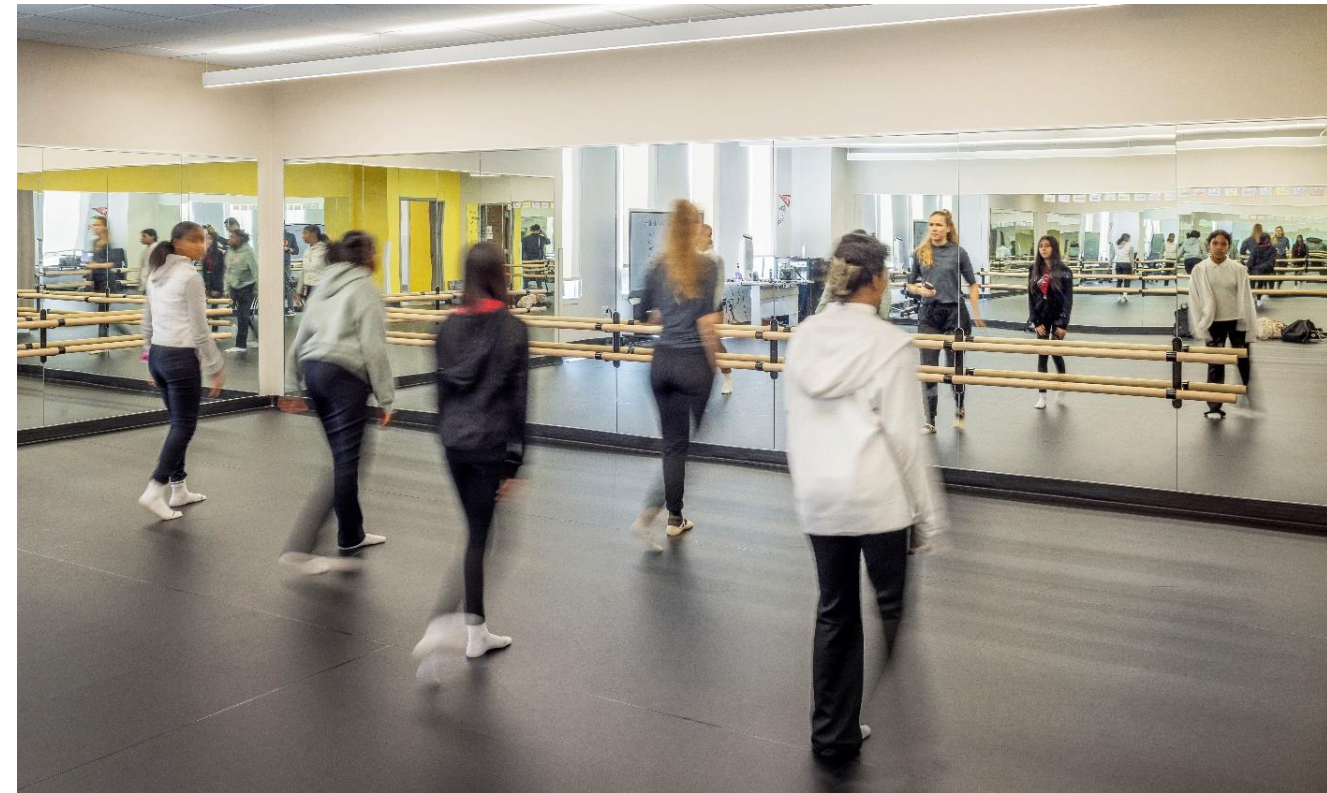
The facility demonstrates a strong commitment to inclusivity, particularly through its bilingual English-Spanish signage that serves the local Hispanic population. Throughout the building, inspirational messaging and interpretive displays highlight the achievements of minorities and women, sending a powerful message to students that success is attainable regardless of their background. These include designated areas for remedial learning, speech therapy, resource rooms, and gifted and talented programs, ensuring that students across the academic spectrum receive appropriate support and enrichment opportunities.

Adaptable and flexible

The modern learning environment embraces adaptability through thoughtfully designed spaces that can be easily reconfigured. At the core of this flexibility is movable furniture and equipment, allowing instructors and students to quickly transform their classroom setup to accommodate different learning activities and teaching methods. This adaptability is further enhanced by the standardization of classroom sizes and layouts, ensuring consistent and predictable spaces throughout the facility.

The design philosophy extends beyond individual classrooms by incorporating supplementary spaces throughout the building. These auxiliary areas serve multiple purposes, providing additional learning zones, breakout spaces, and areas for independent study or small group collaboration. This network of spaces creates a dynamic ecosystem that supports diverse learning styles and activities.

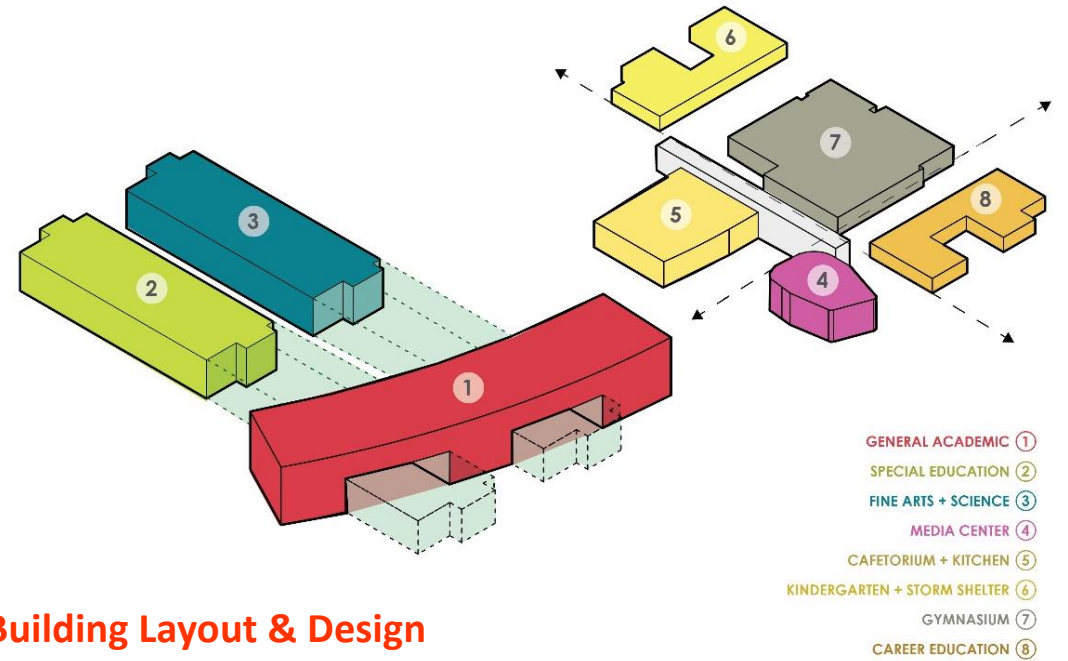
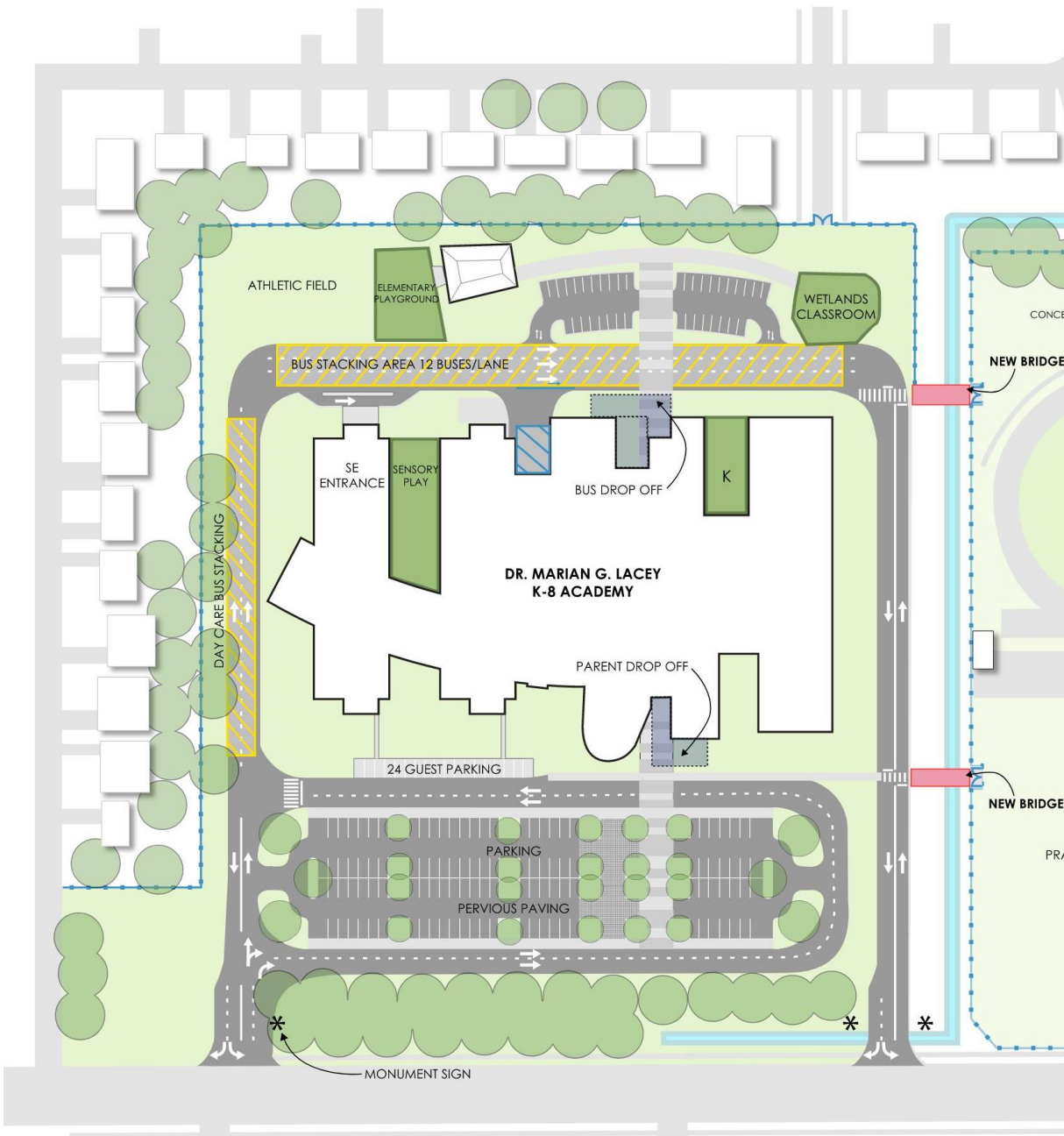
Furthermore, the environment's flexibility is maximized through innovative architectural features that allow certain classrooms to be combined into larger spaces. This ability to join classrooms facilitates collaborative learning experiences, team teaching opportunities, and larger group activities when needed, while still maintaining the ability to separate spaces for traditional classroom instruction. This adaptable approach ensures the facility can evolve with changing educational needs and pedagogical approaches.



05

Physical Environment





Building Layout & Design

- Three-story design with grade levels ascending by floor
- Curved academic corridor for enhanced security
- Separate entry points for buses and parents
- Ability to secure classroom areas while allowing public access to gym, cafetorium, and media center.

Sustainability & Environmental Features

- Permeable brick paving and shade trees to reduce heat island effect
- Stormwater management system with storage and infiltration
- Natural lighting in all classrooms and public spaces
- Energy-efficient insulated metal panel exterior with R-30 roof insulation
- Advanced energy management system with LED lighting throughout

Educational & Community Elements

- Outdoor classroom featuring native vegetation
- Flexible spaces that serve both school and community functions
- Strategic circulation design that separates public and academic spaces
- Design elements aligned with students' circadian rhythms

Community Context

The new elementary school, built on the site of a former high school, maintains the location's educational legacy while bringing modern updates to serve contemporary needs. The facility's design incorporates a comprehensive traffic management system that efficiently handles 150 cars, 12 buses, and 8 after-school care vans, preventing congestion on public streets while addressing community safety concerns by eliminating a problematic rear entrance.

The school's distinctive design features bright colors that clearly identify it as an elementary school, transforming it into a celebrated community landmark. This bold architectural choice has made the building a recognizable reference point and source of neighborhood pride, elevating its role beyond an educational facility to become a defining feature of the community's identity.



Inspires and Motivates

The building is not just a place of study but also teaches good values and highlights positive role models. Throughout the building there are inspirational stories of local and national women and minority leaders. There is a Legacy Room dedicated to the former teacher and principal, Dr. Marian G. Lacey.

The design of the Marian G. Lacey K-8 Academy is intended to raise the student scores, attendance, and participation within the school zone it supports. This has historically been a problem in the district with lack of investment, maintenance, and facilities that are dark, damp, and divided. The theory is if a district invests in an area with a building that is clearly identified as a school, can be used by the community (and create a sense of ownership and pride), is flexible, secure, and a cheerful place, then students will attend classes.





06

Planning Process

Educational Goals

The community advocated for a school facility that would exceed state-mandated educational space requirements, specifically requesting an environment that would support various educational programs focused on personal development and collaborative learning. Their vision emphasized the importance of creating dynamic spaces where students could engage in diverse learning experiences while fostering individual growth and interactive education.

Residents also expressed a strong desire for the facility to serve beyond regular school hours as a vibrant community hub, accommodating local gatherings and athletic events while maintaining a careful balance between accessibility and safety. The community's involvement in shaping these priorities has resulted in a facility that instills neighborhood pride and encourages ongoing investment, creating the strong positive connections they envisioned and establishing the school as an integral part of the community fabric.

School District Goals

The school district's primary goal is to increase enrollment numbers and test scores, while demonstrating reduced student absenteeism as evidence of improved engagement. They want to emphasize how enhanced safety measures and reduced travel times have created a more positive learning environment, positioning them as a competitive alternative to other local educational options.

The district seeks to illustrate how these improvements make the area more appealing to families while serving as a catalyst for community development. They specifically requested that the school be placed in an underserved area and demonstrate how this creates a more equitable distribution of resources citywide.



Community Goals

The community's vision was for a modern, inclusive, and multipurpose educational facility, with flexibility to accommodate all learning styles and expanded opportunities through specialized services like ESOL, Speech Therapy, and OT/PT.

The community also prioritized future preparedness, incorporating a FEMA rated tornado shelter and multiple passive active shooter prevention strategies.

Unintended Results

The school has quickly established itself as a prominent institution within the district, attracting attention through public events and generating increased enrollment and transfer requests from beyond its attendance zones. This success has drawn educational leaders from surrounding districts to visit and learn from its example, while earning meaningful approval from key stakeholders, including the family of Dr. Marian G. Lacey and McClellan alumni.

The project's impact is perhaps best illustrated by a student's candid observation during construction, who questioned whether such an impressive "private school"-like facility could really be intended for them - a powerful moment that demonstrates how investing in traditionally underserved students helps combat internalized inequity and fosters academic ambition among those who previously felt marginalized by the educational system.

