

EAST TEXAS MONTESSORI PREP ACADEMY



Association for Learning Environments
2018 LE Solutions Planning and Design Awards

Categories:
New Learning Environment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Montessori Method of education is a child-centered educational approach based on scientific observation. The Montessori method views the child as one who is naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating learning in a supportive, thoughtfully prepared learning environment. When Longview ISD first experimented with Montessori education they didn't know how deeply the program would impact their education model. Shortly after starting the new program, they implemented the Montessori method in all of their elementary campuses. Spreading the program across multiple schools created obstacles and challenges. Each campus executed the education method differently. Some campuses began to fall behind academically.

As a way to consolidate the district's Montessori efforts and to provide equal education opportunities to all students, Longview ISD made the decision to move all Pre-K / K Montessori education to a single campus, the East Texas Montessori Prep Academy. Going from multiple campuses offering Montessori education to a single Montessori Academy helped the district maintain quality and continuity within the program. It also provided the district with an opportunity to rethink the students' learning experience.

The academy is one of the few public Montessori academies in the nation. The public status gives everybody in the district, including low income families, the opportunity to enroll their children in the program. The academy was centrally placed in the district to maximize reach. Since 2008, the district's Montessori program has proven its value. Students who had previously struggled academically have greatly benefited from the alternative education and have shown marked improvement. Additional positive results have started to emerge in the higher grade levels as the previous Montessori students have carried the program's success with them.

FROM STUDENT-HEIGHT WINDOWS TO THE OUTDOOR LEARNING PAVILION, EACH ELEMENT OF THE DESIGN SUPPORTS THE **STUDENT LEARNING EXPERIENCE**, WHICH WAS THE FOCUS OF THE SCHOOL'S DESIGN.

In response to a decline in enrollment, the district began redefining their education model in 2008. A 2008 bond election that brought much needed upgrades to district facilities, the introduction of Montessori education, and the new education model positively impacted enrollment. Families who previously left the district began reenrolling their children into the Longview ISD school system. The East Texas Montessori Prep Academy has continued to positively effect the district. It has also impacted other schools in the district. By consuming all Pre-K / K Montessori education, the other campuses gained much needed space to grow.

East Texas Montessori Prep Academy has been a success for the district. The overall result was a safe, interactive and adaptable school that looks to have a positive impact on the community for many years to come.

SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

20

TOTAL ACRES

123,000

TOTAL SQUARE FEET:
NEW CONSTRUCTION

1397

STUDENT CAPACITY

Pre-K / K

GRADE LEVELS

\$34

MILLION:
PROJECT COST



AUGUST, 2008
District begins
Montessori Education

JUNE 18, 2015
First Design
Charrette

AUGUST 26, 2015
Schematic
Design

MARCH 2, 2016
Construction
Begins

AUGUST 28, 2017
First Day
of School

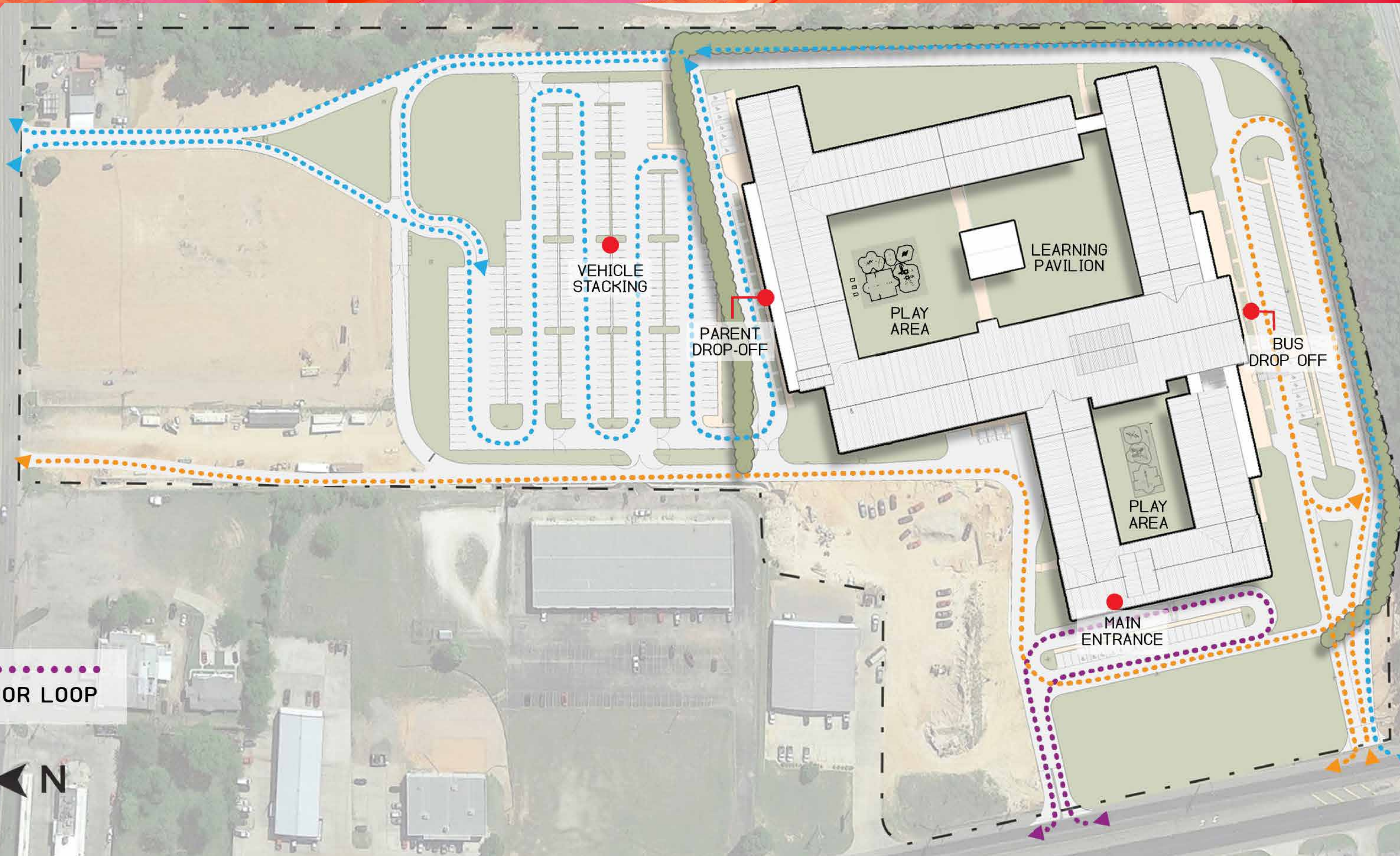
JANUARY 26, 2015
Bid Date

JULY 16, 2015
Second Design
Charrette

DECEMBER 14, 2015
Design
Development

AUGUST 21, 2017
Ribbon Cutting
Ceremony

SITE PLAN



PROJECT DETAILS

- One of the largest Public Montessoris in the nation
- Centrally located within Longview ISD
- Easily accessible from two major roadways
- School uses geothermal heating
- 100 percent of classrooms harvest natural light

PROJECT GOALS

- Bring equity and parity to Longview's Montessori Program
- Maintain quality and continuity with Montessori education
- Design a building that is flexible to changing teaching models
- Architecturally match other campuses in the district
- Provide adequate vehicle stacking to keep parents and students safe
- Attract families to enroll and re-enroll in Longview ISD

BEFORE

ABANDONED HOTEL

AFTER

PURCHASED FOR
FUTURE USE

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Although Longview, Texas is a smaller city, with a population of 82,055, it experiences challenges that are usually characteristic of larger, urban areas. These issues include a sizeable transient population and a large number of families on welfare. Due to the large percentage of low incomes families in the area, the school district has been troubled with under-funding issues for many years. Because of this, many affluent families moved away to surrounding towns in search of better education opportunities.

In 2008, the district decided to completely overhaul their entire education model. It started with a bond program that allowed Longview ISD to replace all but two elementary schools and begin a new Montessori education program. The program experienced great success, even with students who usually under-performed. This led the district to push Montessori education out to every elementary school.

After showing signs of improvement, many of the families who had previously left in search of better opportunities began reenrolling their children into Longview ISD. In 2014, Forbes Magazine ranked Longview as the sixth fastest-growing small city in the United States.

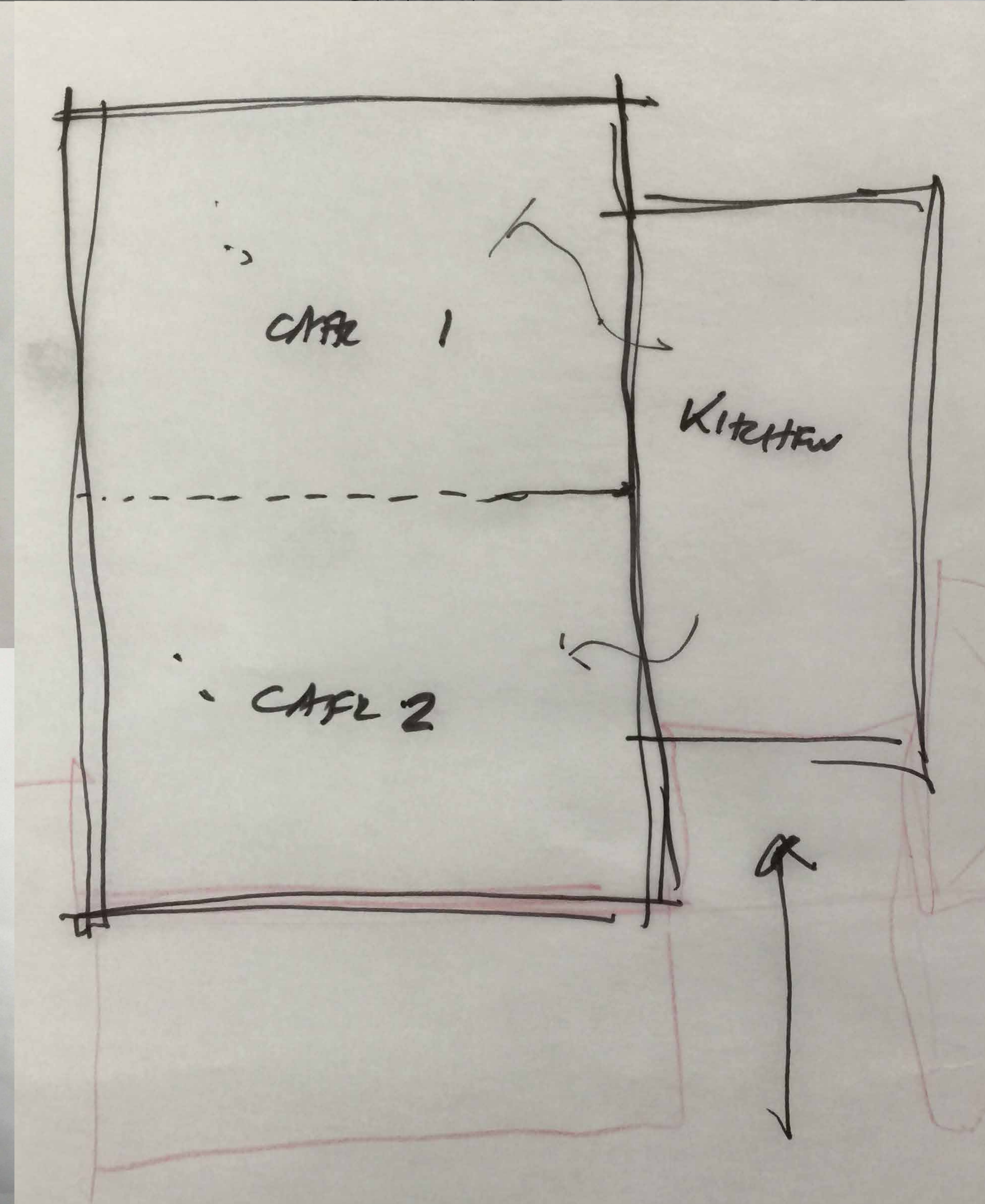
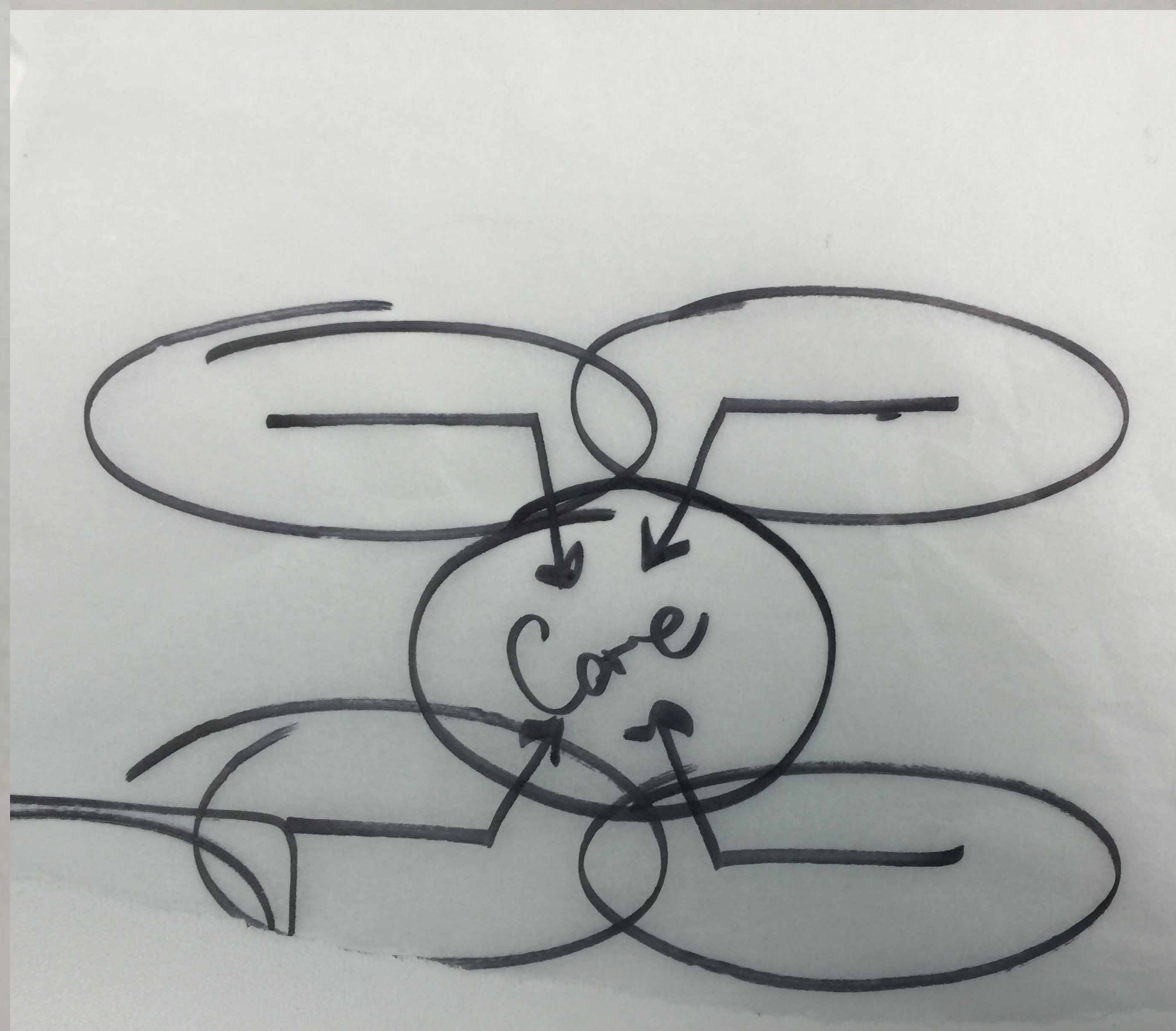
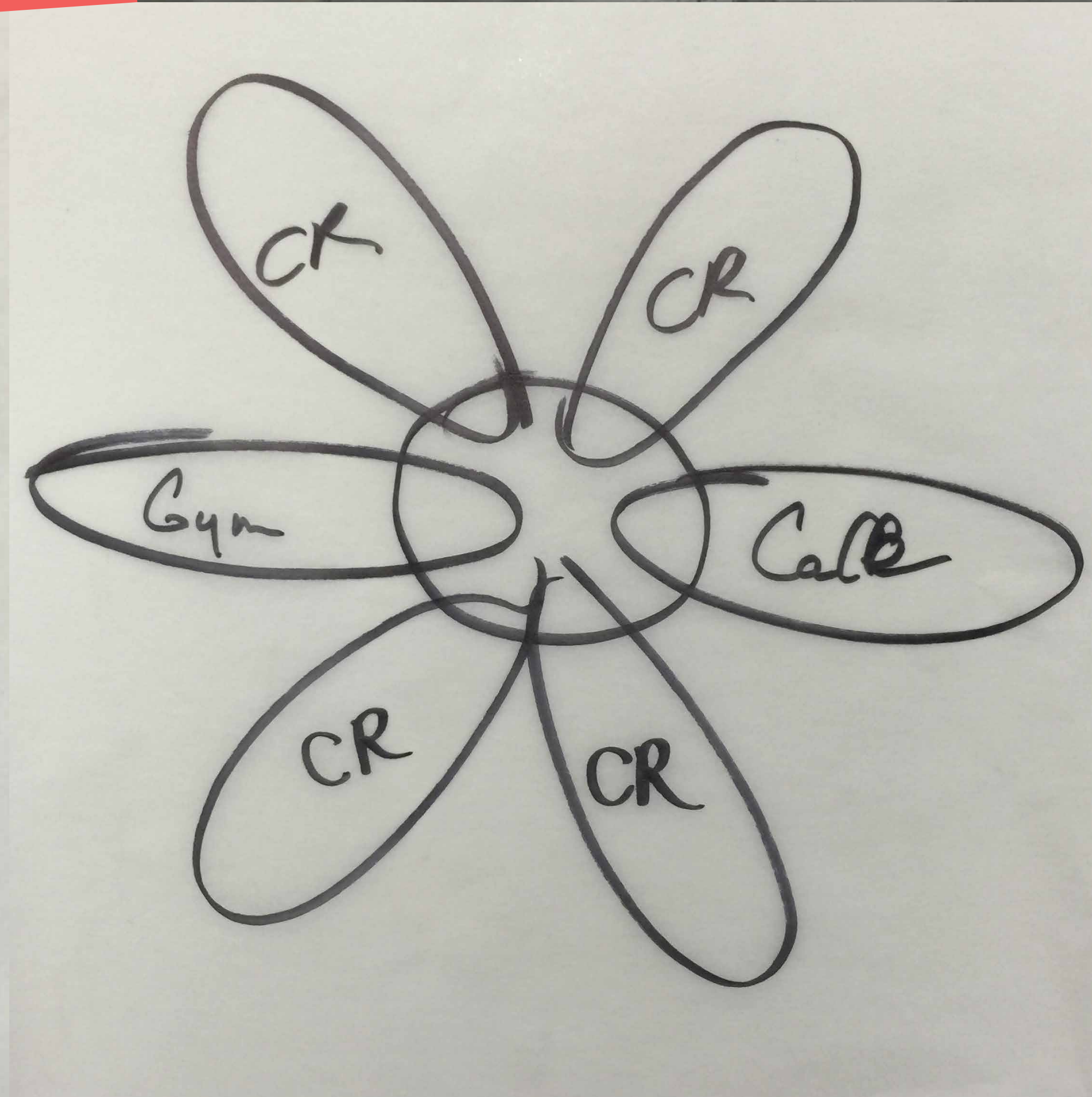
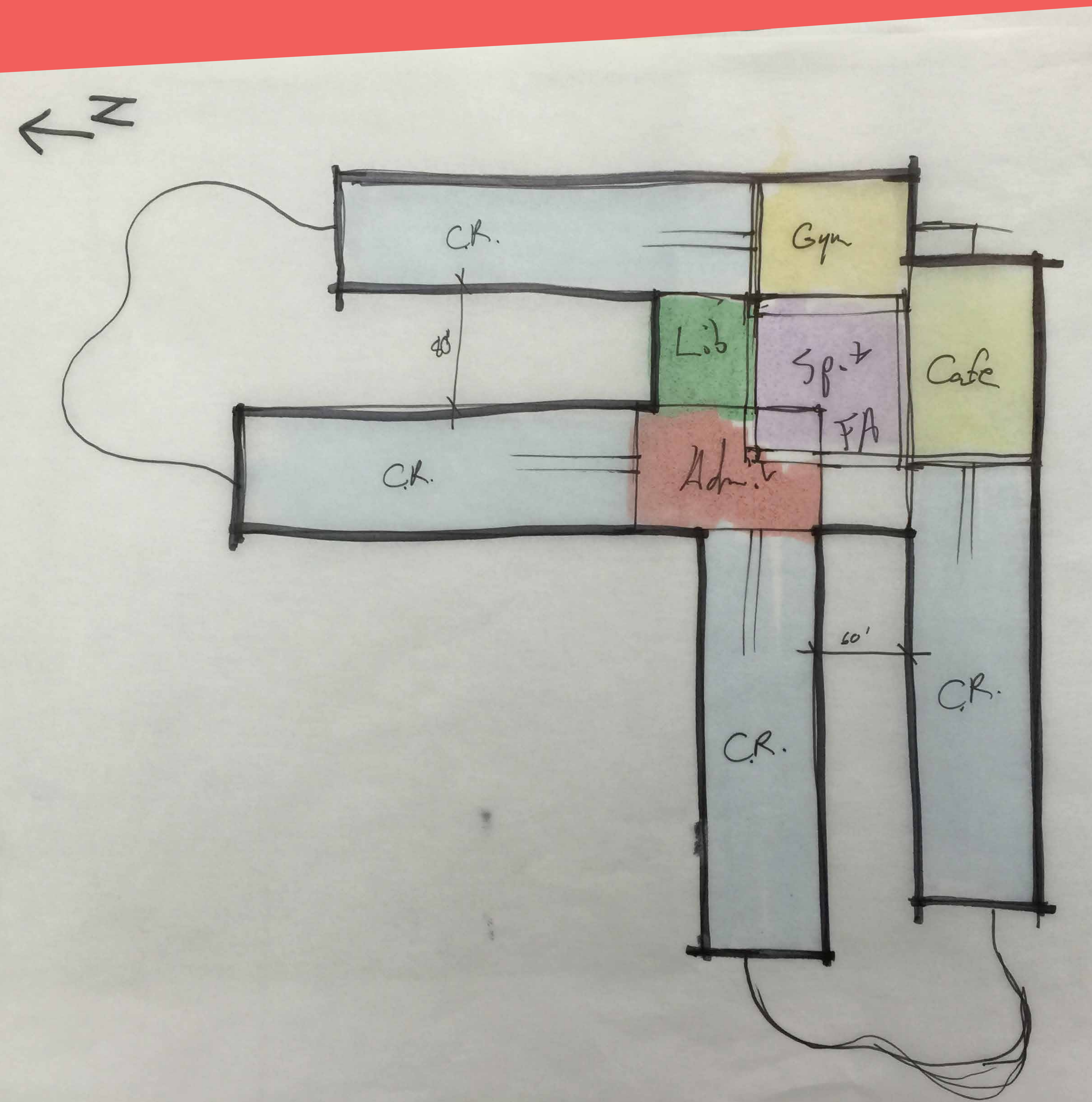
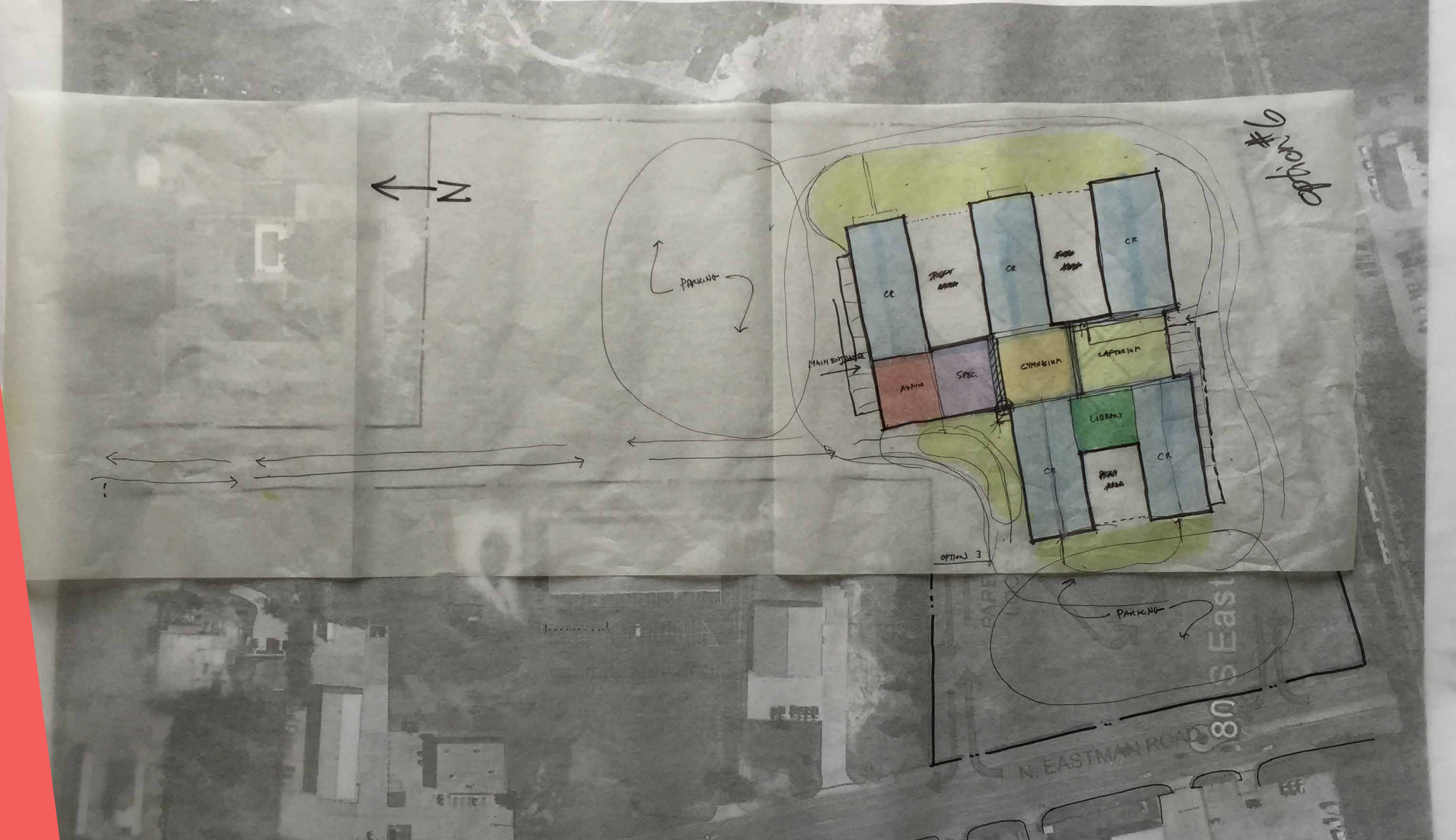
But with the growth of the district and the Montessori program, new challenges began to arise. With every elementary offering the Montessori program, inconsistencies in the quality of programs arose. It became difficult to maintain continuity throughout the district. To address this issue, the district came together and decided to build a single campus for Pre-K/K Montessori education.






Stakeholders included district personnel, parents, students and community members.

This academy, with a capacity of 1400 students, is one of the largest public Montessori schools in the nation. Due to the size and population of the school, many critical issues needed to be addressed during planning. The school was placed centrally in the district to reach all students and to bring equity in the educational opportunities. The young age of the students means that a significant number of parents drop-off and pick-up their children. Safe and adequate vehicle stacking had to be incorporated throughout the larger parking lot.



A wide-angle photograph of a modern, single-story brick building with a prominent gabled roof and a covered walkway. The building is surrounded by a paved parking lot with red-painted fire lanes and a grassy area with two flagpoles. The sky is overcast with soft, diffused light. The building's name is visible on the brickwork.

What used to be an overgrown, forgotten lot is now a symbol of the community's future.

The lot purchased by the district was an overgrown, isolated location that bordered an abandoned hotel. There was also a small transient population residing in the wooded area on the property. Construction of the academy helped transform a rundown, neglected piece of property into a proud symbol of the community's future. The main entrance of the building faces one of Longview's major roadways and shows off the district's commitment to excellence.

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



Longview ISD created the East Texas Montessori Prep Academy as a way to consolidate their Montessori program. This also gave them the opportunity to redefine the student's learning experience and create spaces that are agile and flexible. The district wanted the academy to stay true to the exterior styling of its other campuses, but wanted the interiors to feature unique, innovative elements. 100 percent of classrooms receive natural light and include student-height windows, which provide play ledges and connectivity to nature. Colored corridors and internationally themed environmental graphics in the common spaces provide both wayfinding and interactive learning. The campus contains two large courtyards. These courtyards are used for recreation and learning. The largest courtyard boasts an outdoor learning pavilion that gives the teachers and staff extra options when planning lessons or curriculum.



Student-height windows provide connection to nature.



The classrooms are both comfortable and interactive. The students are encouraged to move furniture and spread out for different education exercises.





Everything, from environmental graphics to the classroom functionality, reflects the thoughtfulness put into creating an exciting learning experience.





Bench seating in the corridors is used for working in groups or waiting on instruction.



Each academic wing contains its own color theme to help with wayfinding.



Environmental graphics support learning around every corner.





The cafeteria remains flexible and is used for large group functions.



Environmental graphics are also used to promote school values.

International themes are to create learning opportunities about other cultures.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

When the district purchased the site, they didn't know if they would be able to purchase the adjacent abandoned hotel. This caused the planning team to have some safety concerns. To ensure that the children wouldn't be exposed to any external threats, the academic wings were built as barriers. These barriers provide large, protected courtyards that are used for recreation. This limits outsiders' access to students. It also gives teachers and staff the added benefit of outdoor learning options.

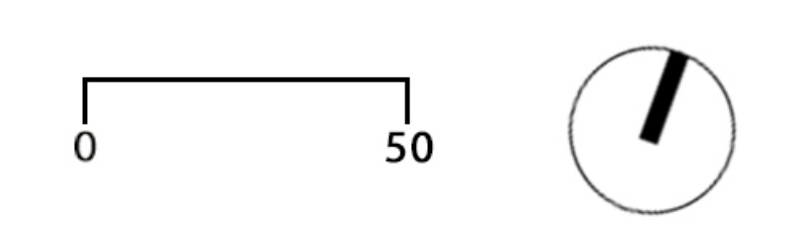
The academy is future proof. When the district's teaching model evolves, the building can be transitioned in the same way as the other campuses. By using similar style, materials and furniture as other campuses, the academy could be used as any other district campus. By taking over all Pre-K / K Montessori education, the academy gave much needed room to the district's other elementary schools that previously offered the program.



FLOOR PLAN



- COLOR LEGEND**
- Academic Space
 - Academic Support
 - Administration
 - Administration Support
 - Athletic Space
 - Athletic Support
 - Circulation
 - Dining
 - Dining Support (Kitchen)
 - Fine Arts
 - Fine Arts Support
 - Library
 - Support Space

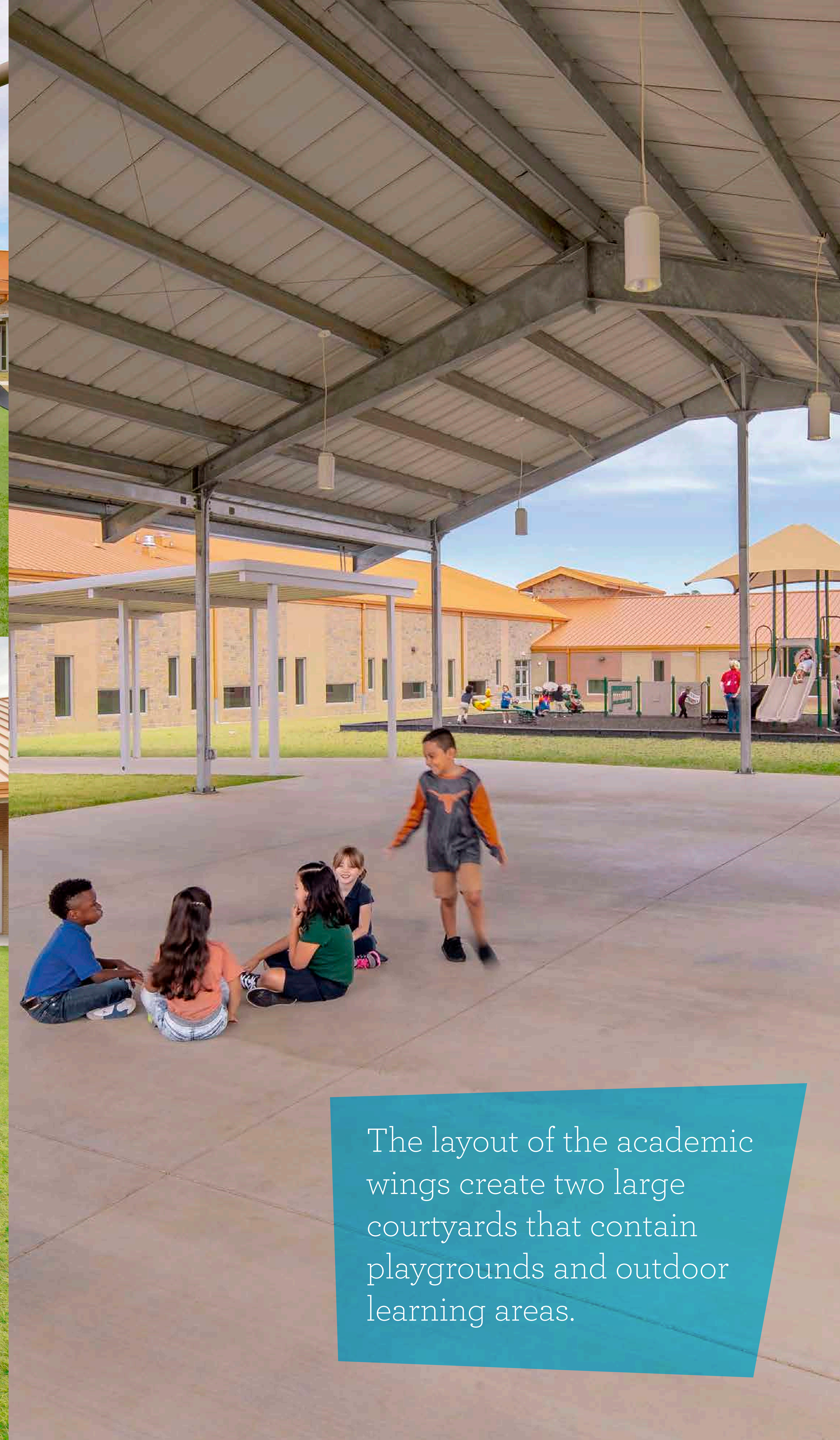




Other campuses
in the district.



Stone, metal and a copper hued roof are all part of the district's identity and help the building match the other campuses.



The layout of the academic wings create two large courtyards that contain playgrounds and outdoor learning areas.



The courtyards provide a safe, enclosed community within the school for students to learn and grow.



Natural light connects students and staff with the outdoors.





The children have room to learn and play.

Playgrounds have shaded areas to keep the kids cool.



ANTARCTICA



SOUTH AMERICA

Geothermal heating gives the district a clean energy tax credit. 100% of classrooms harvest natural light and most common spaces have natural light through regular or clerestory windows. Many windows are located at student height and provide play ledges for students; this gives them a way to connect with the outdoors. The larger of the two courtyards contains a learning pavilion, which serves as a great outdoor learning environment. Artificial turf and native landscape reduce the need for irrigation.




Natural light helps to reduce energy costs.



Clerestory windows are used in the library to provide natural light.



The learning pavilion provides outdoor learning opportunity.



High-quality materials are used to lower the maintenance required from the district.



Terrazzo flooring is used in the main corridors.

Covered walkways around the building provide shade and protection.



RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT

From the student-height windows to the outdoor learning pavilion, it's clear that the student learning experience is the focus of this school. The large capacity of the school allows the district to unify their Montessori efforts and provide equal opportunities. Having a single academy has allowed Longview ISD to maintain a high standard of quality throughout the Montessori program. The academy has also impacted the other elementary schools in the district. By consuming all Pre-K / K Montessori education, the other campuses have gained much needed room to grow.

The first two weeks at East Texas Montessori Prep Academy were a learning period for the staff and the parents. The high number of students enrolled provided a few challenges. Due to the young age of the children, there is a high percentage of parent's dropping off and picking up their kids. This made mornings and afternoons at the school quite chaotic. Once a routine was established and parents became familiar with the system, the problems disappeared. Another concern the district had was the high number of vehicles present during peak times. The larger parking lot used for vehicle stacking has provided enough space to keep students, parents and other drivers in the community safe.





Light fixtures are used to lower scale of the space.





The East Texas Montessori Prep Academy's capacity of 1400 students means that all Pre-K and Kindergarten children in the district have access to the same Montessori education. This has achieved the district's goal of bringing equity and parity to the program.

The building itself checks all the boxes for the district. It's a fun, interactive and most importantly safe space for the kids. It matches the styling of the district's other campuses and remains flexible enough to support the Montessori teaching method.

The community has bought into the district's vision and into the East Texas Montessori Prep Academy. This is evident from the number of families reenrolling into the Longview ISD system. The district took it's teaching model into the 21st century and has set itself success. Longview ISD is now up to the challenge of educating the sixth fastest growing small city in the United States.