

**Martin Luther King Jr.  
Medical Campus Child Care Center**  
—Los Angeles, CA







## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To truly elevate an individual's educational experience, it takes more than careful planning and strong design, it takes shared vision and impassioned motivation. Designing the new Martin Luther King Jr. Medical Campus Child Care Center was a challenge eagerly accepted by a team with a common goal:

**Transform a utilitarian Brutalist structure into an inspirational and inclusive space for children and their families by building nurturing spaces with a glimpse of what's next, creating accessible outdoor space for all learning levels to foster exploration, and providing peace of mind for busy parents and entire families.**

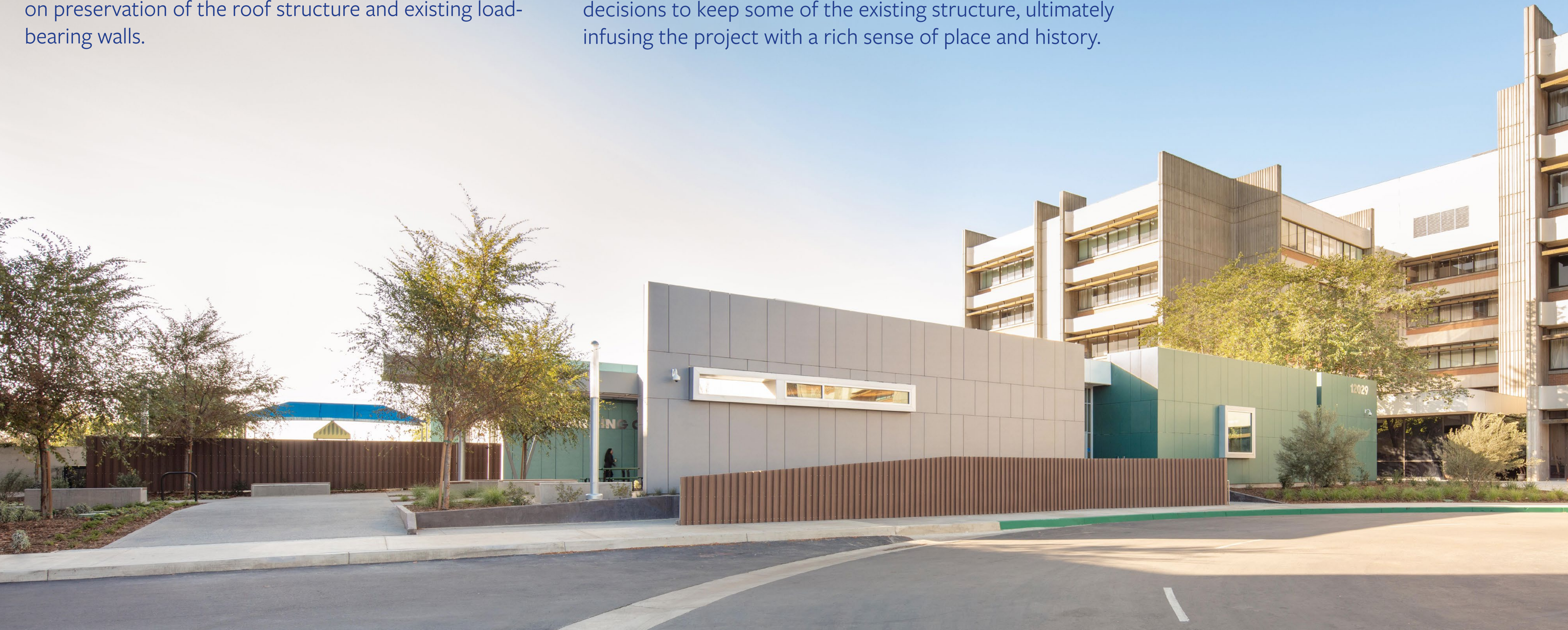
Since the project was completed, the Center has offered care and education to many young learners, expanding their horizons in an environment built intentionally for their educational, emotional, and physical needs.



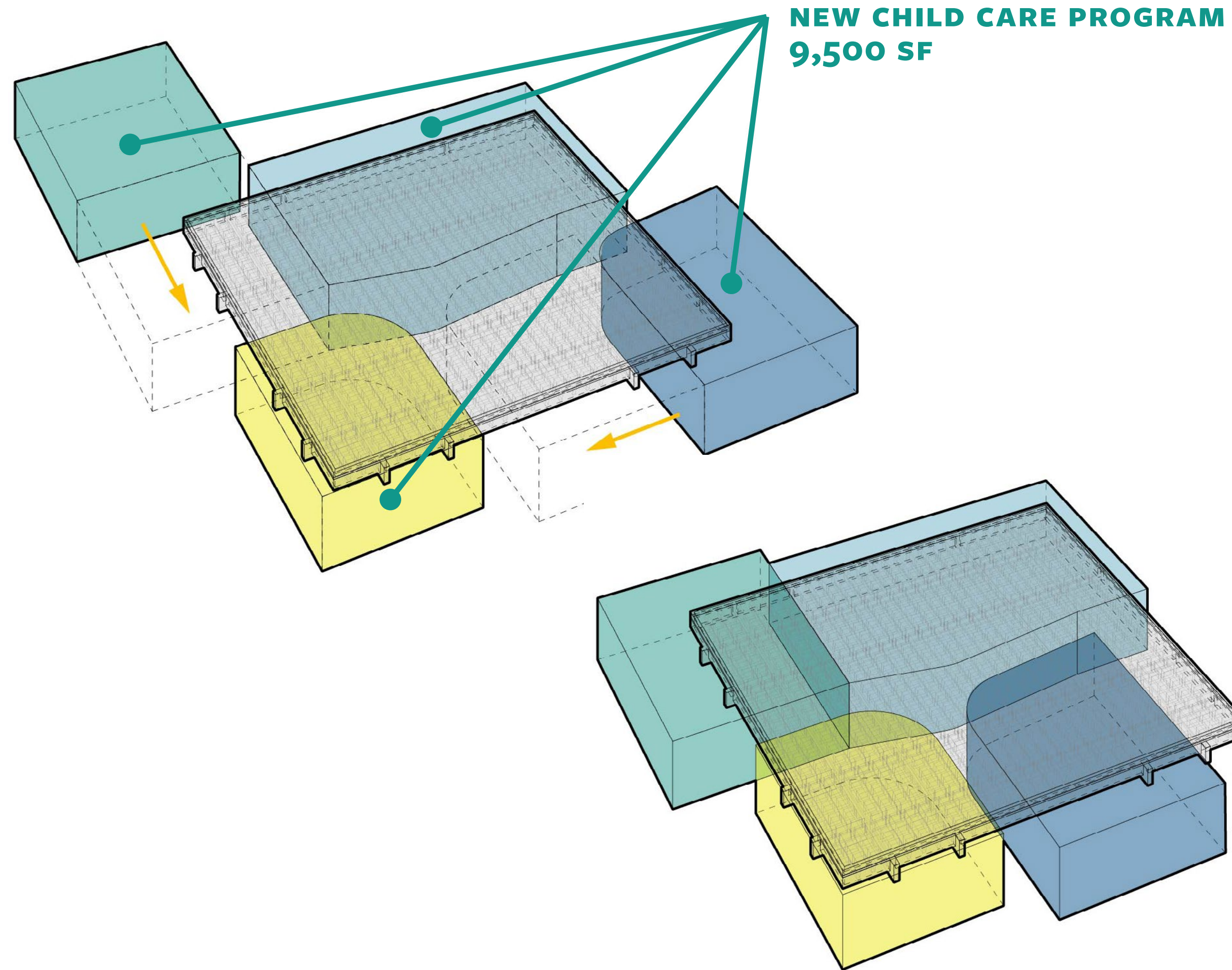
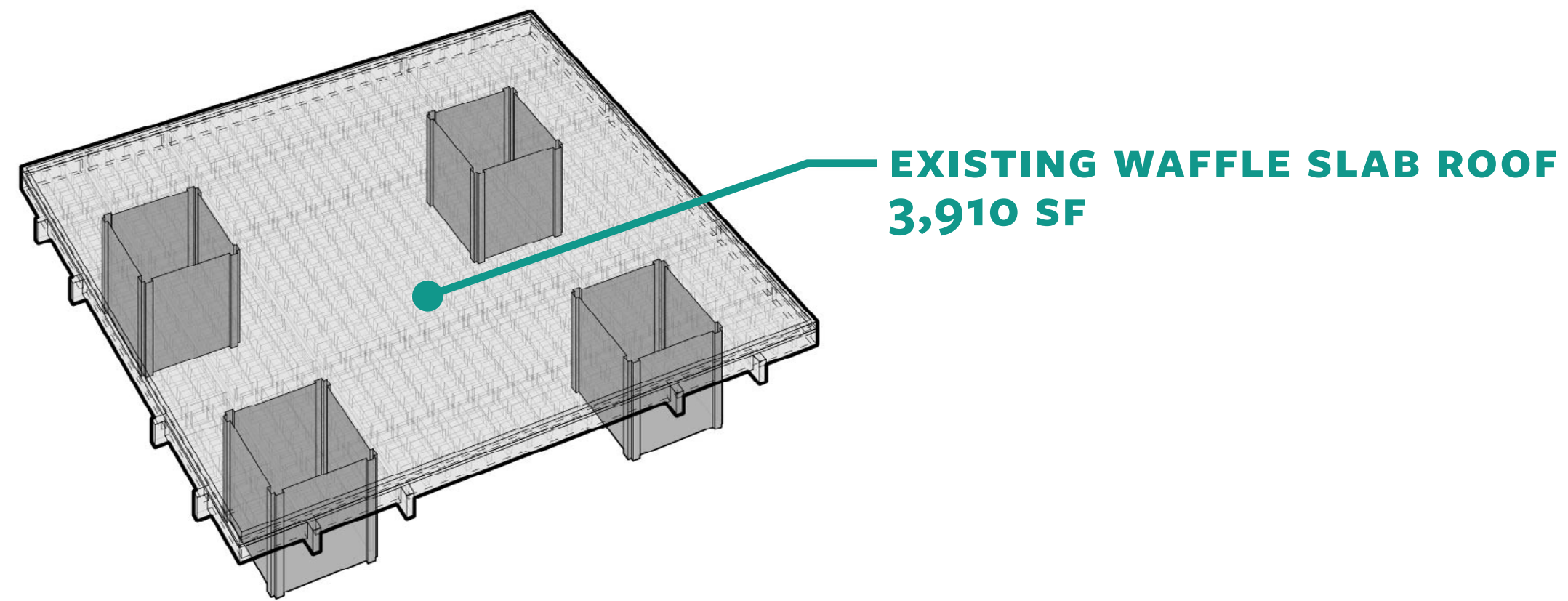
## SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

Built in 1973, the existing cast-in-place concrete building, previously used as an auditorium, sits on an aging hospital campus. The design team was charged with integrating a vastly different program—a childcare facility serving infants through preschoolers. The site's historic nature, the beauty of its exposed concrete waffle slab roof, along with a constrained schedule and budget, focused efforts on preservation of the roof structure and existing load-bearing walls.

The budget was a lean five million dollars that required continual monitoring and prioritization by the entire team. As an LA County Department of Public Works project, it was important that all parties involved with the design and construction were good stewards of public funds. The design team focused on providing an exceptional space for children to learn, grow, and flourish. The budget drove decisions to keep some of the existing structure, ultimately infusing the project with a rich sense of place and history.







The building was demolished except for the core structural elements and a concrete waffle roof slab. Four steel-framed volumes were slipped seamlessly beneath the existing roof. Each box served student or staff activities and were uniquely color coded to make **wayfinding and circulation simple and seamless for both children and families.** To lighten the feel, the roof slab was painted white, providing an ideal backdrop for the brightly colored volumes that now serve the childcare program.



## SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The Center directly serves the employees of the Martin Luther King, Jr. medical campus and families within South Los Angeles. The hospital offers care to patients and their families regardless of insurance status or ability to pay. **Quality child care facilities, such as this, have never been more crucial, especially for healthcare workers and others who cannot perform their essential work remotely.**







South Los Angeles is in transition. Recently labeled as one of the highest-ranking areas of LA in crime and unemployment, the community has worked hard to overcome these issues. Delivering a facility of utmost quality to this community was essential. Through many on-site meetings with the LA County Planners, the Campus medical staff, operators and prospective parents, **the Center was designed to give hard-working medical staff, children, and local families access to a state-of-the-art childcare that also serves as a safe and comforting space for the community and young learners to grow and thrive.**





### EXISTING SITE CHALLENGES

- Tight site on a busy hospital campus with an evolving identity
- Noise
- Dark, aging structure
- Juxtaposition of historic and contemporary architectural styles on site
- Working with essential structure of existing building

### GOALS

- Create a series of graceful transitions from the frenetic city to the calm environment of the Center
- Give children access to outdoor spaces at all age levels
- Align with contemporary buildings on site
- Embrace the site challenges with curiosity and enthusiasm
- Provide diverse opportunities for play as a strategy for learning
- Create a building in an existing structure that is designed for the future growth and feel of the campus



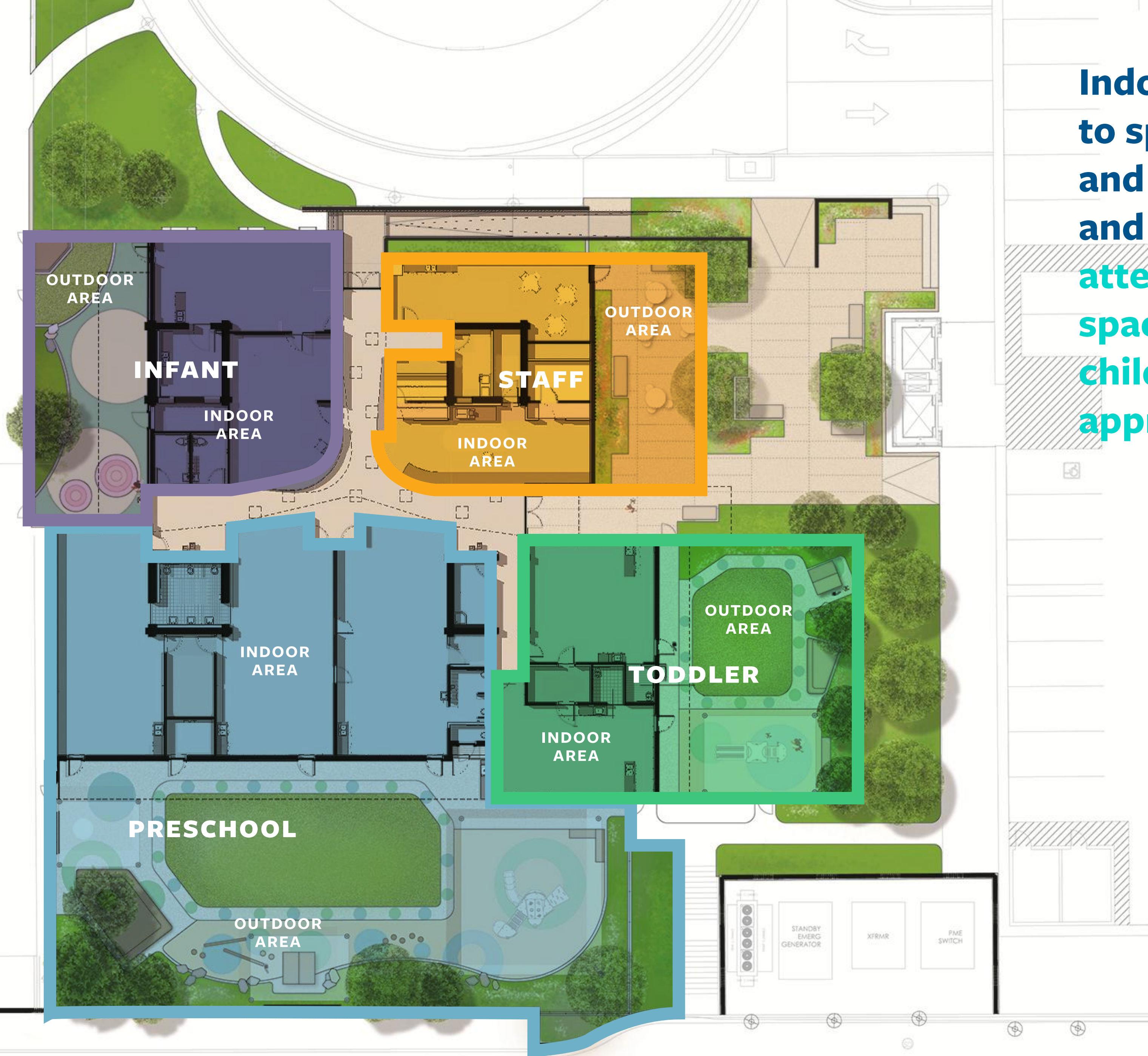
## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Providing a facility with this level of care has tremendous impact to the social and emotional development of young children. There is a sense of security and belonging in a space that is appropriately scaled. It fosters a sense of independence and self-sufficiency that is essential to life-long development.

The goal of the Center is to provide a thriving atmosphere for children from 6 weeks to 5 years old. All children and their families must feel welcome. The barriers to access and support needed to be eliminated in the design to allow everyone entering to feel respected, appreciated, and heard. With a population that speaks several languages, along with young learners not yet able to read, seamless navigation of the space was needed from parent parking to sign-in and drop-off.







**Indoor and outdoor spaces are designed to specifically meet infants, toddlers, and preschoolers’ social, emotional, and physical development. Particular attention was given to the exterior play spaces. Outside the Center, many of the children do not have regular access to age-appropriate outdoor space.**

**UNIVERSAL FEATURES**

- Maximum flexibility for creative play and learning
- Diverse tactility in materials
- Age-appropriate layout and organization
- Peek-a-boo windows to see other learning levels

**INDOOR FEATURES**

- Natural light
- Views of outdoor space
- Quiet areas for individuals and small groups
- Open areas for larger groups
- Dedicated napping areas
- Eating spaces

**OUTDOOR FEATURES**

- Soft surfaces and textures
- Trike tracks
- Water tables
- Play structures
- Grass areas
- Small gardens
- Shady spaces

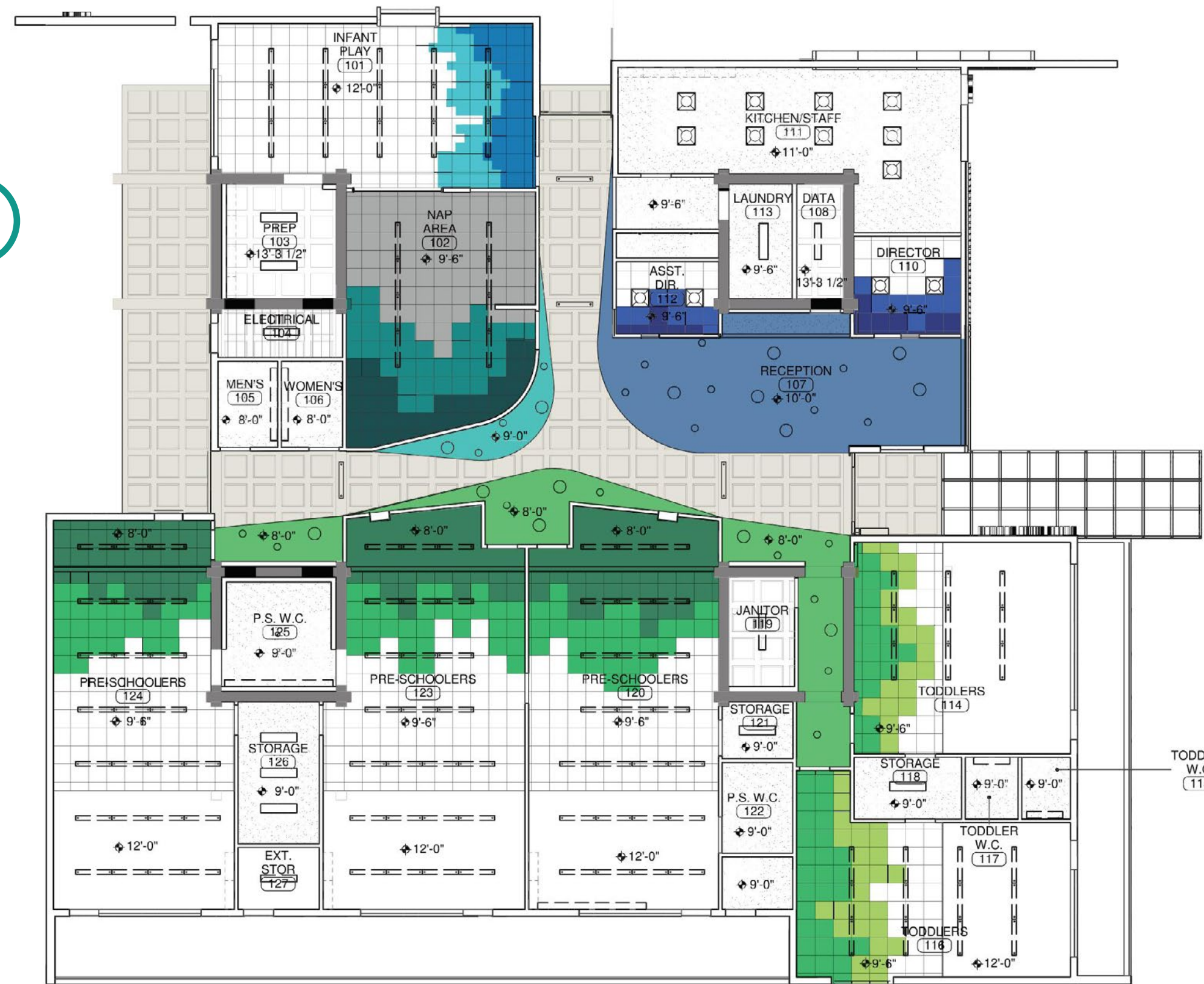




**FLOOR PLAN**

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The design of the Center **supports the individual learner and their unique learning method** in highly adaptable classrooms and adjoining play areas. There are areas that are smaller scale, designed for students who work better and grow in small groups and open areas for kids who thrive working in larger groups.



**REFLECTED CEILING PLAN**

Color was a vital element of the design. Overhead, there are light-colored soffits between the concrete ceiling slab and modules. The cool tones help add to the airy feel of the white waffle ceiling. **Color also defines space and assists with wayfinding, especially for learners not yet able to read.** Being able to easily navigate the building bolsters self-confidence.

**OTHER KEY INTERIOR DESIGN FEATURES:**

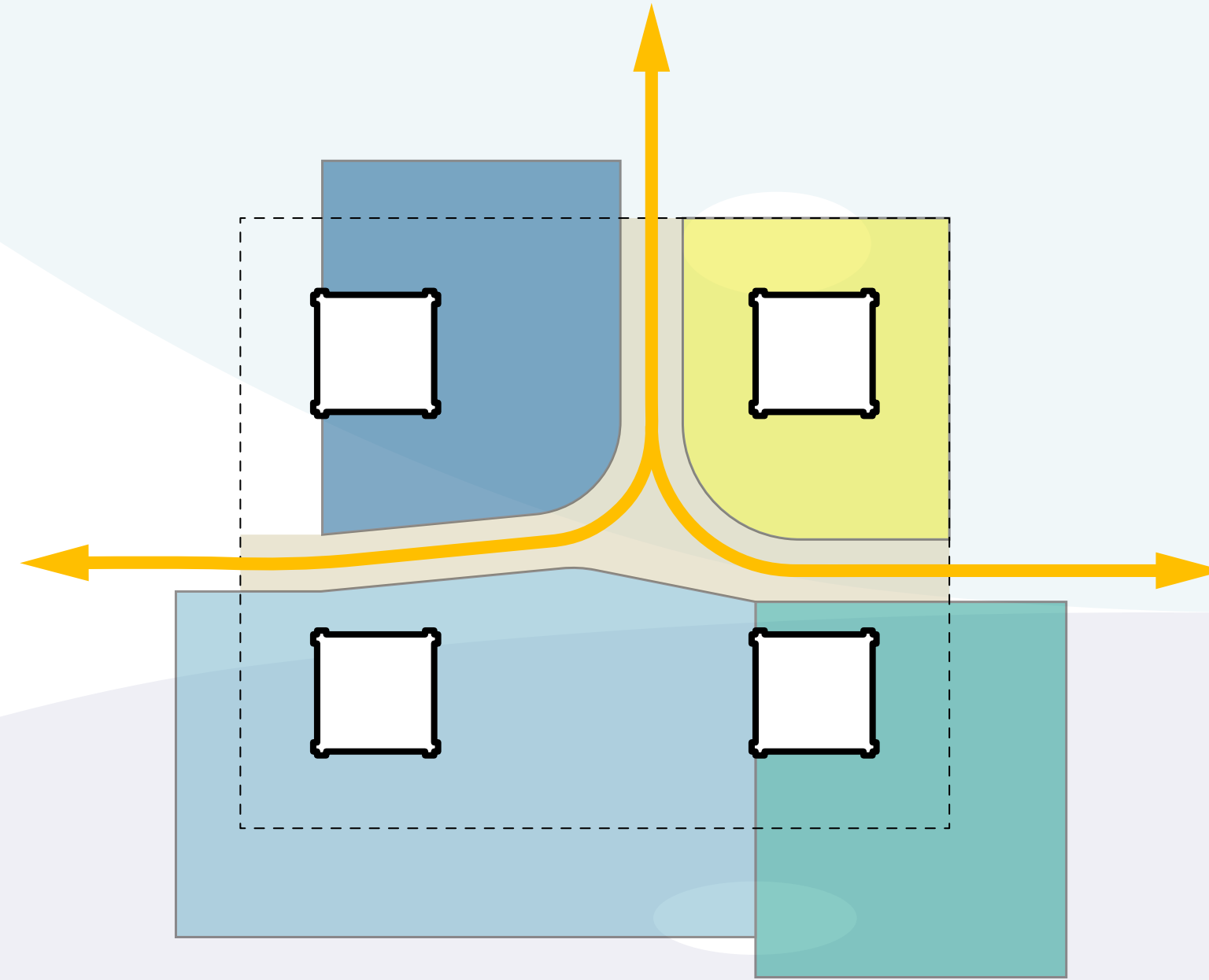
- Irregularly shaped soffits soften the interior by visually breaking the rigid grid of the waffle roof
- Playful, cloud-like layered ceiling seems to float
- Color-coded modules give the learning areas a unique identity and infuse liveliness



Glass is used to create a porous transition between inside and out—clear entrances going to the ground allow for children and parents to see where they are going. **The ability to eliminate surprises and create moments to pause and connect inside and outside. This eases the transition for children and creates a less chaotic drop-off for families.**

Placement of windows within the classrooms are also provide views out and connect the classrooms to the outdoors. **It was essential to give every child a space to connect to the outdoors within the building's dense urban setting.** The grounding qualities of feeling grass, hearing leaves rustle, and smelling flowers is innately soothing.

The Center serves a community where residents often face barriers to services and opportunities. This facility provides a sense of stability for working parents.







From the outset the team was determined to implement the sustainable choice of reusing the existing building. Concrete structures hold a large amount of embodied energy. Adaptive re-use of these buildings is an inherently green way to design. To avoid triggering seismic upgrades, the existing roof system was not touched other than with cosmetic upgrades.

The mechanical system is a high-efficiency VRV system with the units placed in a walled yard away from the project, avoiding acoustical pollution to the classrooms and outdoor play areas.

Daylight was a core element, for the general quality of spaces and to continually connect the young learners to the outdoors. Outdoor spaces included drought-tolerant landscaping which adds to the sustainable features of the site.

The project has many sustainable attributes. It was critical to connect children, who may not have regular access to the outdoors, to a natural space to play and learn. Interacting with nature, witnessing the growing process, and having regular access to daylight is essential for everyone, especially young children.



**Every child** is encouraged to chart their own path. The building and teachers adapt to each child's needs, from fine and gross motor skills to independence. This sense of confidence leads to a life-long love of learning.

**Every space** is designed to support each child's social, emotional, academic, and physical health advancement.

**Every opportunity** is seized to create a safe, inclusive environment for young children learn, ensuring possibilities for growth and connection everywhere.

#### **RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT**

In an area of Los Angeles described as a childcare desert, affordable, licensed learning environments for children ages under five are scarce. This facility addresses the lack of childcare spaces. The Center provides childcare and early-learning opportunities to the community and also to the hospital staff. Providing an inspiring space for children to be cared for on-site can attract the best healthcare professionals.



It is thrilling to watch children run across the plaza to the front door, excited to enter this space every day. They feel safe. Their families feel safe.

The entry plaza has provided a social space for families, where they can share struggles and celebrations. These connections have created a positive ripple effect that will be felt throughout the community for generations.





# MLK LEARNING CENTER

