



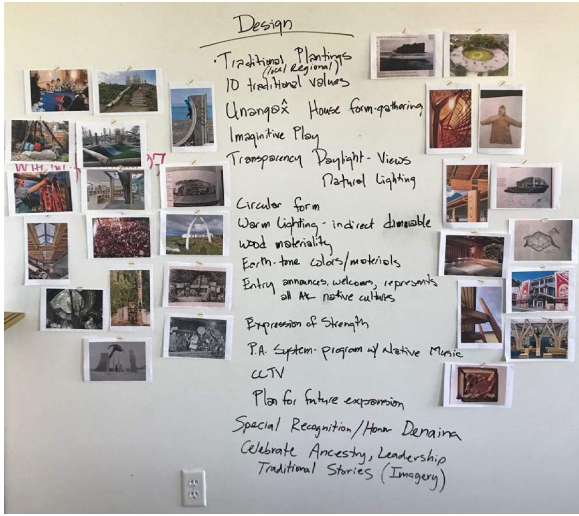
COOK INLET NATIVE HEADSTART - NAQAYEHT'ANA T'UH

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New construction of a single-story, 19,000sf Head Start school in midtown Anchorage. The program includes 5 Head Start (HS) and 3 Early Head Start (EHS) classrooms, indoor and outdoor play spaces, community gathering space, commercial and community kitchens and office spaces.

The new school helps support the continuing mission of CINHS by providing a welcoming space for Alaska Native children to learn and grow in a context of decolonization. The new location in central west Anchorage expands the organization’s service area, supplementing their other school on east Tudor Rd.

The planning was guided by a need to connect the classrooms to the playgrounds while embracing winter sun and sheltering the outdoor space from a nearby road. The indoor play area (gym) is connected to a community gathering space for events and is supported by the commercial and residential kitchens. The gathering space extends into an outdoor plaza, which links the HS and EHS playgrounds. The design vocabulary of the building and grounds are infused with Alaska Native cultural values, materiality and symbolism.



SCHOOL & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT & PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

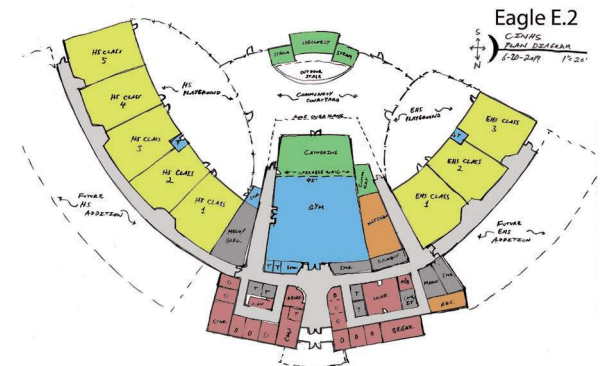
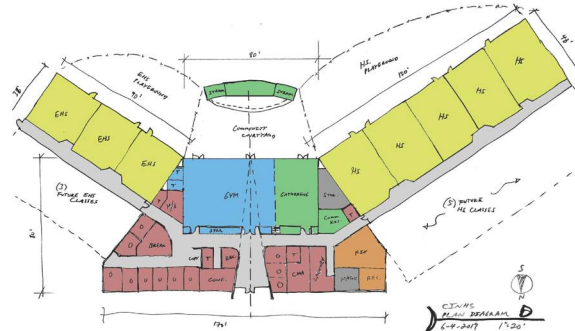
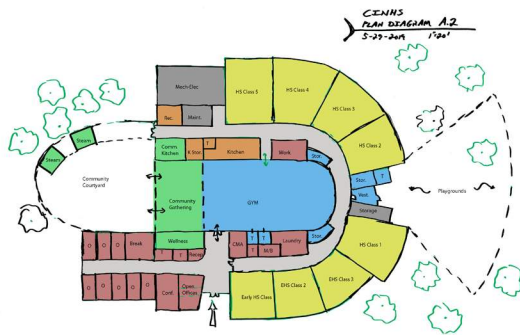
How do we begin to heal historical trauma and decolonize education for Alaska Native people?

This is the question that underlies the planning and design of the new Cook Inlet Native Head Start school, Naqayeh'tana T'uh (Our Community Place).

Led by the client's visionary team of educators and leaders, the process and vocabulary of this project focused from the outset on Alaska Native values of family, stewardship of the natural world, the familiarity of village life and the decolonization of education. All decisions were considered through a lens of healthy education for Native children and their families.

A two-day design charrette kicked off the planning process with participation from CINHS administrators and educators and board members as well as the planning, design, and construction team.

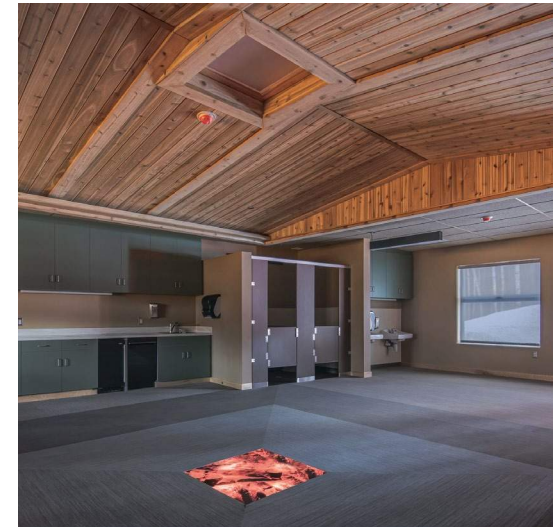
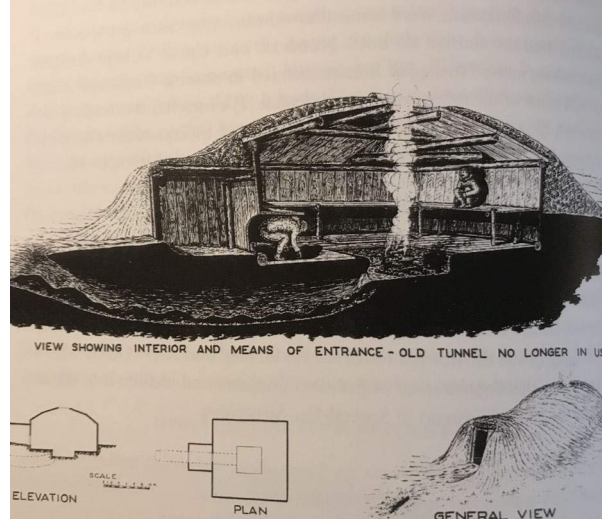
Day 1 started with a round of introductions and story sharing. Introductions were followed by a visioning discussion that reflected on CINHS' mission and values as well as shared Alaska Native values. Participants engaged in a "visual vocabulary" exercise, selecting and discussing imagery that reflected the project vision and goals. The Planning Team also presented the concept of "Learning Signature" with a variety of school examples. Program areas and adjacencies were reviewed and adjusted by the group in a spreadsheet tool that tracks total area and rough construction costs based on a historical per square foot cost for new school construction.



Follow-up discussions resulted in a synthesis of the original planning options, introducing the curved single-loaded classroom wings and plan area refinements to bring the project costs into alignment with budget. At each major design milestone, the design steering committee was given a presentation of design progress and review comments were addressed. The committee extended their own outreach to the broader Alaska Native communities to determine the direction for the final exterior colors and patterns.

Imagery that resonated during the design charrette carries through the completed construction:

- A family gathered around the fire, working with fish skin and telling stories
- Children playing outdoors on logs and rocks
- The traditional long house form seen in many Alaska Native cultures
- Wooden ribs and stretched skin of an Umiak
- A curved kindergarten school sheltering a courtyard playground



In the completed design this visual vocabulary and the values it represents are reflected in a variety of ways:

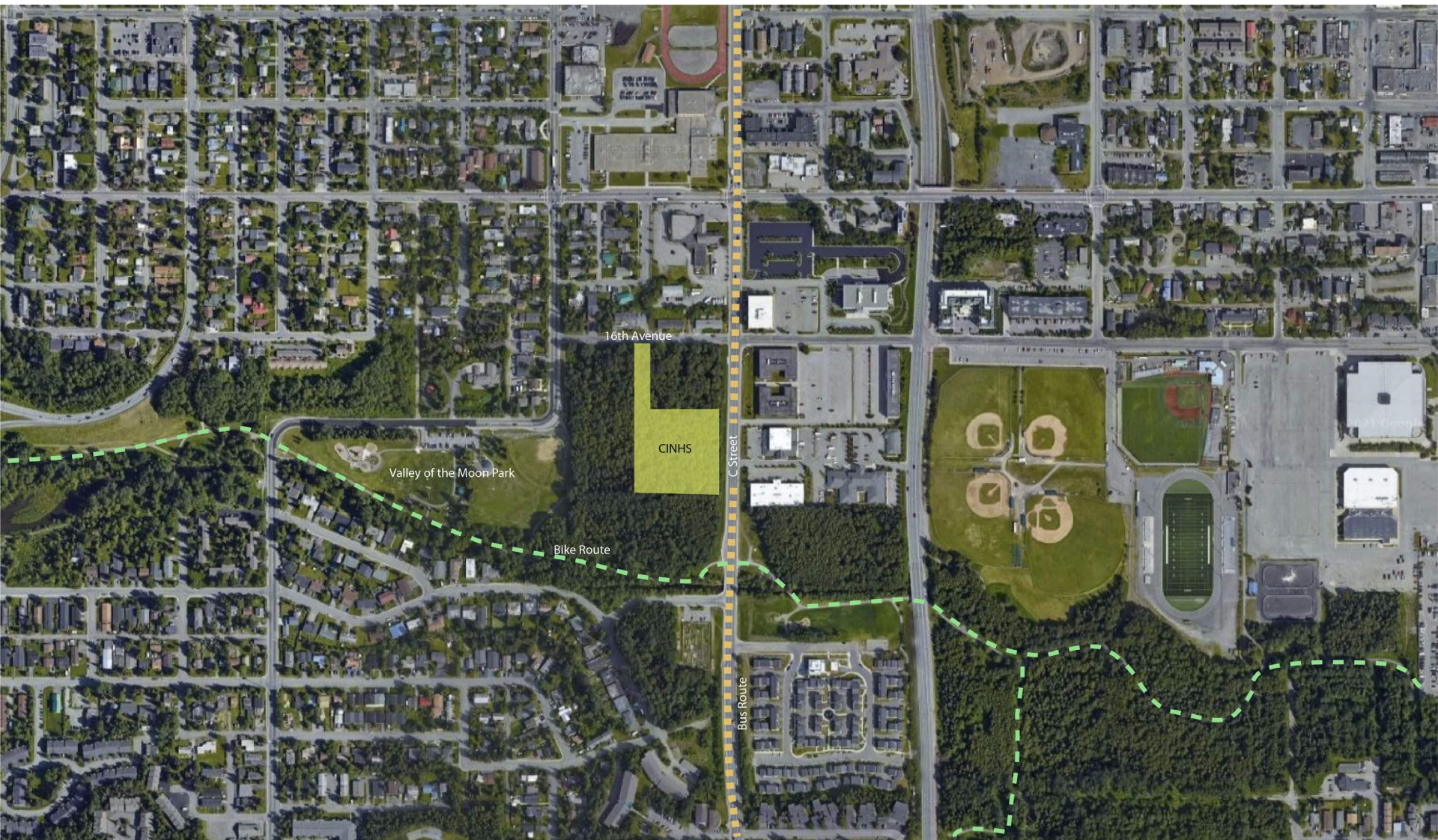
- The floor plan was shaped by a need to connect the classrooms to the playgrounds while embracing winter sun and sheltering the outdoor space from a nearby road.
- The materials, colors and textures of the building focus on wood, skin, stone and bone.
- The exterior tile patterns on the siding reference local Dena'ina beadwork patterns. The client stipulated that all Alaska Native cultural groups should be represented indoors but the exterior should pay respects to the local Dena'ina culture of the Anchorage area.
- The classrooms are named after local plants from various parts of Alaska and windows in the hallway feature graphics of these plants. Illustrated Alaska Native stories at each classroom door further connect culture, education, and place.
- The classrooms reflect a traditional house form with a pitched wood ceiling with smoke hole at the top and a glowing firepit in the floor with soft flooring and radiant heat for sitting around the fire.
- The staff break room is designed to double as a family kitchen for preparation of traditional foods during special school events. It opens to a community gathering space and to the south courtyard between for the playgrounds.
- The playgrounds themselves feature hunting, fishing, and camping themes with traditional Alaska Native architectural forms from several regions represented.

RESULTS

The new CINHS school is unique in its complete integration of Alaska Native traditional culture and contemporary educational leadership. The school sits sheltered in the greenbelt of Chester Valley but is visible through the trees from C Street. The Dena'ina beadwork-inspired exterior tile and curving classroom wings announce the specificity of the place; a school for all Alaska Native peoples, rooted in Dena'ina Athabascan homeland.

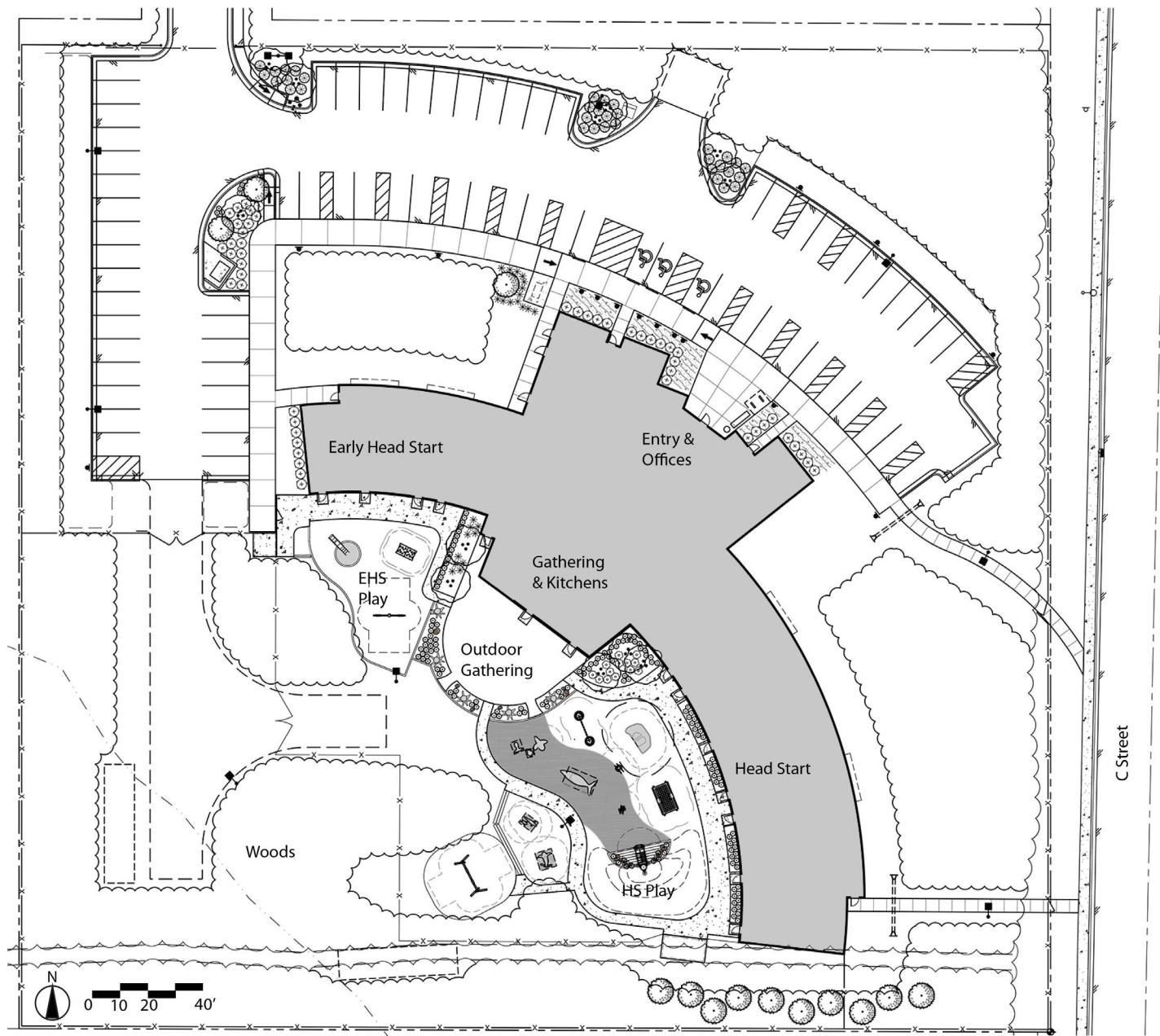
The CINHS classrooms are nurturing spaces with warm, calm finishes, heated floors and indirect lighting. The central firepit and smoke hole light features in each room emphasize an educational philosophy focused on community sharing of stories and wisdom. The rooms open directly to remarkable playgrounds that can stimulate the bodies and imaginations of kids while teaching them about traditional ways of life.

PLANNING NARRATIVE



SITE CONTEXT

The school is close in to downtown and midtown Anchorage but benefits from the shelter of a wooded site in the Chester Creek valley, adjacent to Valley of the Moon Park.



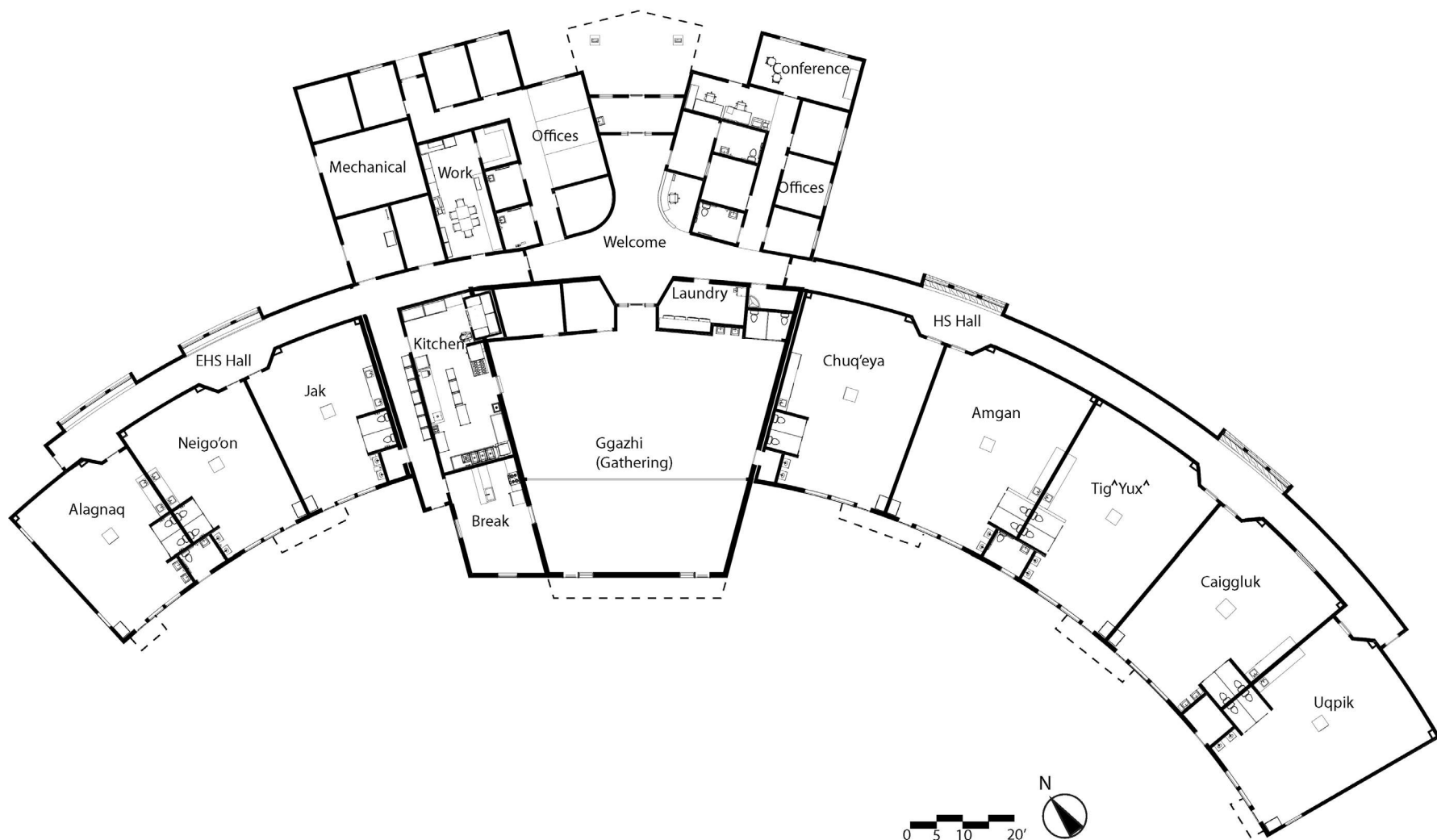
SITE PLAN

This site was selected for its central location to the population served as well as accessibility to bus lines, walking routes and public parks and gardens. The densely wooded site buffers the school from nearby C Street.



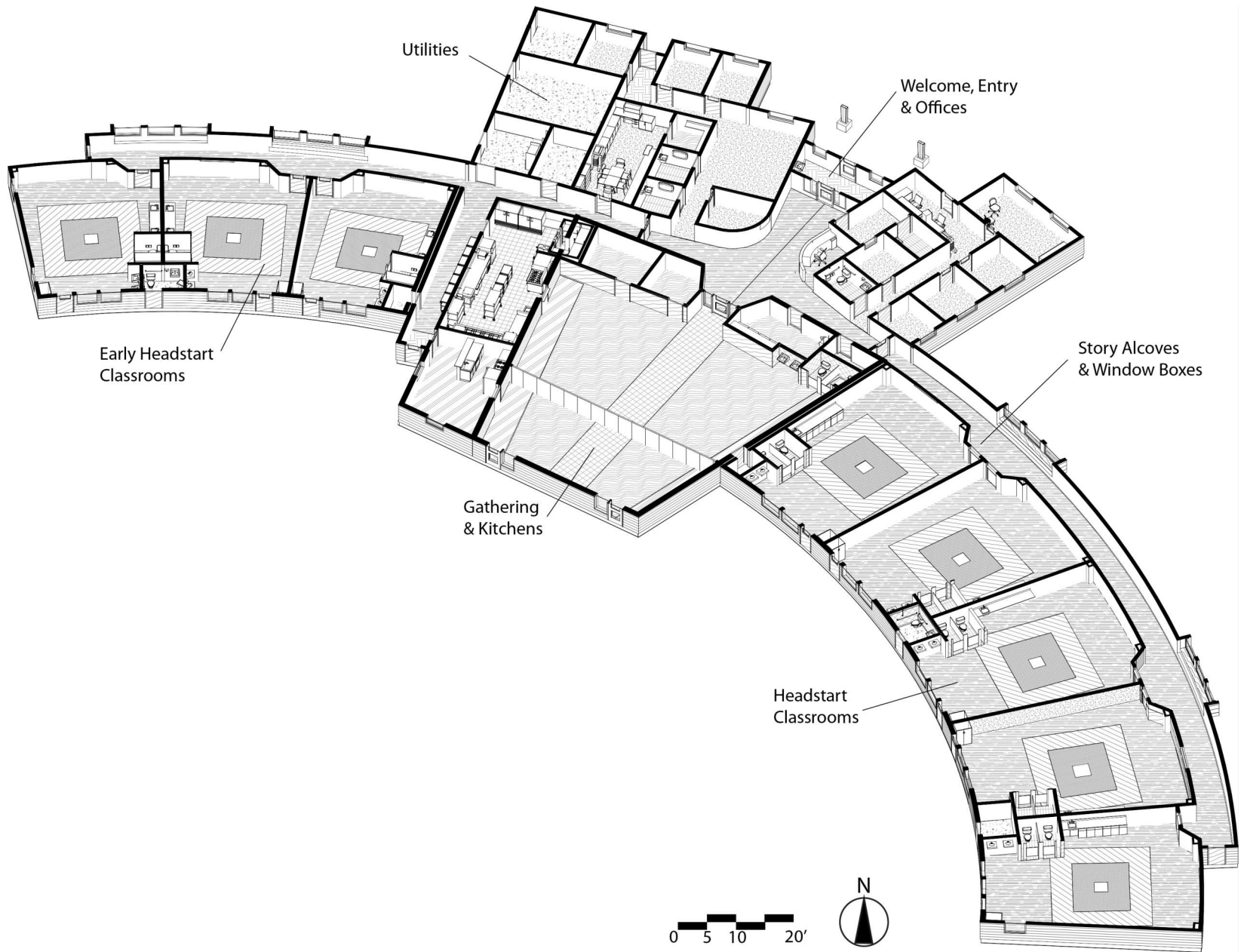
CONTEXT – WOODED SITE

The immediate connection between classrooms and playgrounds and their orientation to the sun and the woods define the diagram for this design.

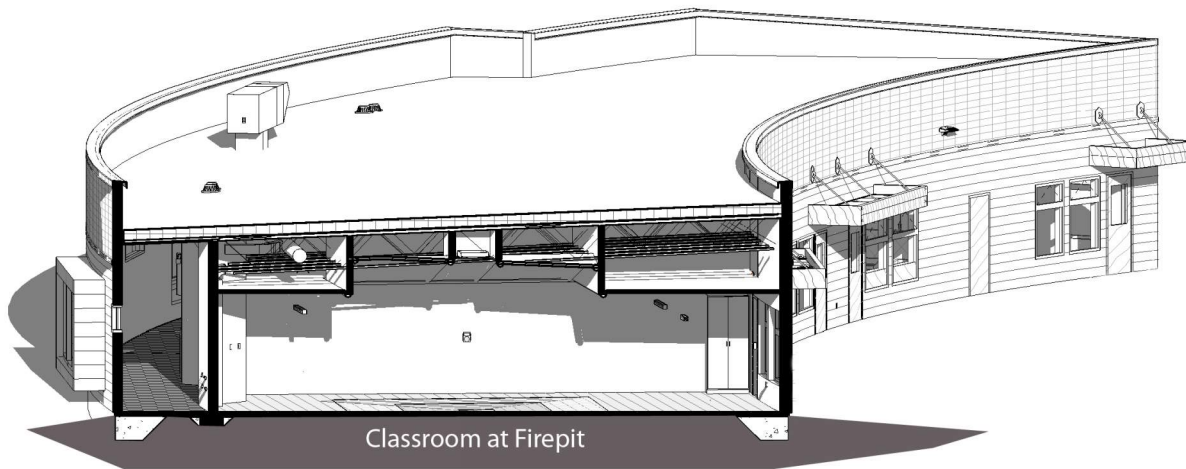
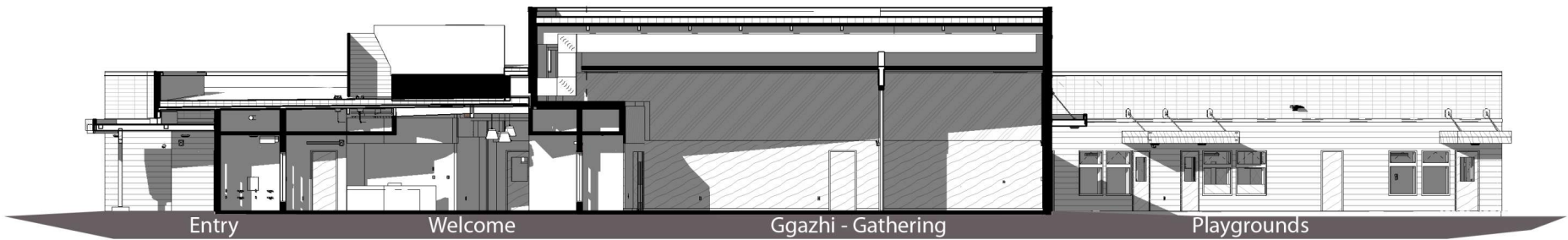


FLOOR PLAN

The curving wings of the building and single-loading of classrooms on the hallways allow for direct playground access and solar access.



AXONOMETRIC PLAN





MAIN ENTRY

Alaska yellow cedar slats and cedar glulam timbers frame the glowing entry to Naqayet'ana T'uh.



OUTDOOR GATHERING

The Dena'ina beluga hunters of Upper Cook Inlet traditionally used upended trees like these in the mudflats as hunting stands. Now the trees mark a community event space outside the Gathering room.



EHS PLAYGROUND

The early head start playground, for ages 6 weeks to 18 months, reflects bird camp, including this driftwood bird's nest play structure.



HEAD START PLAYGROUND

Fishing camp and hunting camp as well as a sod igloo-inspired play structure are features of the head start playground for ages 18 months to 6 years.



REGIONAL CONNECTION

This Dena'ina quiver was selected by the CINHS board to be the material and pattern blueprint for the exterior of the new school.



A HALL WITH A VIEW

The single-loaded corridor design allows for generous daylighting and views of the woods along the curving classroom hallways. Window seats outside classrooms provide a quiet spot for parents, students and staff.



GATHERING PLACE

The multipurpose gathering area fills programmatic needs for indoor play as well as community meeting and event space. Adjacent food service kitchen and domestic kitchen/break room support the cultural importance of sharing food.



DECOLONIZED CLASSROOMS

Natural colors, indirect lighting, the wood house roof form, and a central firepit are all intended to make these classrooms feel more like home or camp and less like colonial institutions.