



jewish leadership academy

2025 A4LE AWARDS
NEW PROJECT DOSSIER



Executive Summary

The Dilemma

Gisela and Daniel Ades, founders of the Ades Foundation, recognized a growing trend within the Miami Jewish community: many bright Jewish students were opting for secular middle and high schools in pursuit of stronger academic programs. To address this issue, the architect we tasked with a visionary endeavor: to design a school that dares to think differently about education. A school where deep-seated connection to Judaism doesn't come at the expense of a first-rate college preparatory education. A school to which every mission-appropriate student has equal access, regardless of their ability to pay. A school that will judge its success not merely on the diplomas that adorn graduates' walls, but on the difference those graduates make in the lives of others.

A Dream, Come to Life

The Jewish Leadership Academy (JLA) is a ground-up, Modern Orthodox middle and high school in Miami. On the cusp of wrapping up its second ever school year, the brand-new school's curriculum aims to combine academic rigor and Judaic studies with an emphasis on service and giving back to the community.

The Jewish Leadership Academy is a case study of successful co-creation between institution and designer. With the entire design process taking place during the COVID-19 pandemic, the team was required to think critically and collaboratively about the future of learning as they developed a curriculum and campus from scratch from a dream to reality. The school's design and curriculum are carefully tailored to foster excellence in academics, Jewish identity, and community service. Situated on a 9-acre campus, JLA offers a dynamic 101,200-square-foot facility that houses 280 students and features state-of-the-art educational spaces. The school's innovative approach includes immersive learning experiences, including regular trips to Israel, community service initiatives, and a curriculum that combines academic achievement with the deep exploration of Jewish culture and traditions.

Scope of Work

Academic Buildings

Classrooms, laboratories, and collaborative spaces equipped with cutting-edge technology to support diverse learning and teaching styles.

Spiritual Spaces

A synagogue and areas dedicated to prayer and religious study, designed to foster a deep connection to Jewish traditions.

Outdoor Learning Spaces

An amphitheater for community gatherings, outdoor classrooms, and recreational areas to enhance physical and mental well-being.

Student Services

A library, media center, counseling rooms, and wellness facilities.

Community Engagement Areas

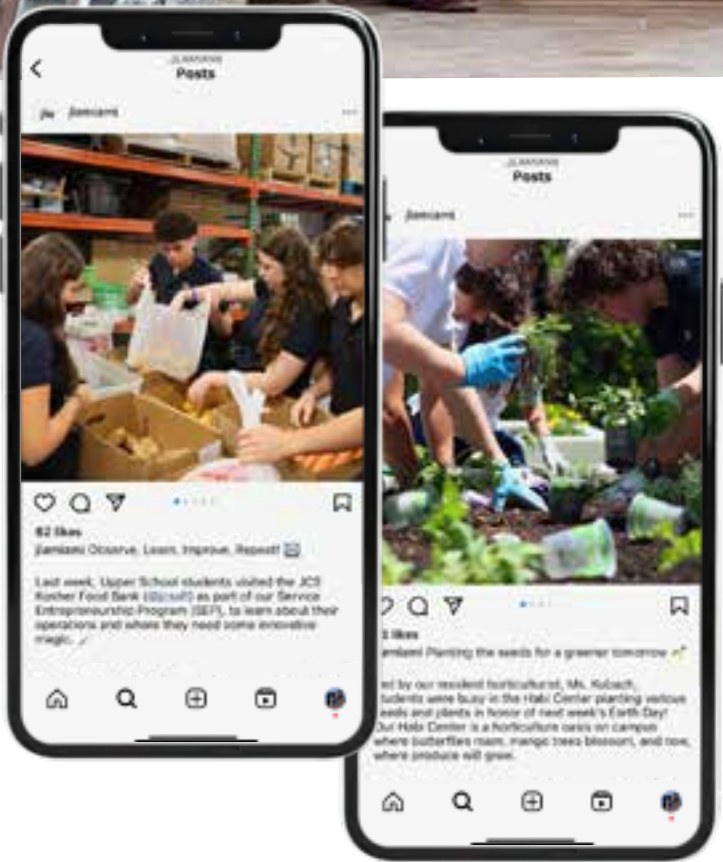
Dedicated spaces for community service projects, collaborative events, and engagement with local Jewish organizations.

Brand Identity

Visual identity, environmental graphic design, and bespoke website design services create a inspiring and cohesive look and feel for the campus.

Budget

[To discuss with client how they'd like to address]



A Diverse Student Body

53

Feeder schools

34

Zip codes

Dedicated to Community Service

1450+

Hours dedicated to service in 2023-2024

20+

Partner organizations



School & Community Research and Engagement

Community

Jewish Community

Miami is home to an array of Jewish schools of different types and sizes, scattered throughout our neighborhoods. Yet, there is a growing trend of the most academically ambitious Jewish students leaving these schools as they transition to middle school due to what they perceive to be the superior secular education offered by the local independent and charter schools.

In addition, due to the high cost of a private school education, those students who do remain in the Jewish school system, often find themselves surrounded by students surrounded by others who are just like them: they live in similar houses, drive similar cars, and vacation in similar places. As a result, the diversity of perspective, opinion, and experience that comes along with a socioeconomically diverse community often eludes them.

Increasingly, therefore, Jewish parents in Miami were facing a heart wrenching decision: sacrifice financially to put my child in a Jewish school where they will be connected to their history and heritage but denied the benefits of academic excellence and diversity but fails to connect them to their faith and community. the exposure to socio-economic diversity, or put them in a secular school that excels at academics.

Location

Pinewood was selected due to its central location, within commuting distance from Coral Gables, Miami Beach, Brickell and Aventura. While not serving a specific local community, it ultimately attracted residents from various Jewish pockets within the South Florida landscape.

Stakeholders

Founders

Daniel & Gisela have been involved philanthropically with the Jewish community for almost two decades. They have always believed that one should never have to choose between academic excellence and a Jewish education. The Jewish Leadership Academy is the product of their commitment to a more ethical, engaged and academically motivated Jewish youth.

After considering the creation of programs that would operate within existing Jewish schools, the Ades's determined that the only way to effectively solve these problems was to start from scratch with a bold vision for a Jewish school unlike any other. In the Fall of 2020, the Gisela and Daniel Ades Foundation began acquiring what would ultimately become a five acre assemblage of land on 95th street in Miami's Pinewood neighborhood and initiated a design competition amongst three globally renowned architecture firms to produce a site plan that best reflected the educational vision of JLA.

Land Purchase & Development

Despite the complexities inherent in urban land acquisition, JLA encountered virtually no resistance from the surrounding community, with widespread neighborhood support and a seamless integration of the project's objectives with the community's vision. Notably, a portion of the land was acquired from a multi-generational family that staunchly believed in the project's transformative potential and its alignment with the neighborhood's ethos. Their unwavering commitment to preserving the land's legacy and rejecting offers for commercial development underscored their shared vision for community enhancement.

Challenges

Planning and Development

Building the campus posed a myriad of challenges. Firstly, acquiring sufficient land for an educational campus in a central urban location proved to be a daunting task. After years of searching and through developing personal relationships with local residents, the lots in Pinewood were acquired incrementally which meant that the design had to be adjusted several times to accommodate the new pieces of land. Both the land purchase and the early design process were furthered hampered due to the fact that COVID was still limiting travel and in-person meetings. These challenges, though, paled in comparison to the difficulties this project met at the procurement stage, with the rampant supply-chain disruption, material shortages, and transit delays that resulted from the reopening of the global economy in COVID's wake. A delayed completion date was not an option for JLA. In the summer of 2022, it was announced that it would be opening for the Fall of 2023 and by March of that year a hundred students had given up their spots in their current schools and were enrolled to begin the next academic year at JLA. Come September of 2023 they would need classrooms to learn in, a Dining Hall to eat in, and gym to play in, regardless of supply-chain disruptions and material shortages. Failure to open on time simply wasn't a possibility we could entertain. And sure enough, due to the Herculean efforts of the design and construction crews, and perhaps with a little help from Above, when the rest of the world was mired in massive delays, JLA opened the doors of its spectacular campus a mere 18 months after shovels were first put in the ground.



Vision

JLA was created after a decade-long research process that involved the consultation of educators, parents, community leaders, and Jewish thought leaders. The goal was to build an institution that serves the most ambitious Jewish students in Miami, providing them with an academic environment that is both challenging and supportive of their Jewish identity.

Through community listening sessions, data on middle-school attrition, and benchmarking against elite secular academies, they crafted a bold brief: a selective, need-blind Jewish high school that pairs Ivy-level academics with deep Jewish learning and year-round community service. A purpose-built campus, designed simultaneously for architecture, interiors, and brand, became the tangible expression of their vision, built on the following pillars:

- 1. Academic Excellence: Offering an elite, rigorous curriculum that prepares students for top universities.
- 2. Jewish Identity: Deepening students' understanding and connection to Jewish traditions, Israel, and the broader Jewish community.
- 3. Community Engagement: Encouraging students to become leaders who are committed to giving back to the community through service.
- 4. Diversity and Inclusion: Ensuring that JLA remains a need-blind institution, offering access to top-tier education regardless of socio-economic background.

Value to the Wider Community

JLA now anchors Miami’s Jewish ecosystem. The campus doubles as a hub: its Beit Midrash, fabrication lab, and athletic courts host partnership programs and public events, while students have already logged 1,450 service hours with 20 local nonprofits. The project shows donors and educators that world-class facilities and socially minded learning can exist debt-free and sustainably, setting a template for other mission-driven schools.

Designed to be safe and comfortable— a place for everyone, the entire campus is ADA compliant, including

the “ninja” obstacle exercise course, designed with specific opportunities for use by children with physical disabilities to engage with other kids. Through collaborative partnerships with organizations like the Jewish Inspiration Foundation (JIF), JLA extends its reach fostering a culture of service and social responsibility. The school has partnered with JIF, an organization that works with disabled athletes, and provides them access to the school's ninja obstacle course.

Advancing Diversity Equity and Inclusion

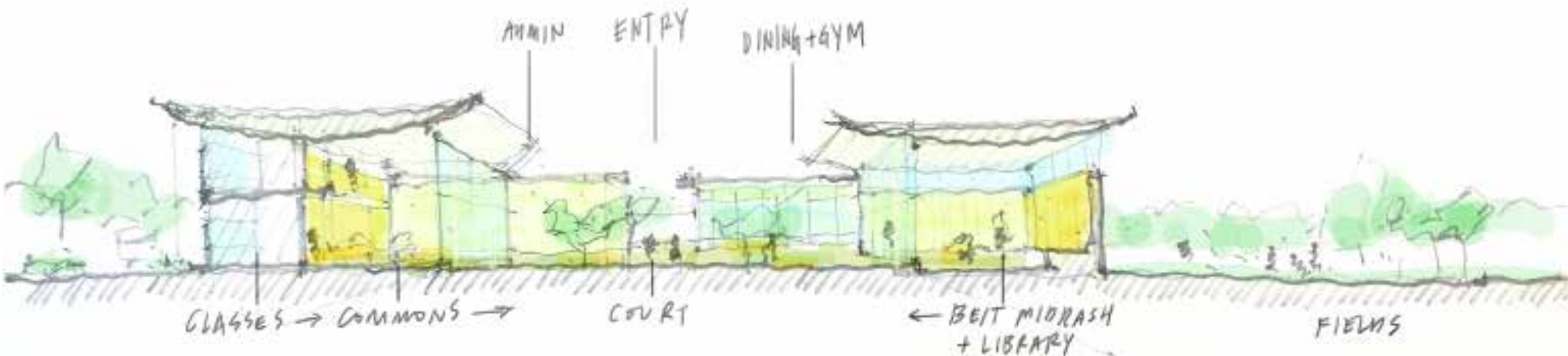
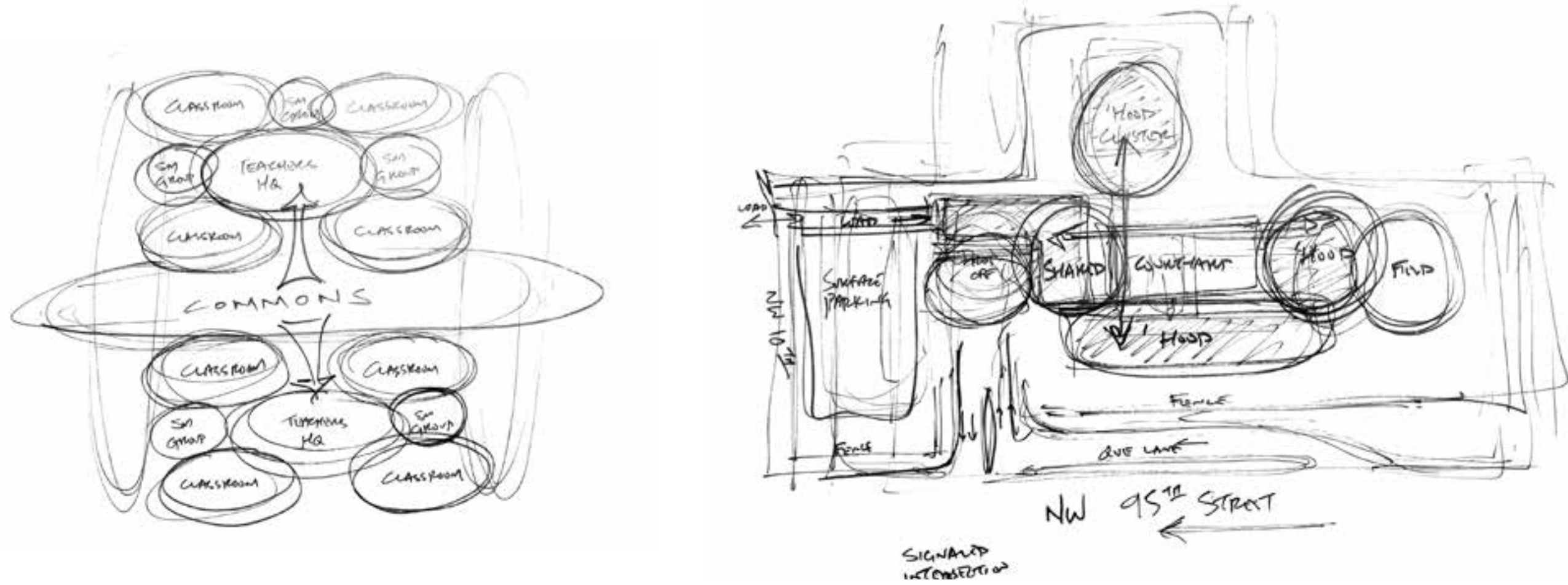
JLA built equity into its business model first. Admission is explicitly need-blind and every family's tuition is “indexed” to income, so cost never screens out a student. Donor funding underwrites the gap, letting the school stay selective on mission and merit, not money.

That policy delivers visible results: more than 70 percent of families receive some level of aid, and the student body now draws from 53 feeder schools across 34 ZIP codes, spanning a wide mix of religious observance, neighborhoods, and household means.

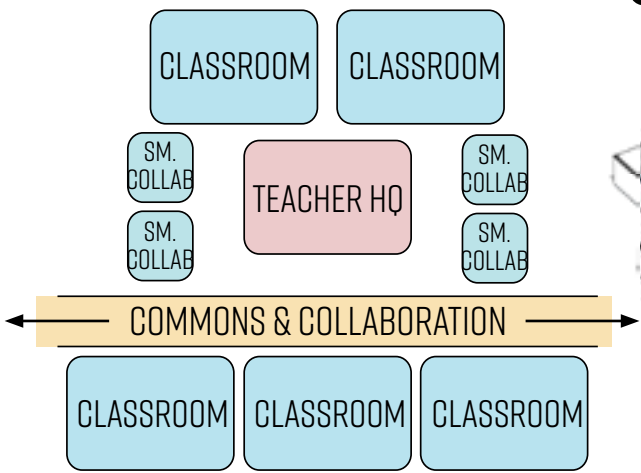
Religious inclusivity is likewise formalized. Applicants need no prior Hebrew or Judaic-studies background; any student whose mother is Jewish (or who has completed an Orthodox conversion) is welcome, regardless of affiliation or current practice. Equity extends to signature programs. The three-week “August in Israel” study trip—central to JLA’s curriculum—has its full cost folded into tuition, ensuring that students receiving aid travel alongside their peers without extra fees.

Academic support closes the loop on inclusion. A dedicated Learning Specialist designs individualized plans and accommodations for students with learning disabilities, giftedness, or other exceptionalities, so rigorous coursework remains accessible to all admitted learners.

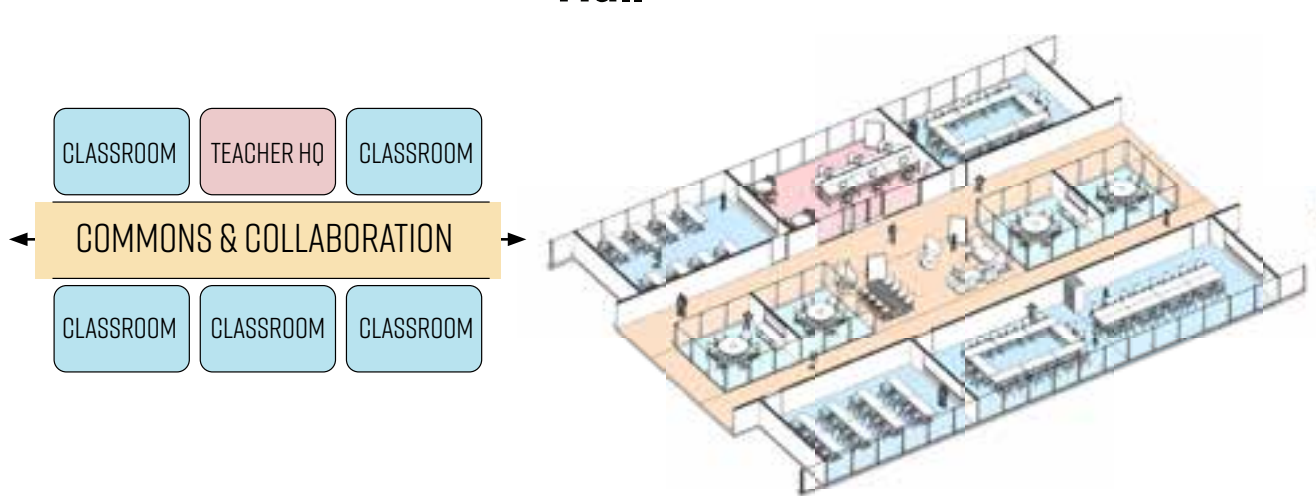
Examples of concepts, Programming and Adjacencies, Spatial Experience



The Classroom Cluster



The Activated Hall





Physical Environment

Site Significance

The land at 975 NW 95th Street boasts a unique history, having been available for purchase for the first time since the 1950s. Originally a nursery, its use evolved significantly over the decades. During World War II, a shop was constructed on the property through a government grant. In the post-war era, this shop became the birthplace of the first fiberglass boat. The site's innovative legacy continued into the early 1960s when submarines intended for the James Bond film *Thunderball* were designed there. A testament to its unique past, a historic marker was erected on the site in 2005.

The project exemplified a holistic approach to development, seamlessly connecting commercial and residential zones while maximizing land utilization without encroaching on residential spaces.

Groundbreaking with Ceremony

On January 16, 2022, the Ades Foundation held a groundbreaking ceremony. Held on the eve of Tu B'Shvat, this momentous occasion served as an opportunity for the children in attendance to plant two olive trees, a symbol of light for the Jewish people, as well as the national tree of the State of Israel. A sofer, or traditional Torah scribe, was also on hand to begin writing a Torah scroll that is now housed in JLA's Beit Midrash and read from by its students on a weekly basis.

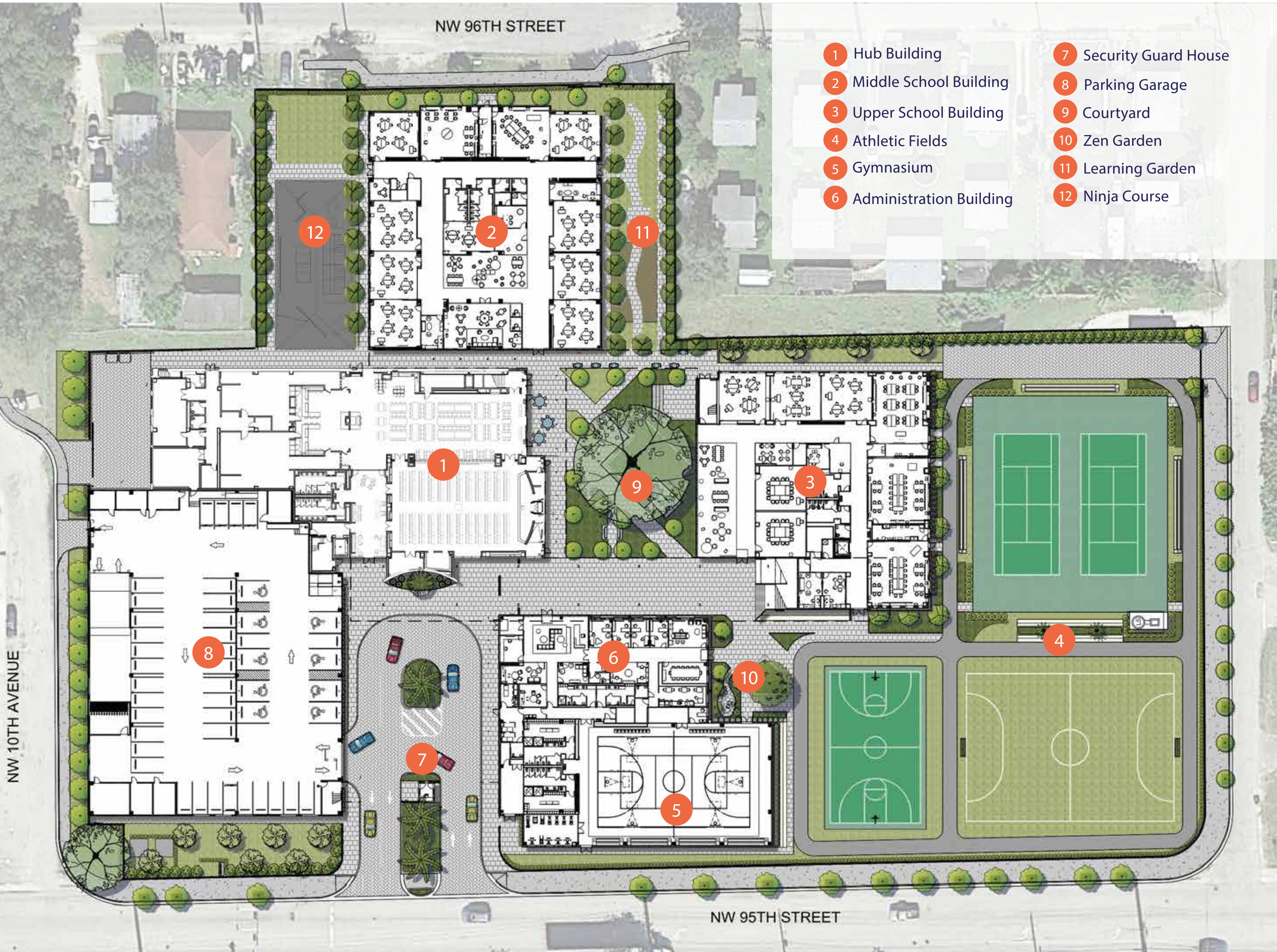


The Site

Set on a 6-acre infill parcel just two blocks west of I-95, the 101 000-ft² campus threads five low-rise buildings around a shaded central courtyard. A soaring “Talit” canopy stitches the Hub, Admin/Athletics, Middle- and Upper-School wings together, giving covered circulation while framing views to playing fields and the heritage live-oak grove. Inside the Hub you’ll find the Beit Midrash, dining hall, music studio, library-terrace and glass-walled Fab Lab; academic blocks add university-level science labs, an Innovation Lab and double-height student lounges. Athletic zones—two-court gym, track, tennis and a half-pitch turf—anchor the south edge, buffering classrooms from street noise.

Context

Fronting NW 95th Street near Miami Shores, the single-entry site pulls visitors through a security gate and along the Talit promenade—designed as both campus spine and public porch—to a courtyard that doubles as event plaza for neighborhood festivals, Shabbat dinners and volunteer fairs. Proximity to major arteries lets the school draw students from South Miami to Aventura.



The Courtyard

The campus was designed around the oak tree—located in the central courtyard and preserved from the original site—which serves as a symbol of resilience, growth and unity.

The buildings' social spaces face the courtyard, to ensure a constant flurry of activity at the heart of campus.

Intimate nodes in the landscape are carved out for impromptu interactions, socialization and gathering.

The “Tallit”

The soaring canopy, named the “Tallit”, symbolizes a Jewish prayer shawl. It acts as the unifying element that embraces you as you move through the campus.

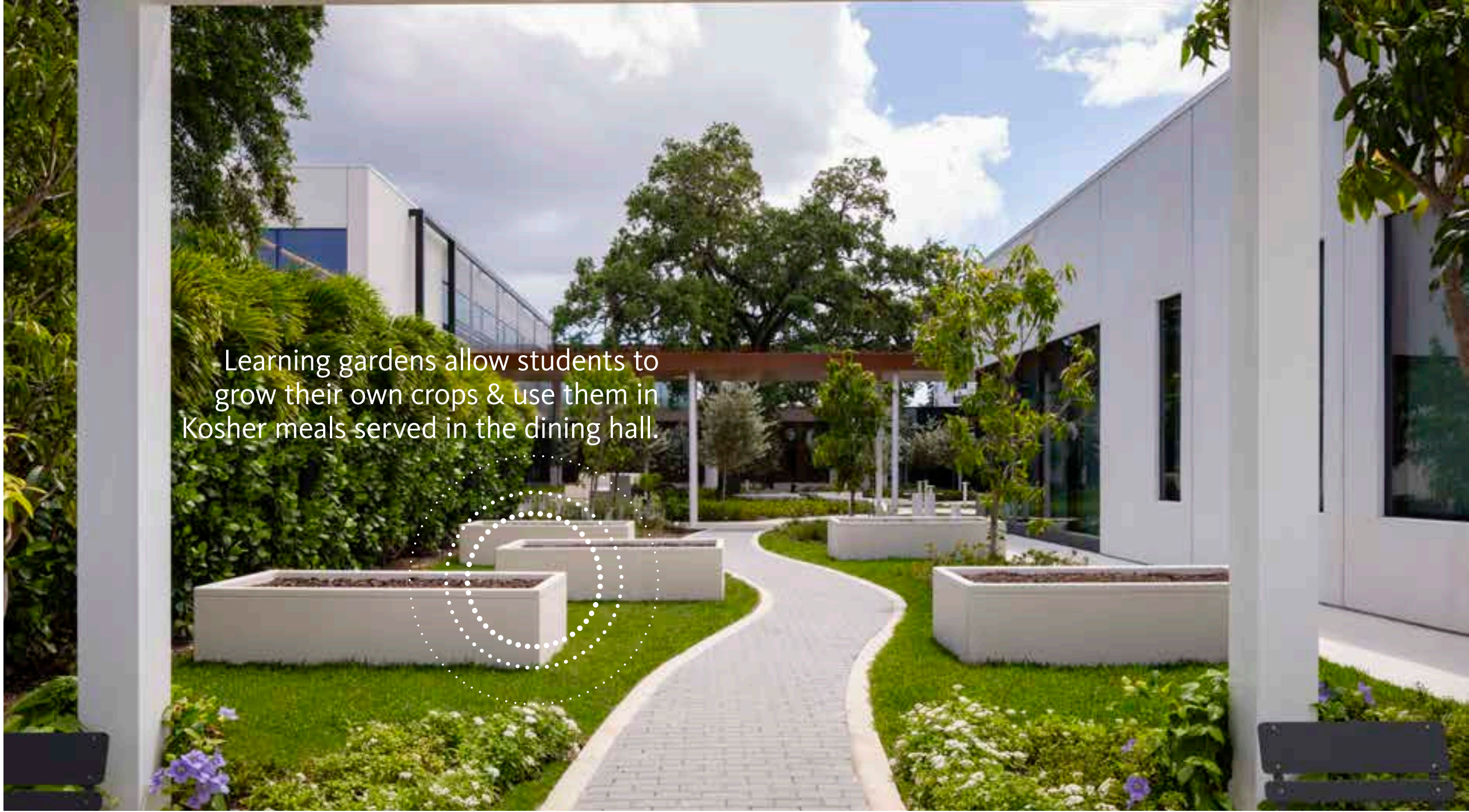
The “Tallit” terminates at the monumental stair, a place used for gathering, socialization and presentation.

The In-Between

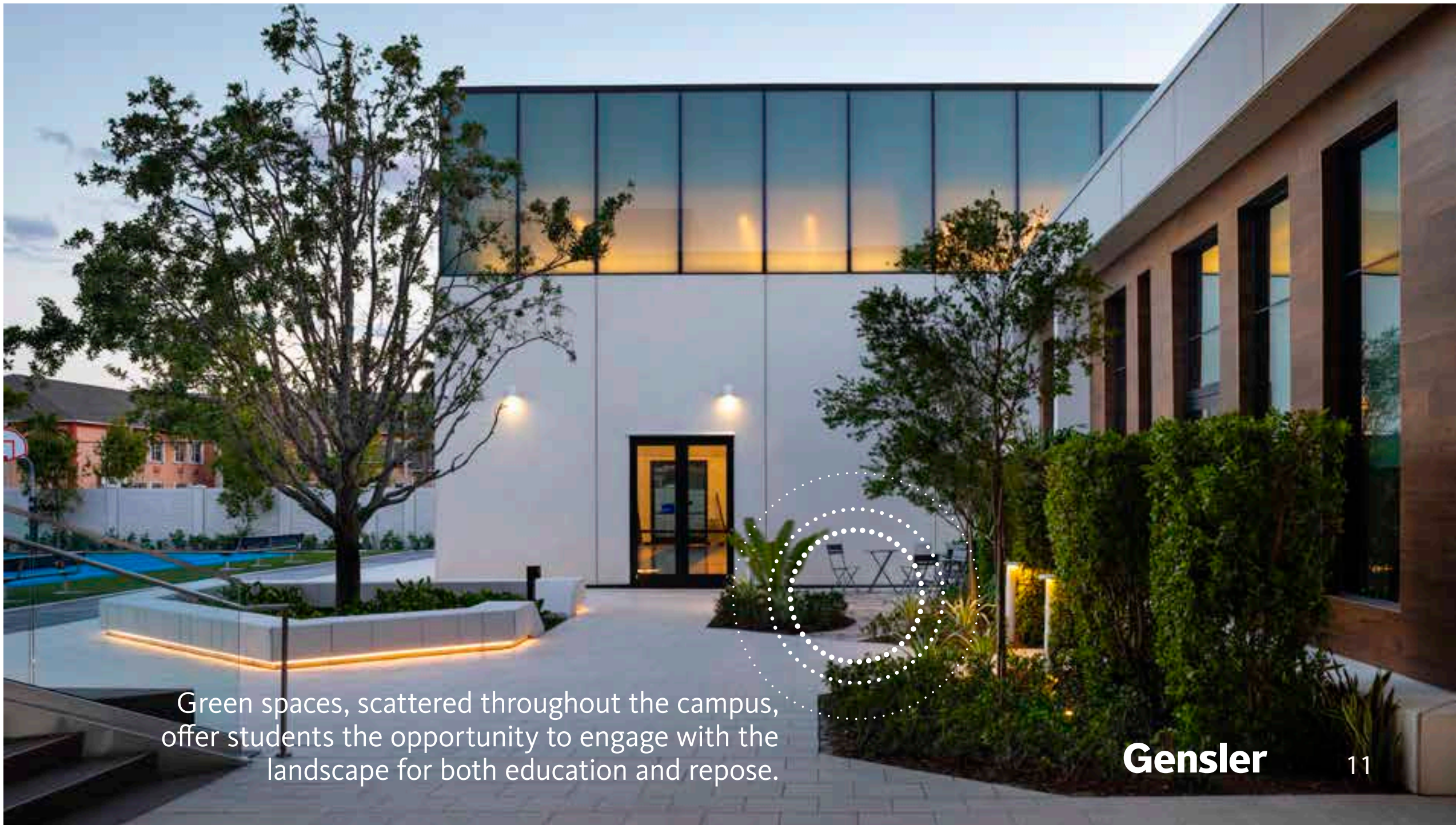
A series of canopies connect every building, protecting students from the elements and creating social nooks along the way.



Learning gardens allow students to grow their own crops & use them in Kosher meals served in the dining hall.



Green spaces, scattered throughout the campus, offer students the opportunity to engage with the landscape for both education and repose.



The Beit Midrash

“a hall dedicated to Torah study”

Strategic use of special materials, such as Jerusalem stone, pay homage to the state of Israel, while respecting the Miami aesthetic.

Campus gathering spaces were designed with flexibility in mind. As the needs of the school change, spaces can adapt their uses and configurations to accommodate.

The Commons

Surrounded by teaching spaces, the Commons is a zone for students and educators to collaborate and foster mentor-mentee relationships.

Designed to be safe and comfortable—a place for everyone. A place where students can explore and express themselves.

MIDDLE SCHOOL COMMONS

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Designed to be task-oriented—a place for studying, gathering and socializing.

UPPER SCHOOL COMMONS



Educational Environment

Educational Vision

The school seeks to reimagine Jewish education in Miami by creating a vibrant, inclusive campus that fosters intellectual curiosity and social responsibility.

The educational design intentions were to provide a rigorous college-preparatory curriculum that rivals the best secular schools, cultivate a strong Jewish identity through immersive Jewish studies, meaningful prayer experiences, and a commitment to service, empower students to become ethical leaders and active members of their communities, and ensure that all deserving students, regardless of financial means, have access to this exceptional educational experience.

In order to ensure that each student receives a high level of attention, each grade will be kept under 45 students for a student-to-teacher ratio of 8:1. Offerings include courses such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald, advanced economics, marine biology, and machine learning. Independent research will be at the forefront of learning at JLA, while the school’s math track will focus on preparations for national and international math competitions.

“The vision supports the innovative nature of the curriculum, providing a dynamic, interactive environment for students and faculty to unite as a community, with ample collaborative spaces and access to the outdoors, creating a campus experience where learning can happen anywhere.”

Architecture Firm

Alignment with the curriculum

Judaic Studies. Centrally located within the Hub, the naturally lit Beit Midrash opens, via operable walls, to the kosher dining hall, reinforcing the integration of Torah study, prayer, and daily fellowship.

STEM Education. High caliber biology, physics, and chemistry laboratories allow for hands-on experiences conducive to research and will allow for group collaboration as well as individual experimentation. Cutting edge equipment such as an anatomy table (a full scale virtual anatomy dissection table) is used by middle and upper school students alike.

The fabrication lab is a pioneering space that provides students the opportunity to turn their conceptual designs into physical representations through experimentation and innovation.

Specialized Studios. A music lab is available to create, edit, mix, and produce digital music using Soundtrap, Garageband, and Logic Pro.

Similarly, the Video Lab has been designed as a modern production studio that will provide students with the knowledge and equipment necessary to record, edit, and produce high quality videos and podcasts. In addition, students will have the opportunity to participate in community news broadcasts, and the freedom to create original content.

Physical Education & Wellness. Two indoor courts, a track, tennis courts, a soccer field, and outdoor basketball facilities meet both the PE curriculum and interscholastic-sports programs.

Support for varied learning and teaching styles

Flexible learning clusters. General classrooms ring shared commons—informal “living rooms” furnished for breakout work—enabling rapid shifts from lecture to small-group collaboration or independent study without leaving the floor.

Outdoor classrooms. Shaded patios, rooftop terraces for student-run crop cultivation, and the central courtyard extend lessons into the landscape, supporting place-based pedagogy.

Targeted support spaces. Small-group instruction rooms adjacent to labs and commons provide settings for differentiated tutoring, advisory meetings, and specialist pull-outs.

Adaptability and flexibility

Operable partitions & mobile furnishings. Science labs can combine for capstone fairs or divide for concentrated practicals; the Beit Midrash converts from prayer to lecture hall; and all learning spaces are furnished on casters for rapid re-configuration.

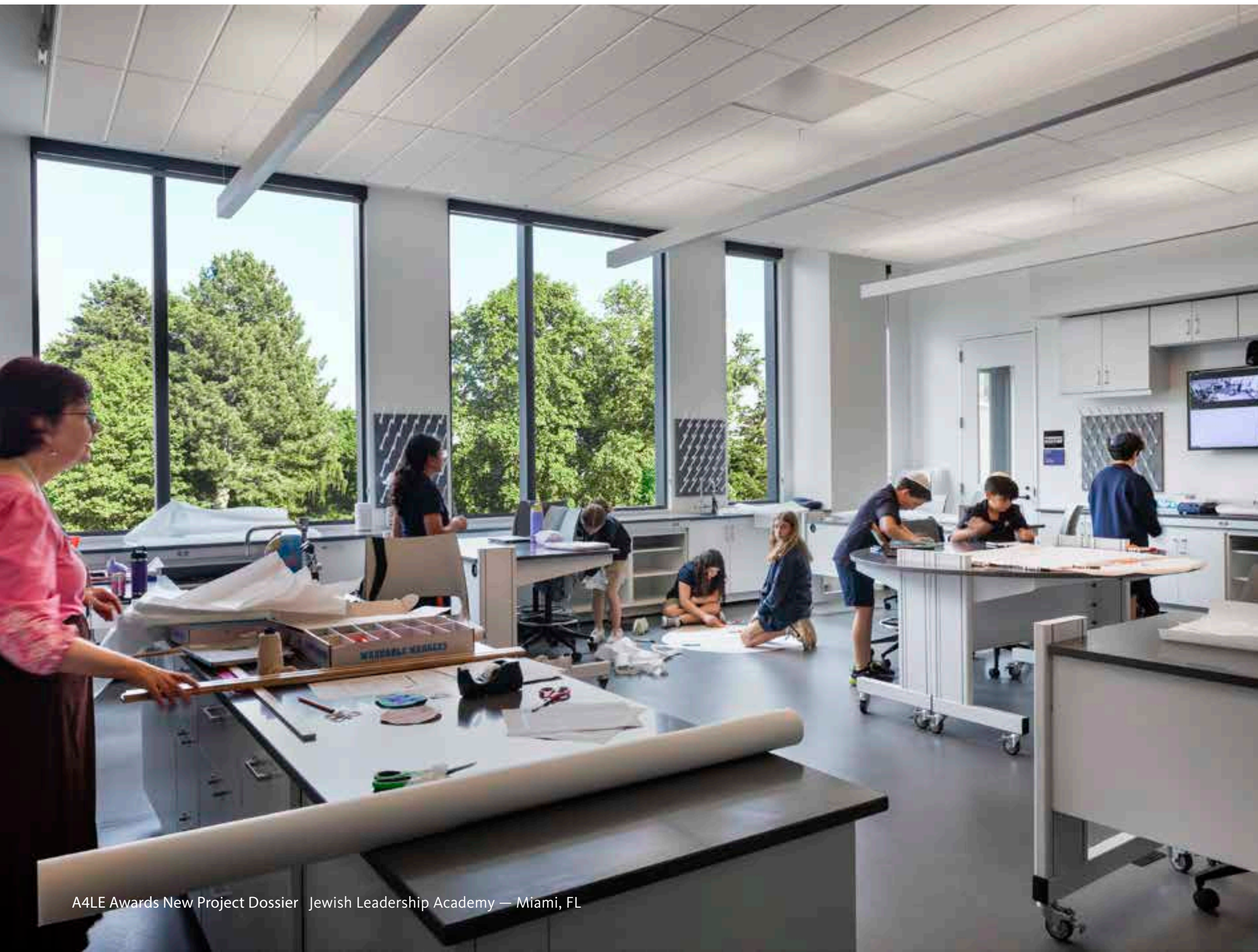
Multi-role Hub. Outside school hours the dining hall, library terrace, and Fab Lab open—individually or together—to host exhibitions, debates, and community events, turning the campus into a civic resource.

Innovation

Holistic design language. Architecture, interiors, and the school’s visual identity were developed in parallel; way-finding graphics, colour cues, and Hebrew typography explicitly link spatial zones to subject areas and Jewish values.

Technology-rich teaching tools. Classrooms are fitted with four-camera systems for hybrid instruction and dual digital displays, while the Fab Lab’s advanced equipment introduces secondary students to university-level fabrication techniques.





The Learning Spaces

Classrooms are equipped with cutting-edge multimedia and distance learning technology to assure that every student has an equal opportunity for learning. The wide variety of class types and courses offered allows the students to explore any and all passions.

Spaces are designed with mobility and flexibility in mind. Students and educators can co-curate their learning environments.

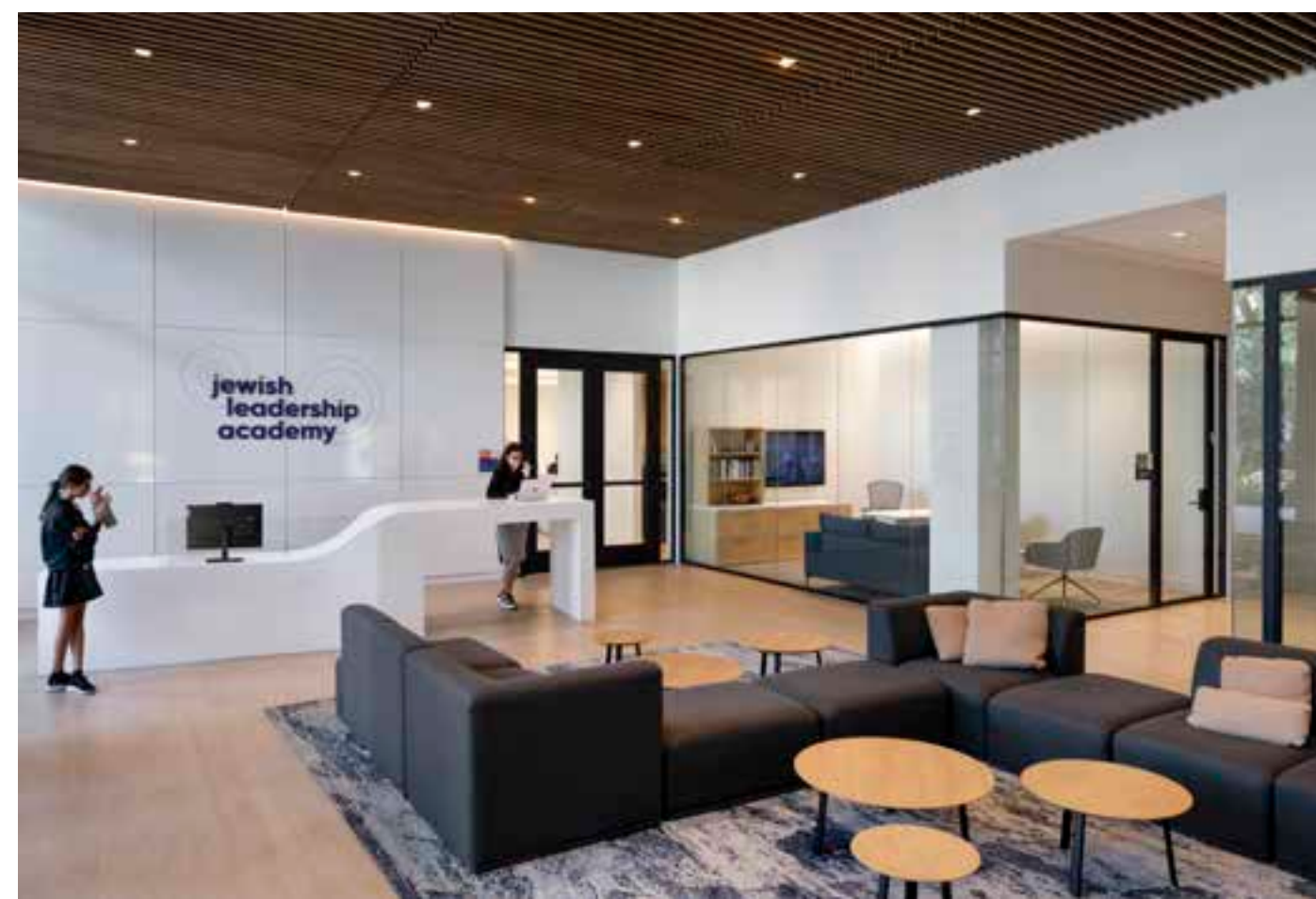




Beyond Academics

Providing students with a variety of spaces to explore, create and discover was fundamental to the project. The extracurricular spaces and programs were designed with the idea that learning can happen anywhere.

Students are able to engage with the campus wholeheartedly—with mind, body and spirit.





Results & Outcomes



Delivering on educational goals and objectives

JLA's program weaves three strands—rigorous academics, immersive Jewish studies, and structured community service—into one continuous student experience. Purpose-built facilities underpin that blend: cutting-edge science laboratories, a fabrication and innovation suite, music and video studios, and a centrally positioned Beit Midrash create “learning neighborhoods” where theory, practice, and reflection can occur in the same school day. Coupled with selective admissions and a faculty recruited for subject-matter expertise, the design allows the Academy to push its students to the very highest academic standards while ensuring that Jewish learning and ethical action remain integral.

Early evidence of success is tangible: the school has doubled in size from the first year to the second, confirming that JLA is attracting precisely the ambitious cohort that once migrated to secular institutions. Students collectively will log more than 11,000 hours of verified service with 20 partner organizations by the time they graduate, translating classroom teachings about responsibility into measurable civic engagement. Annual four-week immersions in Israel, beginning in Grade 9, further cement Hebrew fluency and cultural literacy, delivering the intended outcome of graduates who are as comfortable in a global university seminar as they are in a Beit Midrash.

Advancing broader school-district objectives and community goals

Although an independent institution, JLA functions as a strategic complement to Miami's existing network of pluralistic and Orthodox day schools. By design, the Academy accepts that it “will not be everything to everyone,” thereby relieving community schools of the expectation that they simultaneously serve the full spectrum of learners and the most academically driven. The result is a healthier ecosystem: community schools continue to offer affordable, broad-based Jewish education, while JLA captures students who require—and can thrive in—an intensified, highly selective environment. The Academy's need-blind admission policy ensures that socio-economic diversity is preserved rather than eroded, supporting the wider communal goal that no child be denied a Jewish education for financial reasons.

Fulfilling community aspirations

JLA was expressly created to cultivate Jewish identity, a sense of purpose, and a habit of service among the community's most successful young people. Those outcomes are already visible. The student body's geographic breadth affirms that the Academy is perceived as a city-wide resource rather than a neighborhood enclave. Regular service learning—averaging more than five hours per student, per semester—links classroom discussions of ethics to direct action, strengthening partnerships with 20 non-profit organizations. Meanwhile, Israel expeditions, daily prayer, and an intentional emphasis on Hebrew language collectively embed a durable connection to Jewish tradition and to the State of Israel.

Sustainability and wellness outcomes

The campus integrates sustainable design principles to encourage environmental responsibility and student well-being. Flexible indoor spaces and intentionally programed outdoor classrooms facilitate natural light, fresh air, and frequent movement—all of which support the school's commitment to physical activity and holistic health. Landscape strategies and material selections underscore resource consciousness, reinforcing lessons in stewardship that are embedded in the science and Judaic curricula alike.



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