
MAGNOLIA MONTESSORI FOR ALL

ASSOCIATION FOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS - 2018 LESOLUTION AWARD - NEW LEARNING ENVIRONMENT



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

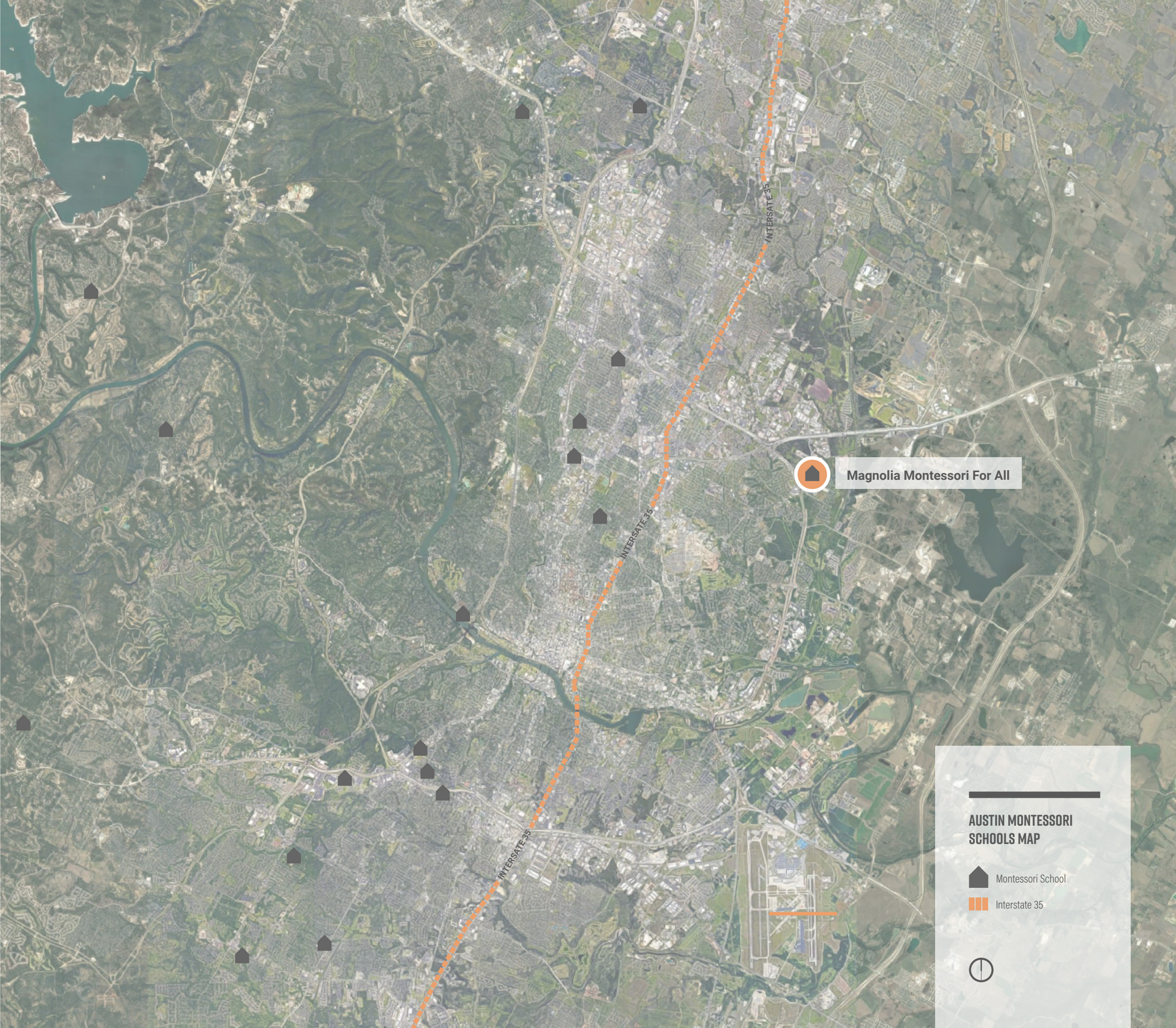
SCOPE OF WORK & BUDGET

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

RESULTS OF THE PROCESS & PROJECT




EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Magnolia Montessori For All (MMFA) is the first public Montessori school in Austin, Texas. Organized as a free public charter school, Magnolia offers high quality, authentic Montessori education to 500 students in PK-6th grade from historically disadvantaged and underserved communities in east Austin. Prior to the opening of Magnolia, all of Austin's Montessori schools were private, tuition-based and located west of Interstate 35, a physical boundary that once reinforced socioeconomic disparities.

Consistent with the ideals of Dr. Maria Montessori, MMFA recognizes each child's tremendous potential, innate curiosity and desire for autonomy. Its program educates and nurtures the "whole child" through a curriculum and teaching methodology that fosters independence and cultivates each student's intellectual, emotional, creative and physical capabilities. As a result, the goal is students can pursue lives of meaning and make valuable contributions to their community.

AUSTIN MONTESSORI SCHOOLS MAP

-  Montessori School
-  Interstate 35



LEFT

While Austin is home to a number of Montessori schools, none previously existed east of Interstate 35, which has historically divided Austin racially and economically. Magnolia Montessori For All is the first east Austin Montessori school.

SCOPE OF WORK & BUDGET

9

acre site for the east Austin campus with a more than 30 foot grade change across the site.

\$233

Cost per square foot of the Montessori school east Austin campus

500

Students enrolled in Magnolia Montessori For All's in PK-6th grade classes

\$23,346

Cost per student incurred at Magnolia Montessori for All, which is 29% less than Texas public school trends.

600

Number of children on the Magnolia Montessori For All wait list for 2018-2019.

\$11,672,804

Final construction cost of the Montessori campus, which is 29% less than Texas public school trends.

40,000

Square feet of classroom and administration space tailored to the Montessori curriculum

10,000

Square feet of covered outdoor amenity spaces, including an outdoor pavilion.

“Montessori flips everything on its head and starts with an approach that’s 100 percent **differentiated**, 100 percent **personalized**, 100 percent **competency-based**. It embeds social and emotional learning into the very fabric of what kids do, and it puts respect for the child at the very core of its philosophy.”

SARAH COTNER,
MONTESSORI FOR ALL CO-FOUNDER



Magnolia Montessori For All’s new purpose-built campus exemplifies and supports the essential features of Montessori education:

- student-centered classrooms
- individualized child-directed learning
- sensory learning using Montessori materials
- a three-year work cycle with multiple grades in each classroom

This approach enables teachers to develop deep understanding of each child’s personality and abilities to guide them to appropriately challenging work, and it facilitates the formation of strong and trusting relationships between students, their peers and their teachers that span multiple years. During the three-year work cycle, students learn at their own pace, practice skills as often as they need to develop mastery, and eventually mentor younger peers.

Many of Magnolia Montessori For All’s students come from high risk backgrounds, so it is particularly important that school feels like a stable home away from home. Rather than an intimidating civic-scale single building, the school’s founders envisioned a welcoming village of residential-scale buildings.

LEFT
An open floor plan with designated areas for work allows for individualized child-directed learning.

ABOVE
The scale and proportion of Magnolia Montessori For All’s buildings helps the campus blend seamlessly with its residential context.

KEY

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| A Main Entry | I Lower Elementary Courtyard | Q Fire Lane |
| B Administration | J Upper Elementary Courtyard | R Fire Lane / Service Drive |
| C Headquarters | K Multipurpose Room | S Detention Pond / Open Play Area |
| D Infant & Toddler Classrooms | L Paved Commons & Pavilion | T Water Quality Pond |
| E Food Preparation | M Student Services | U Existing Parking Lot |
| F Laundry | N Play Area #1 | |
| G Infant & Toddler Play Area | O Play Area #2 | |
| H Children's House Courtyard | P Community Garden | |
-
- | | |
|--|--|
| Public / Shared Spaces | Lower Elementary |
| Infant & Toddler | Upper Elementary |
| Children's House | |

The design team worked closely with the extended school community to maximize the potential of the sloping 9-acre site through a plan that organizes MMFA's program—Administration, Infant and Toddler program, Children's House (PK-Kindergarten), Lower Elementary (grades 1-3), and Upper Elementary (grades 4-6)—into 16 buildings that define and forge distinct learning communities.

While they all share a common architectural vocabulary and design elements, no two are alike. The variety imbues each classroom with character and a unique identity on campus, which fosters students' well-being and sense of belonging. The buildings cascade down the sloping hillside, defining courtyards and secure outdoor spaces for learning or recreation.





VISIONARY BOARD OF DIRECTORS



TEACHERS



PARENTS & STUDENTS



LEFT

Principal designer led Magnolia Montessori For All students and teachers through Austin's Umlaf Sculpture Gardens and Museum to spur a conversation around design.

ABOVE

A multidisciplinary stakeholder groups, including administration, a visionary board of directors, teachers, parents, and students were critical in the shaping of the design of the school.

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Montessori For All was founded in 2011 by an enthusiastic Montessori educator and experienced charter school teacher and advocate, Sara Cotner. Prior to launching the school in 2014, Sara assembled a dedicated administrative team, a visionary board of directors and a group of devoted Montessori teachers. Representatives of these groups, as well as a cohort of engaged parents and energetic students, comprised the school's very active design committee, and their passion and excitement propelled the design process.

Through direct observation of classrooms, design workshops and question-and-answer sessions, the design team gathered information and insight about each group's vision, goals and practical requirements for the new campus. The project's design principal also engaged students by leading them on an architecture tour of a local sculpture garden and museum and talking about its design and construction.

1907 First Montessori school, Casa dei Bambini, established in Rome by Maria Montessori.

1911

Montessori spreads to United States with its first school in Scarborough, NY.

2007 Magnolia Montessori For All (MMFA) ideas begin to germinate.

2012

In March, Montessori For All receives its Texas non-profit incorporation.

2013 In November, MMFA is granted its Texas charter and purchases 9 acres.

The design firm's immersion in the school community and the school's continuous involvement and deep investment in the process produced a dynamic partnership that enhanced the final design outcome. Buildings include specific suggestions from faculty that make the spaces a custom fit for this unique program, including non-rectangular floorplans, a limited palette of natural materials and muted colors and dedicated outdoor space for each classroom.

Students successfully advocated for a upper elementary chicken coop and community plant timeline garden.

The final design is a definitive expression of Montessori For All's rigorous interpretation of the values, ideals and traditions of authentic Montessori education.



ABOVE
Varied ceiling heights create a dynamic classroom with intimate and expansive areas that teachers can rearrange as needs change.

RIGHT
The non-rectangular floor plan helps teachers define zones within the classroom where work is arranged thematically.



2014
 Staff is hired and portables are installed for a school opening with 300 families.

2015
 MMFA selects architect and construction manager at-risk for their East Austin campus, as well as completing planning process.

2016
 MMFA design and construction documents are completed in June, with ground breaking in December.

2017
 MMFA's opens Children's House in July, Administration/Headquarters/Infant Toddler in October, and Upper & Lower Elementary in December.

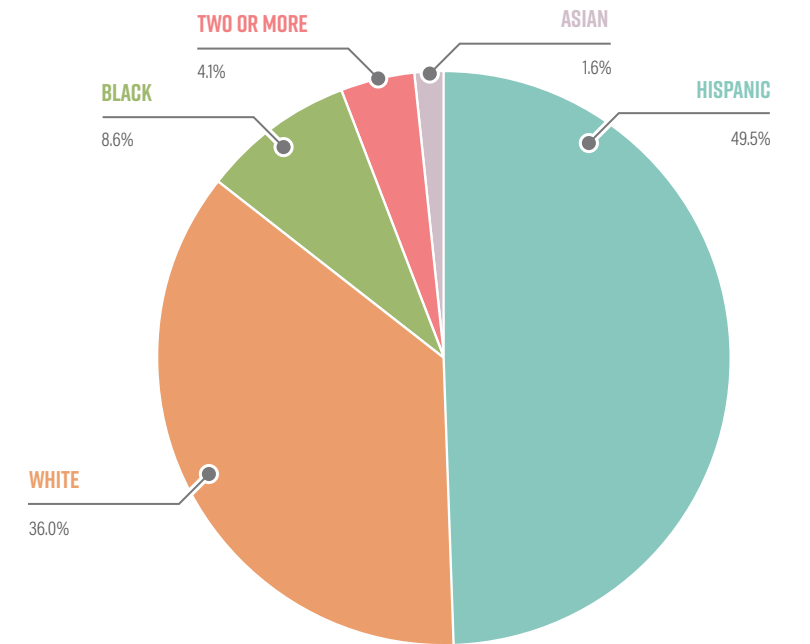
2018
 For 2018-2019, MMFA will enroll 500 students, with a wait list of 600.

“How can we make it feel the most comfortable and familial for the students and the teachers?”

PROJECT ARCHITECT ON
MAGNOLIA MONTESSORI FOR ALL



2017-2018 STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Explain the educational vision and goals of the school

Magnolia Montessori For All's mission is to nurture future citizens, innovators and leaders who will transform the 21st Century through an educational approach that cultivates students' independence, perseverance, self-reliance, critical-thinking and creativity. The founders of Montessori For All aim to disrupt the current standardized and didactic approach to public education and replace it with the Montessori method: child-directed, individualized learning under the careful guidance of trained Montessori teachers using specific Montessori materials.

While there are 5,000 private Montessori schools across the country, just 500 are public Montessori schools, which means access to this instructional method is often limited by a family's ability to pay. Montessori For All seeks to change that.

The founders believe that the quality of educational opportunity should not be determined by a family's income and that all children deserve the chance to reach their potential. Beginning with its first school, Magnolia Montessori For All, the founders aim to help children from all backgrounds access an exceptional education by opening and leading high-performing and authentic public Montessori charter schools in diverse communities nationwide.

LEFT

The paved commons and pavilion are located at the heart of the campus and host school and community gatherings.

ABOVE RIGHT

MMFA has worked to have the student demographics mirror that of the community in which the school resides.



CUBBIES



MATH, GEOMETRY & SENSORIAL



GEOGRAPHY & PRACTICAL LIFE



MATH & GEOGRAPHY

Describe & illustrate how the environment supports the curriculum

The hallmarks of Montessori education that informed the design of the campus and its buildings are: self-directed and individualized learning, multi-age classrooms, and the three-year work cycle. While these features are universal across ages and grades, they are applied differently as students mature, master skills, and develop internal motivation.

The design team observed students at work and conducted workshops with faculty and teachers to understand nuances in how these concepts are implemented at each developmental stage. In response to practices and principles shared across grade levels, the classroom buildings feature an irregular building footprint, a kitchenette, a cubby corner with a built-in window seat, a dormer window and a back porch.

The non-rectangular layout of each classroom supports students' independent and self-directed learning. Instead of a central teaching wall that identifies the front of the classroom and signifies a didactic approach, Montessori relies on unique sensorial materials, which are arranged thematically around the room with work tables and open areas with rugs where students set up their work.

The building footprint encourages students to move freely through the classroom, touch and investigate the materials, and then match their work with a location where they will be comfortable and can concentrate.

The spatial variety of the classroom also supports the three-year work cycle and multi-age classrooms. Because each student in a Montessori classroom is honing different skills at their own pace, the layout makes efficient use of limited square footage by offering students of different ages and abilities many settings. This means that a student can work independently alongside others collaborating on an unrelated project. This arrangement also offers younger students the opportunity to observe older students practicing more advanced concepts, and it gives older students the chance to mentor their younger peers, which develops their self-confidence and leadership skills.

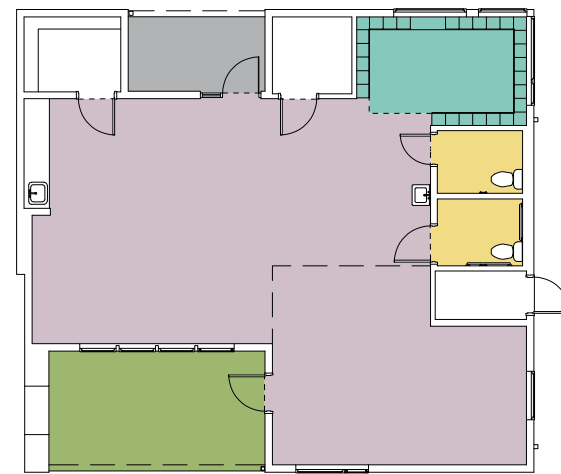
BELOW

The Children's House layout demonstrates spatial efficiencies for a diverse array of programs within a tight footprint.

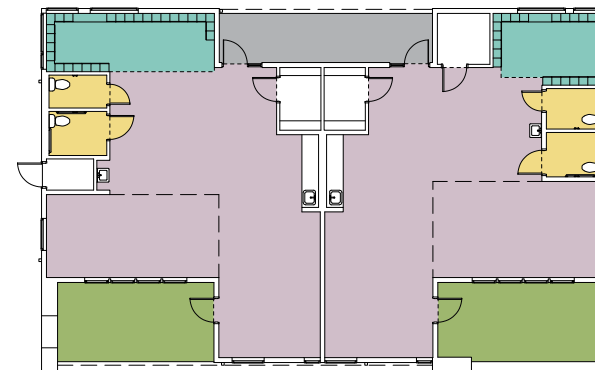


EACH CLASSROOM MODULE HAS THE SAME SPATIAL COMPONENTS—ENTRY PORCH, CUBBIES, RESTROOMS, STORAGE AND BACK PORCH.

THERE ARE THREE CONFIGURATION UTILIZED TO CREATE THE BUILDING CLUSTERS FOR EACH LEVEL. WHILE EXHIBITING A LEVEL OF MODULARITY, NO TWO CLASSROOMS ARE EXACTLY THE SAME AS IT RESPONDS TO ITS SITING AND SOLAR ORIENTATION.



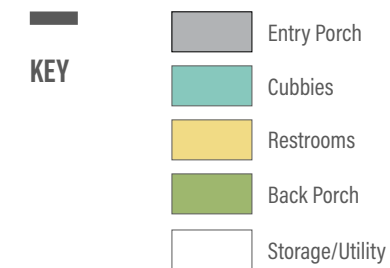
SINGLE CLASSROOM

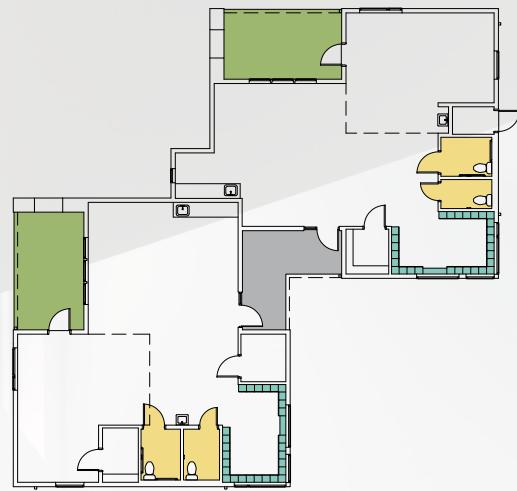


SIDE-BY-SIDE CLASSROOMS



L-SHAPED CLASSROOMS





L-SHAPED CLASSROOMS



FAR LEFT

The L-shaped layout defines zones that are appropriate to different types of work and encourage the child to vary his or her environment throughout the day.

LEFT

While students in Upper Elementary spend more time sitting in chairs than on the floor, open tables, rugs and natural wood furniture maintain the residential character in the upper grades.

The kitchenette is a key component of the practical life curriculum in the earlier developmental stages, when young children are developing dexterity, hand-eye coordination and physical independence. It remains an important feature of the upper grades. Older students prepare snacks for their peers and rotate through jobs that maintain the classroom, which helps foster personal accountability, shared responsibility and a sense of community.

In addition to carefully crafted interiors, the outdoors plays a critical role in the implementation of the curriculum. Every classroom has a back porch that is considered an extension of the indoor space. In the younger levels this space incorporates raised planter boxes where students grow vegetables or flowers that they harvest for classroom snacks or tabletop bouquets. A wall of windows allows

teachers to supervise students inside and outdoors simultaneously, so that children can move freely back and forth throughout the day. The indoor/outdoor connection is reinforced by the abundance of natural light in the classrooms, which almost eliminates the need for artificial lighting.

While classrooms share many features, each developmental stage has unique activities, objectives and milestones which the design team addressed through specific design details. For example, a significant learning objective for students in the Children's House is to develop physical independence in the bathroom and when getting dressed. Consequently, the bathrooms in the Children's House feature Dutch doors, so that students have privacy but can be supervised and assisted by their teachers if necessary. Similarly, the ceilings in the children's house are one foot lower than those in the Lower and Upper Elementary classrooms, which creates a more intimate environment for their small bodies.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Immediately adjacent to an existing neighborhood of single family homes, Magnolia Montessori For All's 9-acre site played a central role in the design of the campus. Instead of a single school building, the founders imagined a village in the woods with classroom buildings that read as houses, so that school would feel like a second home to its 500 students.

The village concept resonated with the design team. The designers organized the school's program into clusters of crisp cottage-like buildings that tuck into the gentle slope of the site. The scale, proportion and materiality of the buildings echoes that of the nearby residential neighborhood, which creates harmony between the new school and its context and helps it belong to the community.



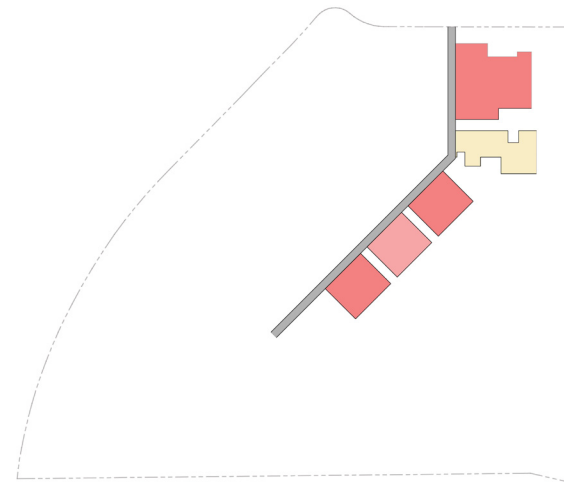
ABOVE

Rather than off-the-shelf playground equipment, both play areas incorporate abstract landscape features that encourage the imagination and support a range of activities.

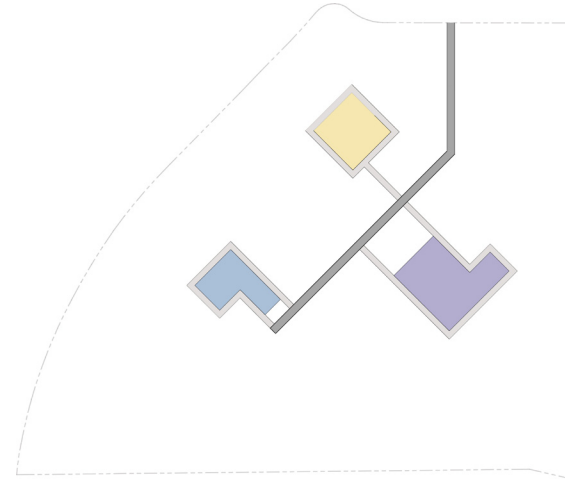
ABOVE LEFT

Inspired by Nordic fishing villages, residential-scaled clusters of buildings encircle well-apportioned courtyard spaces for each level.

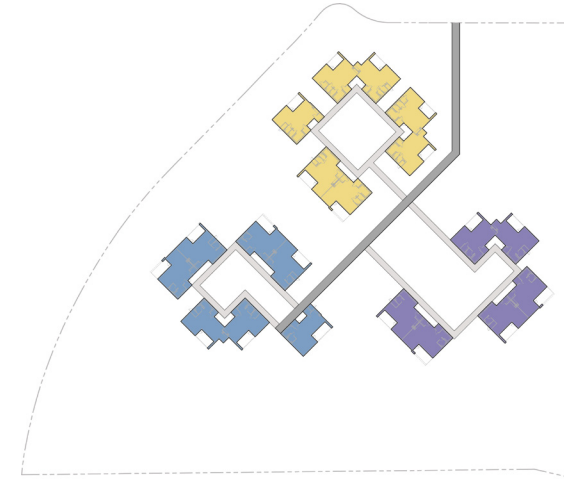
Additionally, the buildings feature distinctive front door color. Within each courtyard, each classroom has a different door color to create a sense of identity and aid in wayfinding.



COMMON PATHWAY & BUILDINGS



LEARNING COMMUNITY COURTYARDS



CLASSROOMS BUILDING CLUSTERS



OUTDOOR LEARNING SPACES



LEFT & BELOW

The configuration of the Magnolia Montessori For All campus was not only driven by a number of site conditions, but also by the guiding design principals. A centrally located pedestrian pathway anchors the campus with public and amenity spaces in closest proximity. Courtyards serve as the centralizing element to each building cluster. Additional green spaces, such as the playgrounds and outdoor patios, provide areas to engage with the outdoors on the communal and more individualized scales respectively.

The school's three learning communities are accessed from a common walkway that serves as the village "main street." Each cluster of buildings encloses a central courtyard where students from that age group play or engage in outdoor learning. The Children's House is located on the western edge of the site on higher ground and closest to the Administration building. Lower Elementary is on the eastern edge, down the hill and immediately adjacent to the playgrounds. Upper Elementary occupies the north edge of the property and overlooks the playing fields and the outdoor pavilion.

These locations are quite intentional and appropriate to the developmental stage of the children in that program. The students in the Children's House are the youngest and smallest, so it is more practical and efficient to locate their classrooms close to the school's main entrance. This area of the campus also had sufficient space to create an enclosed and secure play space between the buildings. Lower Elementary students require more room for gross motor activity. While their internal courtyard is comparatively smaller, their neighborhood opens onto both playgrounds. Upper Elementary is tucked away from the lower grades to provide the oldest students with more freedom of movement and some visual and acoustical separation from their younger peers.



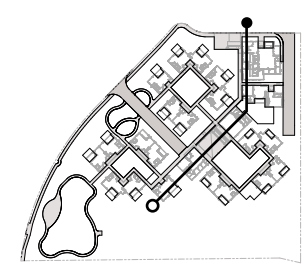
FAR LEFT
The Children's House classrooms encircle a shared courtyard that provides preschoolers and kindergartners with dedicated and secure play space.

LEFT
Located between the Multipurpose Room and Student Services, the pavilion incorporates built-in seating that takes advantage of the dramatic change in grade.

BELOW
This east-west section of Magnolia Montessori For All looking north demonstrates the design decisions that navigate the significant grade change across the site.

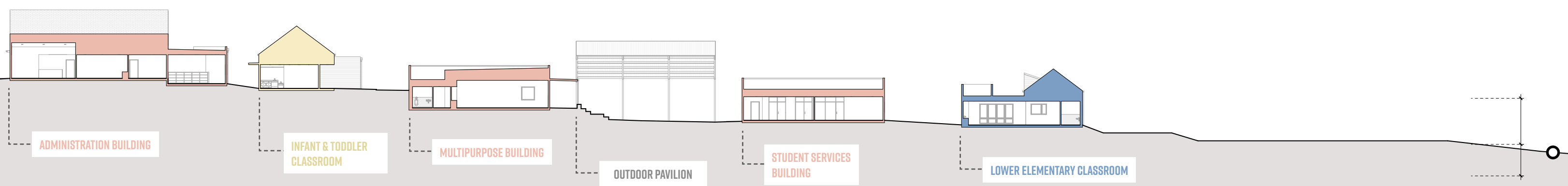
At the heart of the campus, a multi-purpose room hosts youngest student napping, the afterschool program, teacher trainings and community events. The adjacent outdoor pavilion with built-in seating provides flexible and sheltered outdoor gathering space for recreation or assemblies. Across the way from the outdoor pavilion is the student services building, which provides special education, behavioral and counseling resources. By creating neighborhoods of individual buildings within the overall village, the design elegantly

navigates over 30 feet of grade change from the main entrance of the campus to its far side with minimal earthwork and retention. The residential scale also kept the project economical by minimizing the size of spaces, eliminating vertical circulation, and utilizing simple materials and structural systems. From the top of the site, gabled rooftops seem to cascade down the hillside, which heightens children's experience of the landscape. A ramp threads between the buildings to provide a fully accessible path around the campus.



MAGNOLIA MONTESSORI FOR ALL EAST-WEST SECTION

- Public / Shared Spaces
- Infant & Toddler
- Lower Elementary



“We had to really make sure that we understood how they wanted it to work.”

DESIGN PRINCIPAL ON
MAGNOLIA MONTESSORI FOR ALL



RESULTS OF THE PROCESS & PROJECT

Montessori For All aims to provide students of all racial, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds with access to a Montessori education—a unique instructional approach which research shows produces better outcomes across a range of skill sets, from academic and cognitive abilities to social and emotional intelligence. It is particularly difficult for those in economically-disadvantaged communities to access high quality education. An emphasis on rote memorization, repetition and testing hinders these students from developing essential critical thinking, problem-solving and creative skills necessary to succeed in college and beyond.

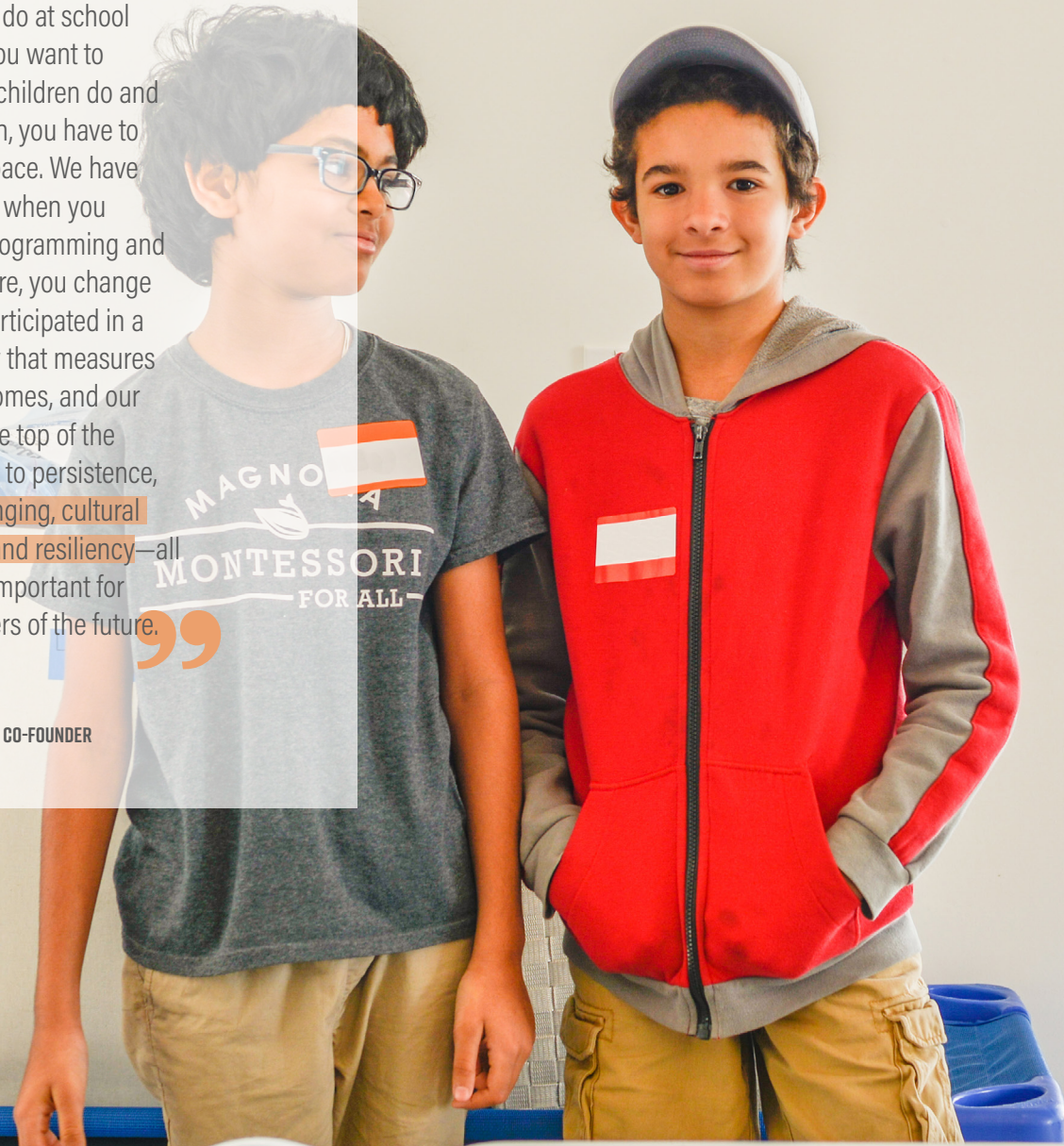
Magnolia Montessori For All opened in the fall of 2014 in nine temporary buildings on its current site in east Austin, Texas. Less than four years later, fundraising, design and construction of almost 40,000 SF of facilities tailored to the Montessori curriculum are complete, and students have finished the first semester in their new school. With more than 600 families on Magnolia Montessori For All's admissions wait list and a new flagship campus that reflects their visionary approach, MMFA is a proof of concept for public Montessori education.

LEFT

White walls, concrete floors and natural wood furniture act as a neutral backdrop to colorful, meticulously crafted Montessori materials.

“ At Montessori For All, we want to revolutionize education through an approach that builds self-direction, determination, collaboration and critical thinking. That means you have to change what children do at school every day. If you want to change what children do and how they learn, you have to change the space. We have observed that when you change the programming and the architecture, you change people. We participated in a national study that measures different outcomes, and our school is at the top of the cohort related to persistence, sense of belonging, cultural competence and resiliency—all of which are important for creating leaders of the future.”

SARAH COTNER,
MONTESSORI FOR ALL CO-FOUNDER



After operating out of temporary buildings for over three academic years while watching their vision appear on paper and then emerge from the landscape, the entire community—students, faculty and administrators—was eager to move into the school whose design they shaped through intense and continuous community involvement and whose construction they financed through concerted fundraising, not a bond package typical of traditional public schools.

Montessori For All is leveraging the success of its Magnolia campus by expanding into new geographies, beginning with the launch of Redbud Montessori For All in San Antonio, Texas.

Moreover, Montessori For All has propagated change beyond its own students and families to the broader community in Austin. Following MMFA example, Austin Independent School District launched a public Montessori program in an under-enrolled elementary school in August 2017.

Finally, the program is influencing the national educational reform conversation by attracting attention from Getting Smart CEO Tom Vander Ark, who listed Montessori For All on his list of “100 Schools Worth Visiting” and hosting visits with more than 50 national visitors in its first year, including the co-CEO of Teach for America and the co-founder and co-CEO of Achievement First.

LEFT
Students of Magnolia Montessori use determination and leadership daily. Whether it taking the lead of their educational experience to assisting with the school's own Grand Opening by hosting tours, the students are learning critical skills to be the leaders of tomorrow.

ABOVE
From the entry to the school, one can look through the campus to see the village of classrooms.