

# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

**Location:** Dallas, TX

**Services Provided:** Programming, Planning, Architecture, Interior Design, Community Engagement, Project Management, Construction Administration, Building Information Modeling

**Size:** 202,000 SF Existing Building | 60,000 SF Addition

**Construction Cost:** \$56 million

**Completion Date:** May 2020

### Executive Summary

South Oak Cliff High School (SOC), originally constructed in the 1950s, stood as a longstanding educational institution in South Dallas. Over decades, the facility suffered from severe infrastructure degradation, resulting in a student-led walkout in 2016 that gained national media attention. The protest shed light on the poor conditions, including leaky roofs, failing HVAC systems, gas leaks, pest infestations, and overall safety hazards.



BEFORE



AFTER

In response to community advocacy and stakeholder engagement, the Dallas Independent School District (DISD) initiated a comprehensive renovation and expansion project to revitalize SOC into a state-of-the-art learning facility. The project involved a 60,000 SF addition and a full renovation of the existing 202,000 SF structure, focusing on modern learning environments, enhanced athletic and fine arts facilities, and sustainable design elements.

Through a highly collaborative design and planning process, SOC has been transformed into an equitable, future-ready school that fosters academic excellence, student engagement, and community pride. The new facility has improved student retention, increased enrollment, and positioned SOC as a model for educational equity in underserved communities.

# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

### The SOC Community

SOC is situated in a historically underserved, multi-generational community in South Dallas. Before the renovation, the school's deteriorating condition symbolized systemic neglect. The successful transformation of SOC was not just about infrastructure, it was about restoring community trust and ensuring educational equity.

### Stakeholder Engagement

- Students & Parents: Advocated for change through protests, discussions, and participation in design meetings.
- Faculty & Administration: Provided input on the functional needs of the school.
- DISD Leadership: Worked with the community to align budget priorities with educational goals.
- Local Organizations & Alumni: Partnered with For Oak Cliff, neighborhood leaders, and prominent alumni to ensure the project's success.



Source: FOX News 4

- Funding Disparities: Historically, urban schools like SOC received fewer investments compared to suburban counterparts.

### Challenges Faced

- Severe Infrastructure Decay: Roof leaks, HVAC failures, and safety hazards disrupted daily learning.
- Community-District Trust Issues: The initial reluctance from the district required continuous advocacy efforts.

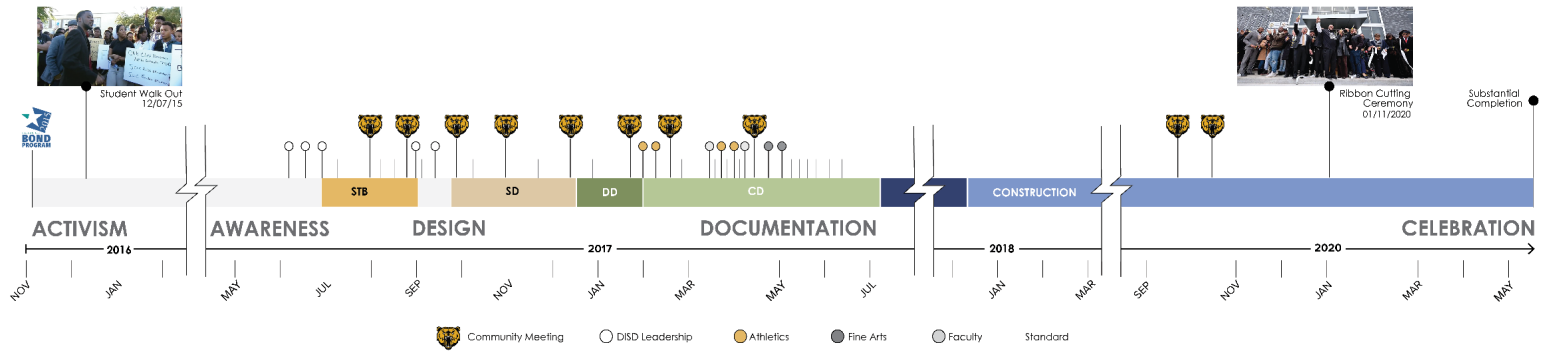


Source: Dallas Morning News

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## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

### Project Timeline & Phases



### Pre-Design & Community Advocacy (2015-2016)

- **December 2015:** Students organized a walkout to protest unsafe and inadequate learning conditions, gaining national media coverage.
- **April 2016:** An initial design charrette was held with community leaders, alumni, and Dallas ISD to discuss the future of SOC.
- **2016-2017:** Multiple community meetings and school board discussions took place to refine the project vision and secure funding.

### Design & Budget Approval (2017-2018)

- **Initial Budget:** \$26 million allocated through Dallas ISD's bond program.
- **Advocacy & Adjustments:** Due to ongoing community engagement, the budget was increased to \$42 million, eventually reaching \$56 million.
- **Final Design Approved:** In collaboration with students, educators, and architects, a plan was finalized to integrate flexible learning spaces, modern infrastructure, and community-oriented areas.

### Construction & Implementation (2018-2020)

- **2018:** Groundbreaking took place, marking the beginning of construction.
- **May 2020:** Major renovations completed, including STEM labs, athletic facilities, and the Legacy Concourse.
- **January 2020:** A ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrated the transformation, with over 1,500 alumni, students, and faculty in attendance.
- **August 2020:** Full occupancy and the official opening of the renovated campus.

# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

### Scope of Work & Programmatic Enhancements

- **Academic Improvements:** New STEM classrooms, interdisciplinary learning environments, and expanded fine arts facilities.
- **Athletic & Extracurricular Upgrades:** A 2,000-seat competition gym, weight training facility, and an auxiliary gymnasium that also serves as a storm shelter.
- **Community Integration:** The Legacy Concourse, featuring historical artifacts and student achievements, and redesigned courtyards for outdoor learning and events.



### School & Community Engagement

#### Equity-Driven Transformation: A Model for Community Advocacy in Design

- South Oak Cliff High School's \$52 million renovation was more than just a school upgrade—it set a precedent for equity in Dallas ISD and became a catalyst for reinvestment in historically underserved communities. The project represented a shift in how the district responded to schools in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods, which had long faced disparities in funding and resources compared to wealthier, predominantly white areas.
- South Oak Cliff High School's renovation was not merely a facility improvement; it was a response to decades of systemic neglect and fueled by community activism.
- This transformation showcases how architecture can serve as a tool for social justice, ensuring historically underserved populations receive the same quality learning environments as their peers in more affluent areas.

Supporting Evidence: The project was driven by student protests, alumni advocacy, and grassroots community engagement, which secured an increased investment from an initial \$9 million to a final \$56 million.

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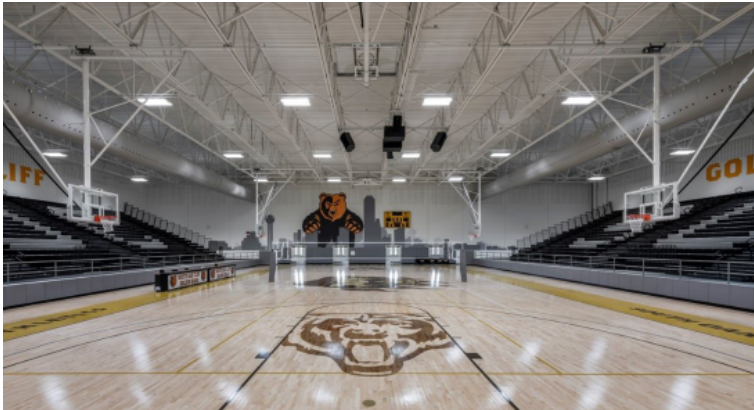
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### Community-Centered Design: A School That Reflects Local Identity

- The design actively incorporated input from students, parents, and community leaders to ensure that the school reflected South Oak Cliff's cultural and historical identity.

Supporting Evidence: Features such as the Legacy Concourse, honoring alumni achievements, and outdoor learning spaces designed to serve both academic and community needs.

### Learning Environment & Educational Vision



### Holistic Student Wellness: Designing for Academics, Athletics, and Mental Health

The redesign integrates modern academic spaces with state-of-the-art athletic facilities and wellness areas that support the learner.

Supporting Evidence:

- 2,500-seat competition gym.
- Auxiliary gym doubling as a storm shelter.
- Career & Technical Education (CTE) labs.
- Collaborative learning hubs.

### Reclaiming Underutilized Spaces for 21st-Century Learning

The renovation transformed previously neglected and underused spaces into modern, flexible learning environments that foster creativity and collaboration.

Supporting Evidence:

- Two repurposed courtyards converted into outdoor learning areas.
- Learning amphitheater designed for project-based and interactive learning.

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## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL



- Modernized Educational Spaces
- Flexible Learning Environments: Classrooms with movable furniture and adaptable layouts.
- Technology-Enhanced Spaces: Smart classrooms, STEM labs, and interactive learning staircases.
- Fine Arts & CTE Expansion: Dedicated choral spaces, career training facilities, and an expanded auditorium.



### Adaptability & Flexibility

- Learning Stair doubles as lecture space, collaborative area, and performance venue.
- Outdoor courtyards provide opportunities for alternative learning experiences.
- Gymnasium serves dual purposes as a storm shelter.

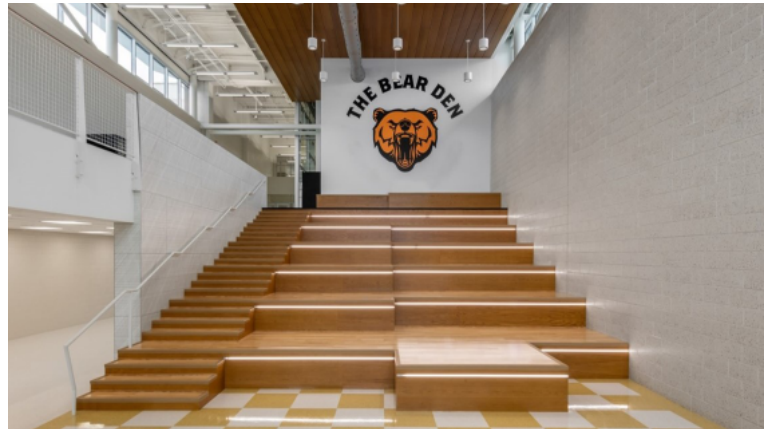
### Physical Environment & Sustainability

Sustainable and Resilient Design: Building for the Future

The school's renovation incorporates sustainable features and resilience strategies, ensuring long-term energy efficiency and preparedness for extreme weather events.

Supporting Evidence:

- Storm-resistant construction in key areas such as the auxiliary gym.
- Energy-efficient HVAC systems were designed to reduce operational costs.



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## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

- Natural lighting enhancements to improve student well-being and reduce reliance on artificial lighting.

### Facility Upgrades

- Energy Efficiency: Upgraded HVAC systems, LED lighting, and sustainable insulation.
- Water Quality Enhancements: A campus-wide filtration system ensuring clean and safe drinking water.



- Durable Materials: Low-maintenance surfaces such as CMU block and high-resilience flooring.

### Community-Centered Design

- Legacy Concourse: Displays student achievements and historical milestones, reinforcing school pride.
- Public Access Areas: Gymnasium and courtyards designed for after-school and community events.

### Equity-Driven Transformation: A Model for Community Advocacy in Design

South Oak Cliff High School's \$52 million renovation was more than just a school upgrade—it set a precedent for equity in Dallas ISD and became a catalyst for reinvestment in historically underserved communities. The project represented a shift in how the district responded to schools in predominantly Black and Latino neighborhoods, which had long faced disparities in funding and resources compared to wealthier, predominantly white areas.



# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

### Community-Led Advocacy That Sparked a Movement

- The activism surrounding South Oak Cliff forced Dallas ISD to acknowledge and address systemic inequities in school infrastructure.
- Students, alumni, and community leaders mobilized protests, walkouts, and meetings with district officials, demanding that their school receive the same investment as others in more affluent areas.
- Their success became a blueprint for other schools facing similar neglect, proving that community advocacy could lead to tangible change.



### Shifting Dallas ISD's Investment Priorities

- Before the South Oak Cliff renovation, many older schools in southern Dallas were overlooked in bond allocations, leading to deteriorating conditions.
- The district initially allocated just \$9 million to the project, but after sustained pressure, the budget increased to \$52 million, showing a shift toward prioritizing historically underserved schools.
- This success paved the way for other schools in southern and western Dallas to demand—and receive—better facilities.

### Setting a New Standard for Future Renovations

The South Oak Cliff project demonstrated that aging schools in historically marginalized communities could be modernized to the same standards as those in wealthier areas.

The project included features typically reserved for newer or well-funded campuses:

- State-of-the-art science labs
- A competition gym

# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

- Outdoor learning spaces
- A dedicated space for alumni engagement
- After the renovation, Dallas ISD made more equitable investments in schools like Kimball, Carter, and Roosevelt High Schools, following the precedent set by South Oak Cliff.



### A Symbol of Racial and Educational Justice

- For decades, disparities in Dallas ISD mirrored larger racial and economic inequalities in the city.
- South Oak Cliff's transformation became symbolic of a long-overdue reckoning with these issues, demonstrating that students in Black and Latino communities deserved the same educational opportunities as their peers in wealthier neighborhoods.



- The project inspired discussions on equity beyond facilities, including curriculum enhancements, teacher recruitment, and support services in historically underserved schools.

### Results of Planning & Project Execution

#### Educational & Community Impact

- Student Enrollment Growth: Increased from 900 to over 1,300 students.

# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL



- Higher Teacher Retention: Improved working conditions fostered stronger faculty engagement.
- Revitalized School Spirit: The SOC football team won its first state championship in 60+ years, boosting morale and community pride.

### District & Community Goals Achieved

- Strengthened School-Community Bonds: The school now functions as a multi-use facility supporting educational and cultural events.

### Unexpected Achievements

- National Media Attention: Coverage in Texas Monthly and Texas Standard influenced broader policy discussions on school equity.
- Inspired Similar Projects: The success of SOC led to increased funding for other underserved schools in Dallas.

### Value of the Process & Project to the Community

- Restored trust and collaboration between stakeholders and Dallas ISD.
- Increased student enrollment from 900 to over 1,300 post-renovation.
- SOC now functions as a “Town Center”, hosting community activities, alumni events, and extracurricular programs beyond school hours.



# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

### Conclusion

The South Oak Cliff High School renovation exemplifies the power of architectural design to address educational inequities, honor community heritage, and create future-focused learning environments. The project aligns with A4LE’s Summit Award criteria by demonstrating how school renovations can be a catalyst for social change, student success, and sustainable innovation.

This project is a testament to how thoughtful and inclusive design can transform not just a school, but an entire community, proving that investing in schools is investing in the future. South Oak Cliff High School’s renovation was more than just a school upgrade—it was a movement for educational equity, community restoration, and student empowerment. Through a

collaborative design approach, sustainability-focused infrastructure, and ongoing community involvement, SOC has set a precedent for transforming public education spaces in historically underserved communities.

This project is a testament to the power of advocacy and innovative design, proving that investing in schools is investing in the future.



# SUMMIT AWARD SUBMISSION DOSSIER

## SOUTH OAK CLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

### Key Advocates and Organizations

- **Student Leaders:** In 2015, a group of students, notably David Johnson, Teah Mitchell, Landon Finley, and Lizzett Godinez—dubbed the “Fab Four”—organized protests and walkouts to highlight the school’s deteriorating conditions. Their efforts brought significant attention to the issues and underscored the need for substantial renovations.
- **Derrick Battie:** An alumnus from the class of 1992 and former professional basketball player, Battie returned to serve as the school’s community liaison. He was instrumental in advocating for the \$52 million renovation, leveraging his position to rally support and bring awareness to the school’s needs.
- **For Oak Cliff:** Founded by neighborhood activist Taylor Toynes in 2014, this community organization focuses on liberating Oak Cliff from systemic oppression through education and community engagement. For Oak Cliff played a significant role in mobilizing residents and resources to support the school’s renovation efforts.

### Direct Testimonials

- **Principal Dr. William Johnson:** “Students reacted to the new facilities with tears, just joyfully overjoyed by the opportunity to learn and receive an education in an institution where they don’t have to fight for just basic needs.” (kai-db.com)
- **Former Student Leader Lizzett Godinez:** “Us as students, us coming together. You know we got something done. We got people to listen to us, and us standing out and standing up for ourselves and what we believe in got us this school.” (nbcdfw.com)
- **Athletic Trainer Jocelyn Shackelford:** “The renovation has had a positive impact on everyone. Both staff and students are excited every day to report to school and enjoy the features of the new building.” (teamedgeathletics.com)
- These testimonials underscore the transformative effect of the renovation, fostering a renewed sense of pride, motivation, and community engagement at South Oak Cliff High School.