



Uplift Education

Luna Campus

Executive Summary

Uplift Education Luna Campus is designed to improve educational outcomes for a historically under-served student population by creating a purpose built environment that supports academic success, wellness and a strong sense of belonging. Situated on an industrial-adjacent site near a major Dallas interstate, the campus is intentionally designed to create an environment of opportunity and empowerment for students; many of whom travel long distances and

represent the first in their families to pursue higher education.

In a post-pandemic world, the project addresses new challenges by integrating flexible, technology rich learning spaces, social-emotional learning environments and community focused design strategies that foster resilience, engagement and long-term success.

Project Details

Grades Served Pre-K - 12th	Site Area 17 acres
Student Capacity 2,000	Construction Cost \$42 Million
Building Area 166,000 SF	Completion Date February 2024
Project Location Dallas, Texas	

Scope of Work

- + Pre-K - 12th Grade Classrooms
- + Special Education Classrooms
- + Art Classrooms
- + Maker Space
- + A/V Recording Studio
- + Music Classrooms
- + Computer Labs and Libraries
- + College Counseling
- + Gymnasium
- + Kitchen and Dining
- + Admin Offices
- + Play-field
- + Playgrounds
- + Outdoor Green Space

School & Community Research and Engagement

CONTEXT

Understanding the Community

Uplift Education operates as a non-profit public charter school network in North Texas. Established in 1996, Uplift now serves nearly **23,000 scholars** in pre-k through 12th grade on **20 campuses** across the DFW metroplex.

Each school offers free, college-preparatory education in communities where access to college-preparatory focused curriculum is limited. The focus is on providing rigorous academics and strong support systems to prepare students for success beyond high school.

The program aims to eliminate achievement gaps across ethnic and socio-economic groups. Its goals include 100% high school graduation and college enrollment, with at least 70% of graduates earning a college degree within six



scholar demographics



- Hispanic - 80%
- African american - 14%
- White - 5%
- Am. Indian or Alaskan Native - 1%
- Asian or Pacific Islander - 1%

stakeholders

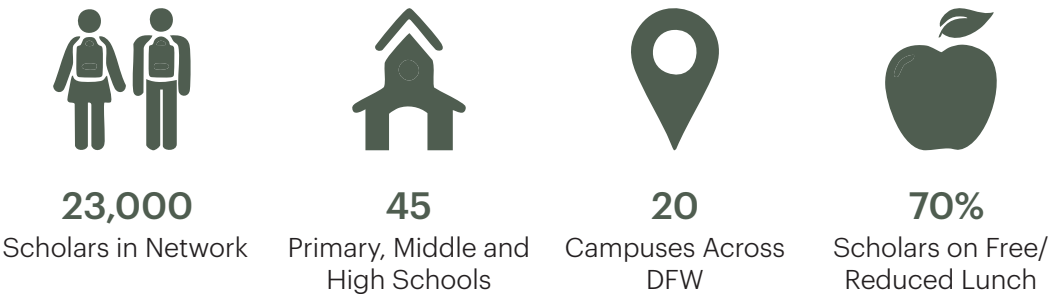
- Administrators
- Teachers
- Parents
- Students
- Community

challenges

- How can this project improve education outcomes among a disadvantaged student population?
- How can the design respond to the unique challenges of a post-pandemic world to create an environment that fosters equity, resilience, and academic success?

available assets

80% of Uplift’s students are on free or reduced lunch. 100% of Uplift’s graduates were accepted to college. Last year of those matriculating, 78% will be the first in their family to attend college.



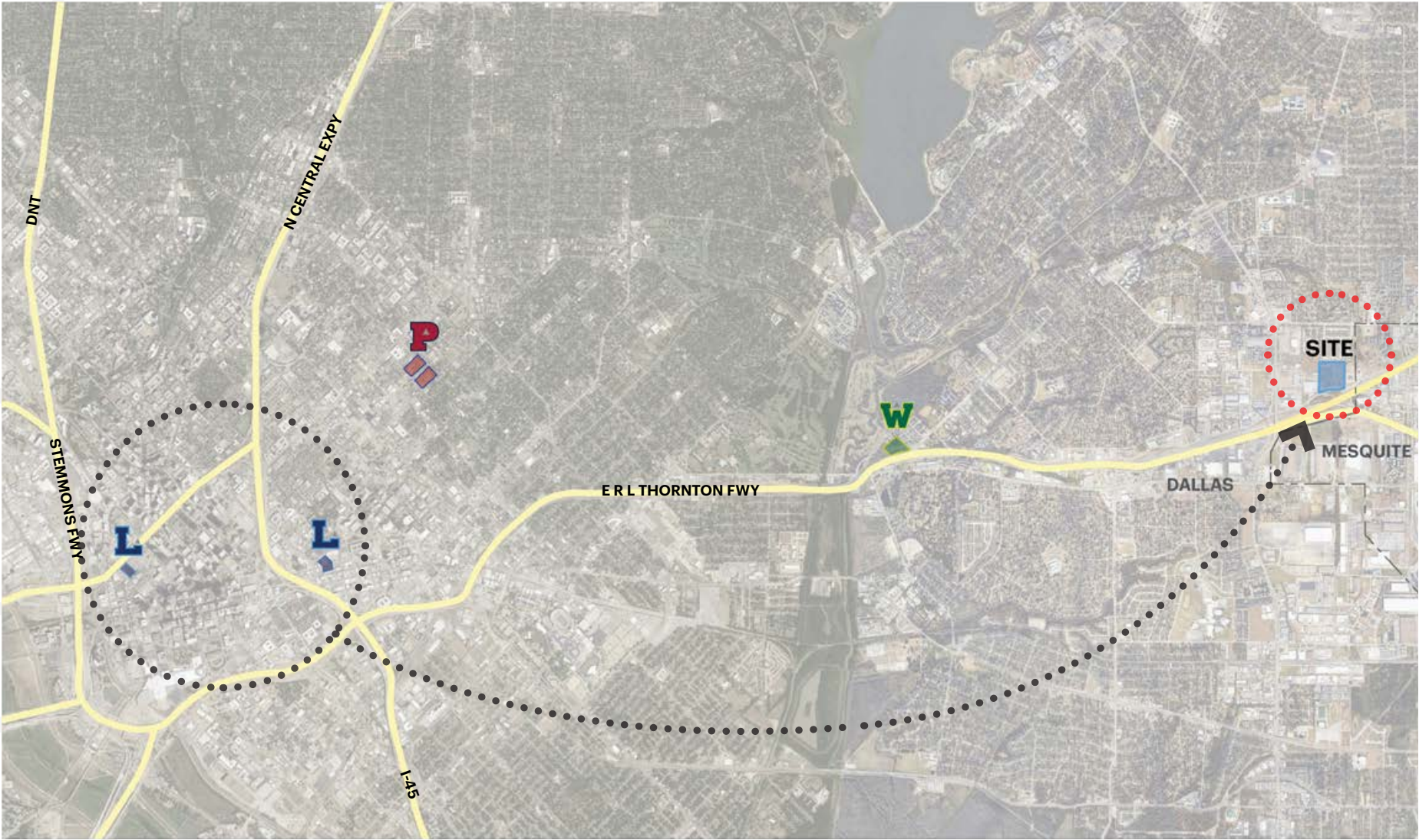
School & Community Research and Engagement

CONTEXT

Unification

In 2020, Uplift Education engaged our team with the challenge of designing a unified school campus that would accommodate and integrate two existing schools onto a single site.

Our goal was to create a cohesive, efficient environment that respects each school’s identity while maximizing shared resources and fostering community. The design reflects Uplift’s mission—supporting student success through thoughtful planning, flexible learning spaces and a strong sense of place.



“
Our new building has allowed us to have more frequent and meaningful community engagement events such as community festivals and large-scale celebratory ceremonies.
”

- Katie Woodiel
Head of School | Uplift Luna Secondary

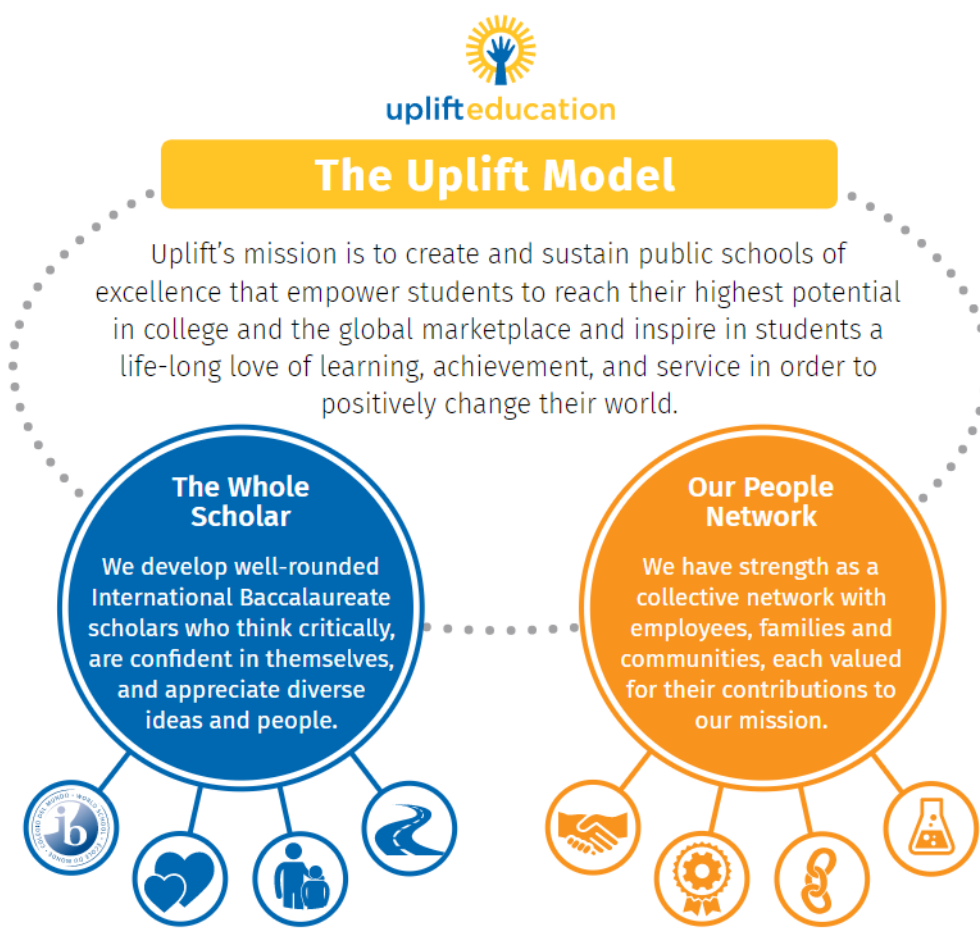
School & Community Research and Engagement

PROCESS

The Vision

The team extensively reviewed Uplift’s model, priorities and goals and aligned them with our own measures of design excellence. Through this process a site-inclusive design outcome is achieved that heavily incorporates equitable community, well-being, and change in pursuit of an overarching project goal: to build a learning ecosystem that prepares students to succeed in higher education.

The final design organizes the campus of buildings around the perimeter of the site to define and protect a communal outdoor quad and stitches it together with a network of pedestrian paths creating a compact, walkable, and active environment. Finally, the Road to College & Career counseling program is placed in the center as a beacon for students of all ages and a symbolic celebration and reminder of their goals and aspirations.



Uplift Education Luna Campus



School & Community Research and Engagement

PROCESS

Community Benefit

Initially established in 2010, the school served grades K-12 through locations in Deep Ellum and Downtown Dallas.

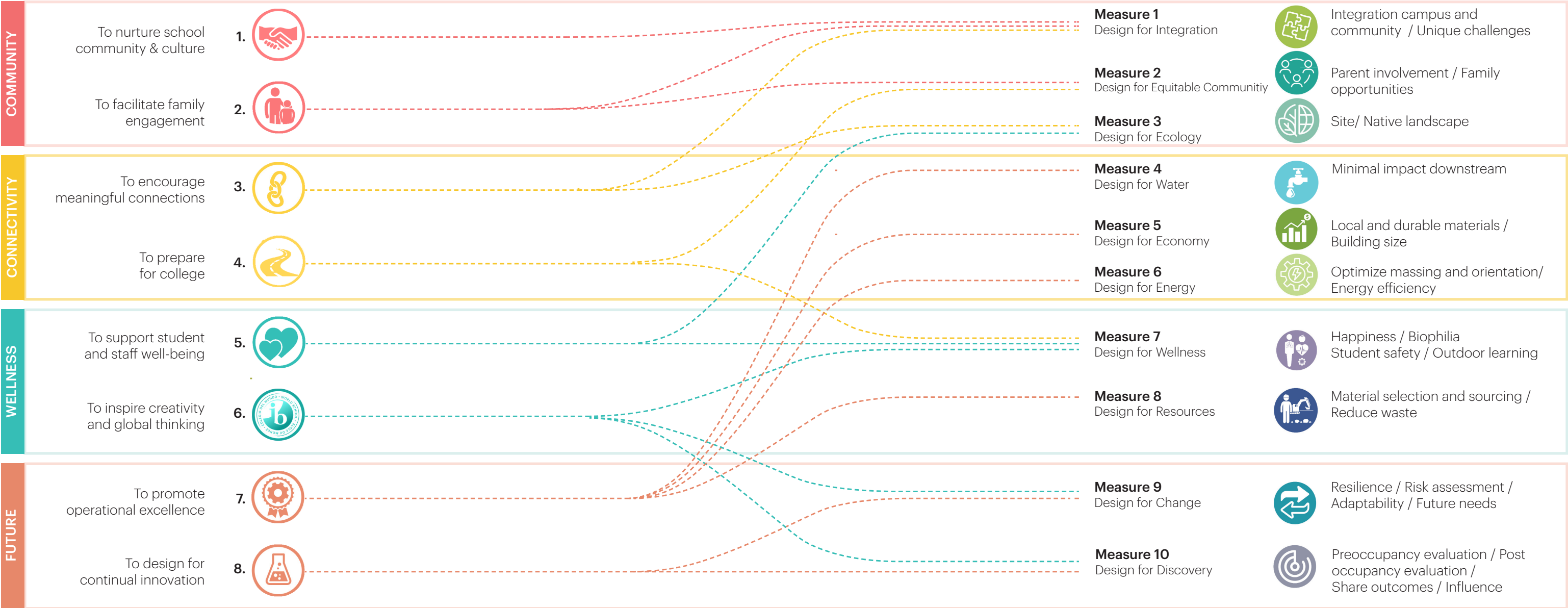
The new, consolidated campus is an upgraded home for **existing students** and also **serves**

new students from the **East Dallas, Mesquite, Garland and Sunnyvale areas.**

“We are excited to become a key part of this community,” said Uplift Education’s CEO, Yasmin Bhatia. *“Not only will we be providing a beautiful home for our existing scholars, but we will be able to give more families in the area a new choice for their child’s education.”*

Press release of May 24th, 2023

UPLIFT LUNA GOALS



School & Community Research and Engagement

PROCESS

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

This project inspired a joint research project on how the design of learning environments can support social and emotional learning. The research study was led by the Center for Advanced Design Research and Evaluation (CADRE) and Uplift, and was sponsored by the American Society of Interior Designers.

The first phase of the study is complete. During this phase, the team created a **Visual Design Guide** based on teacher interviews and a detailed review of research. The guide highlights **18 proven design strategies for effective learning environments**. The second phase is now in progress and involves a study comparing conditions before and after changes are made to the learning spaces.



I am looking for design strategies that stimulate the senses, but have been shown to impact students' emotional outcomes.

You should look for:

These icons:

Sensory Stimulus Emotional Learning

I'm mainly interested in design strategies that have been shown to impact social, emotional, and learning outcomes for students and teachers.

You should look for:

These icons:

Student & Teacher Impacts

SEL Outcomes

I'd like to design an enriched learning environment and want to identify multiple design strategies that can be applied in a school setting.

You should look for:

These icons:

Enriched Environment Stimuli

This Typology:

Space Type: **School**

We want to see what teachers have said about implementing certain design strategies that focus on the classroom.

You should look for:

From the Teacher's Desk

This Typology:

Space Type: **Classroom**

Physical Environment

CONTEXT

Physical Attributes of the Environment

This economical site affords Uplift the opportunity to consolidate two outgrown campuses into one that meets their students’ needs, but that economy comes with the soft cost of inhospitable context:

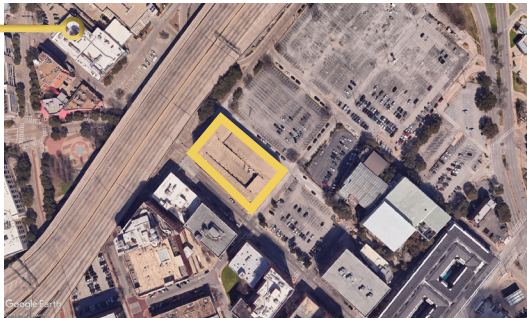
Distance from the original downtown locations and the neighboring I-30 interchange and metal fabrication facility **poses challenges in connecting the new campus to the existing Uplift Luna community**, which is primarily composed of economically disadvantaged students.

Providing a learning environment that protects students from nearby incompatible uses, while also reconnecting the new campus to its historic downtown community, is essential to fostering a safe and meaningful educational setting.

Luna’s former pair of downtown campuses offered **little outdoor space and access to nature**. Designed to be multi-functional and with all age groups in mind, the new quad provides an opportunity to radically improve the physical, social and emotional health of students and teachers.

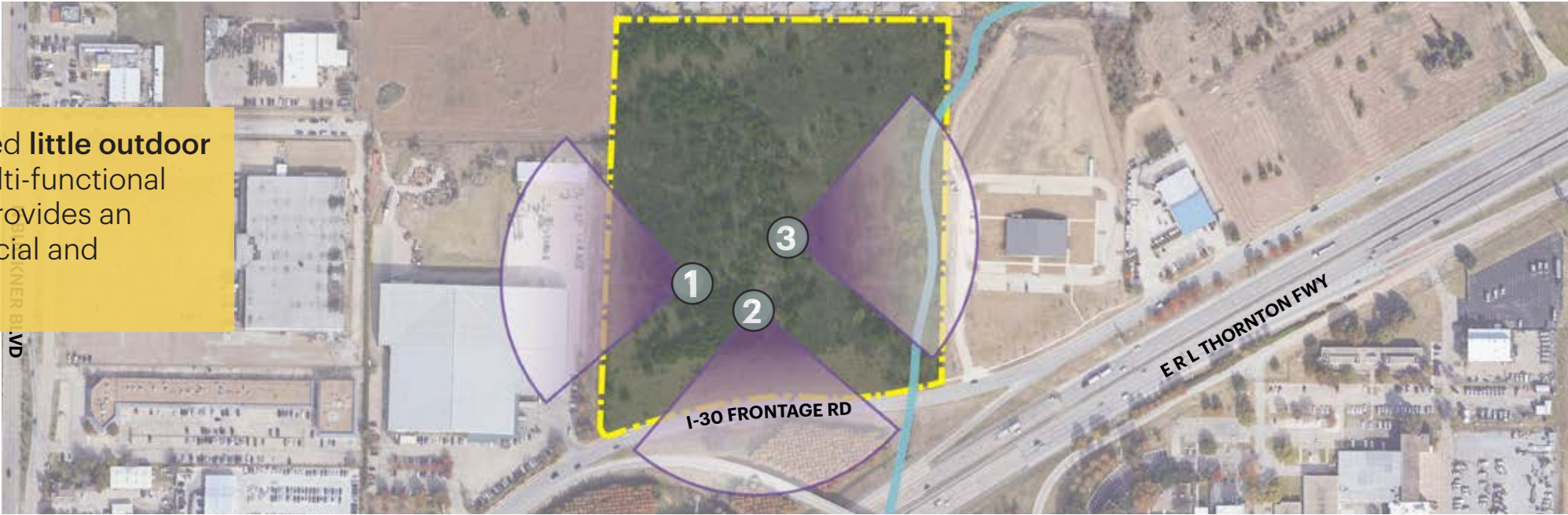


Deep Ellum Aerial



West End Aerial

Uplift Education Luna Campus



Physical Environment

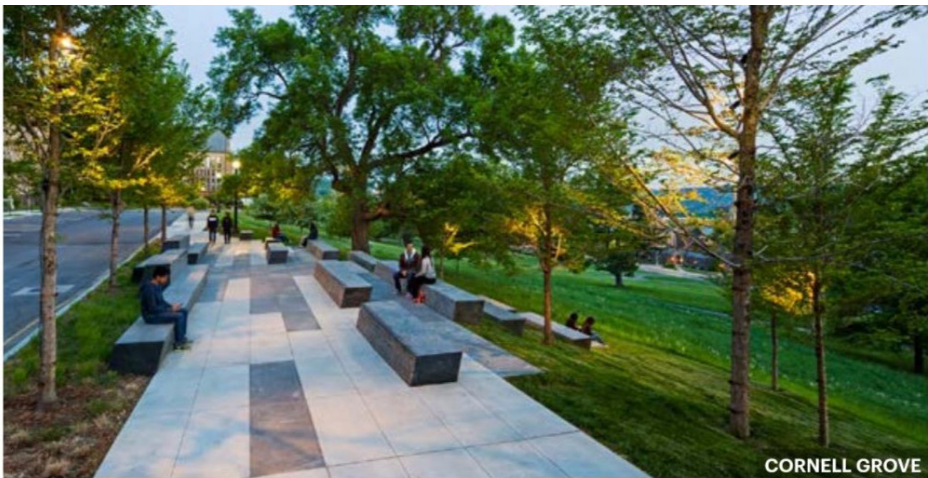
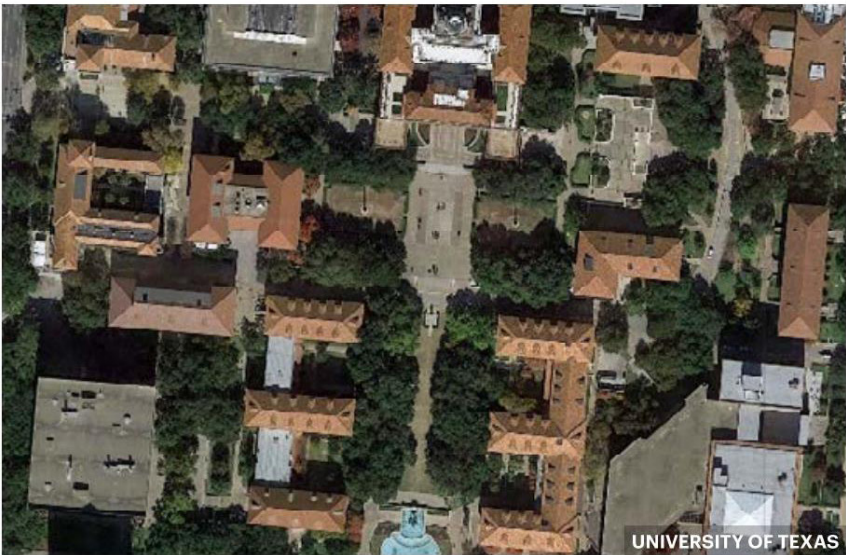
CONTEXT

Designing for Connection

Learners First guided the design process from the beginning, with the team prioritizing spaces that support student success, belonging, and well-being.

Drawing inspiration from collegiate campus quads; known for their openness and sense of community; the design places students at the heart of the campus.

This central space fosters connection, encourages collaboration, and reflects the belief that every design decision should serve the needs of learners first.

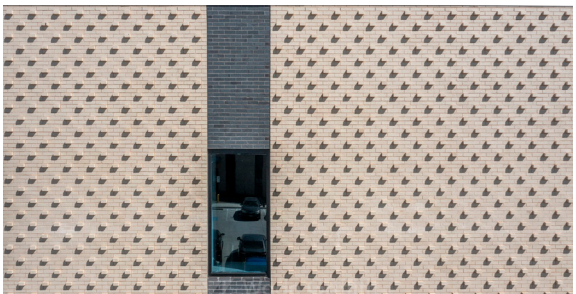
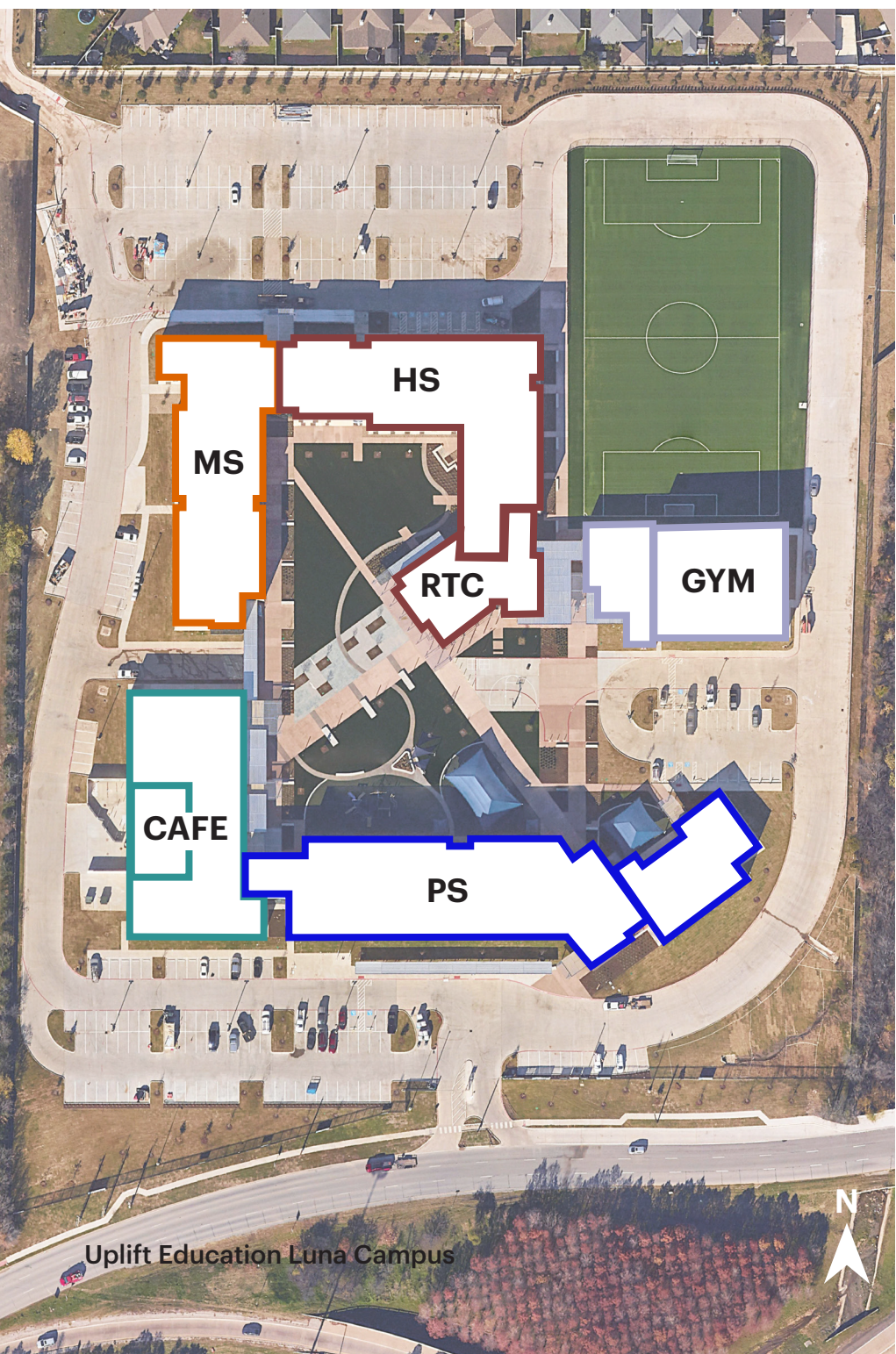


Physical Environment

CONTEXT

Contextual Integration

The final design places all the parking and vehicular circulation to the edges of the site with school buildings focused on a central quad to create a welcoming learning environment.

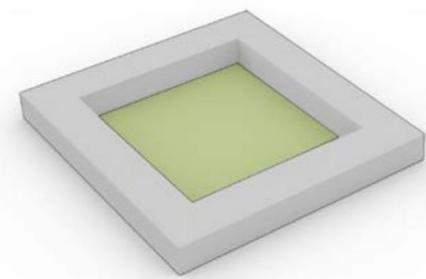


The physical school environment plays an important role in student development, and the pandemic highlighted how absence of that environment can hinder aspects of development that aren't strictly academic. Uplift Education sought a new campus that would bridge personal and academic aspects of development, and provide a welcoming, supportive atmosphere for all students.

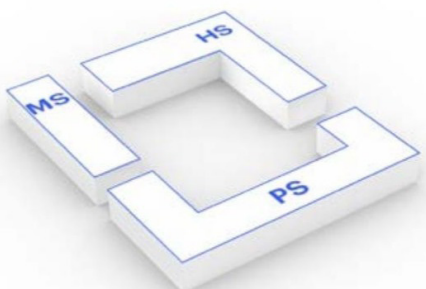


Physical Environment

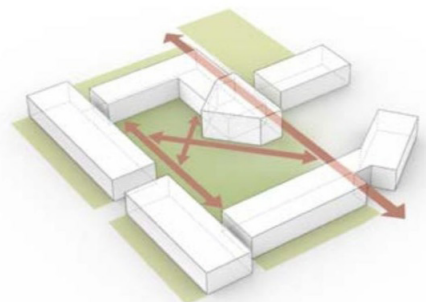
RESPONSE



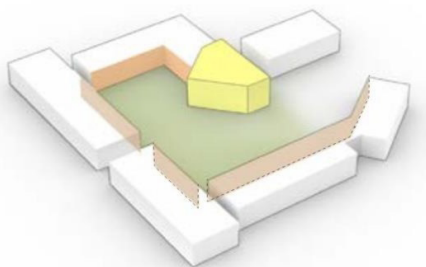
INWARD FOCUS



PROGRAM



CONNECTIVITY



PURPOSE

Community

Organization of campus buildings around site perimeter to define and shelter communal outdoor space.

Organization

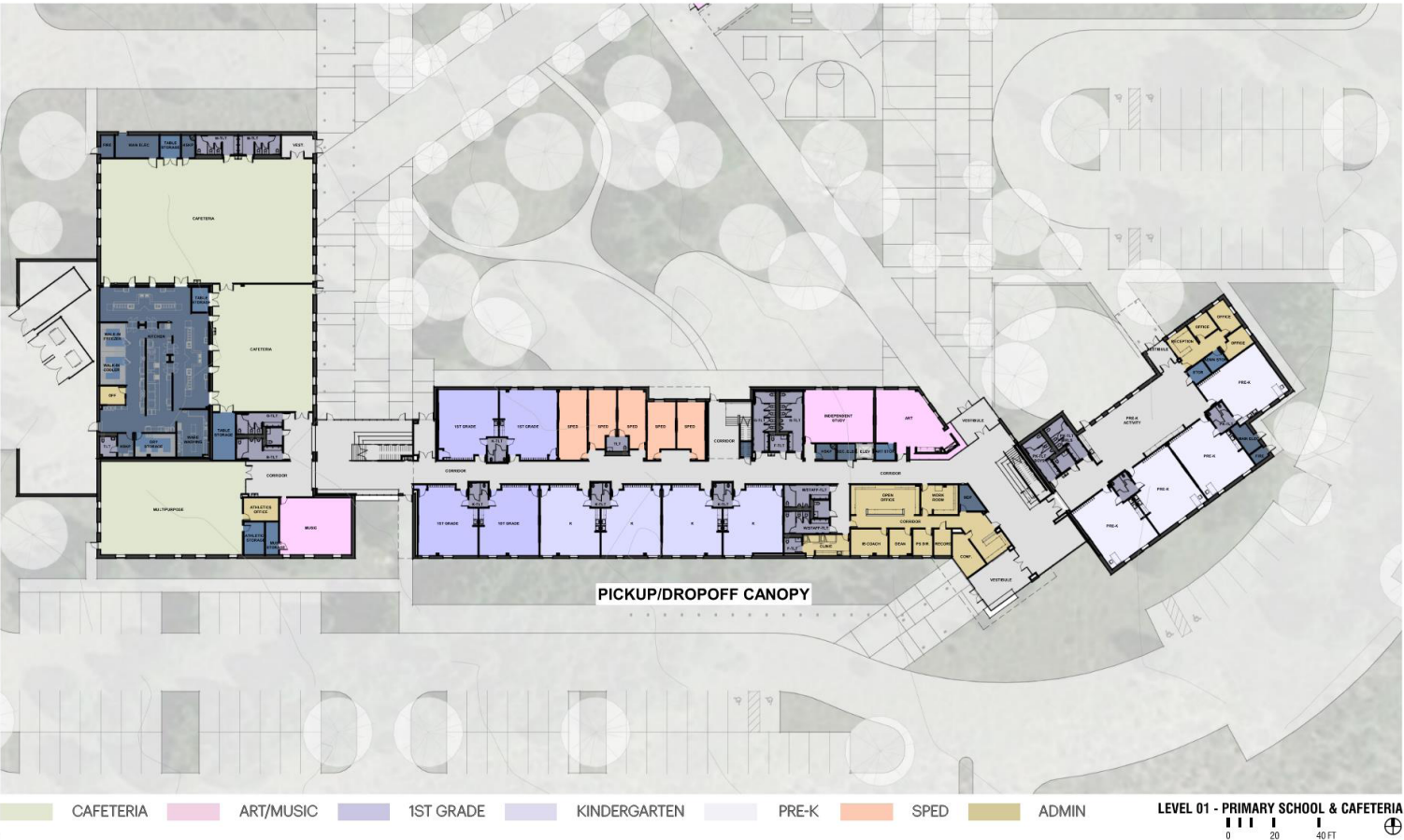
The campus is programmed as three interrelated schools, each with its own identity and function. A network of paths and open space links them together.

Connectivity

Tied to precedent of college campuses and quads. A network of pedestrian paths connects campus buildings and open space. Creating a compact, walkable environment enhances the campus experience.

Uplift Education

The Road to College counseling program is placed in the center as a beacon for students of all ages and tangible reminder of their goals and aspirations. views within the courtyard focus to the RTC from Pre-K to 12th grade



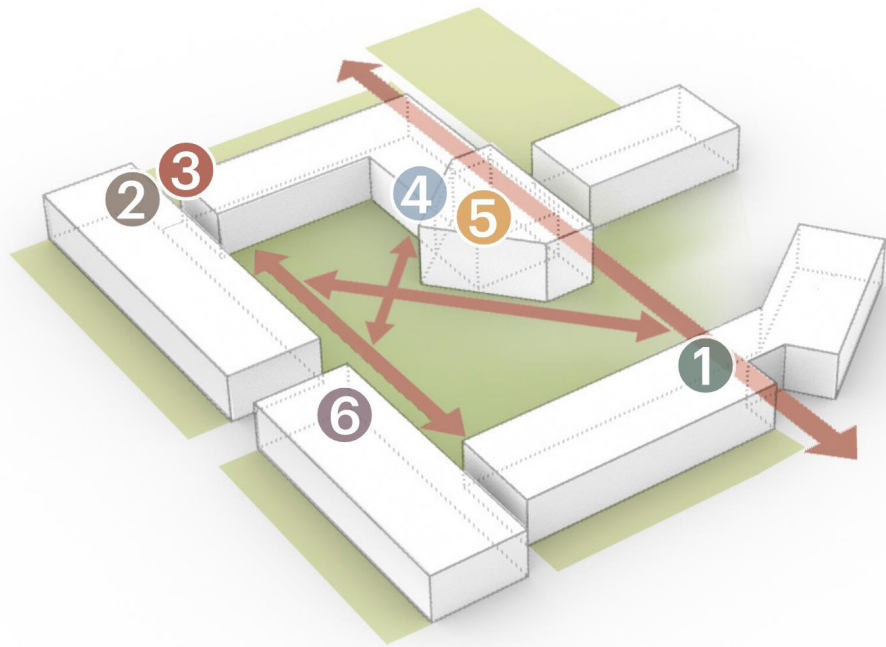
Physical Environment

RESPONSE

Luna’s previous pair of downtown campuses offered very little usable outdoor space for students and faculty to be active and connect to nature.

The overall focus on not only beautiful, but functional outdoor space greatly enhances user engagement with nature and encourages physical activity, both of which are proven **to promote wellness and improve academic achievement**. Students of all ages have access to common outdoor space as well as separate age-appropriate spaces within the quad.

Main interior circulation nodes are double height atriums oriented toward the quad with complementary finishes to **visually and symbolically connect the indoor to the outdoor**. Faculty and staff break rooms, meditation rooms and dedicated garden promote mental and emotional health.



- 1

Primary Lobby Space
- 2

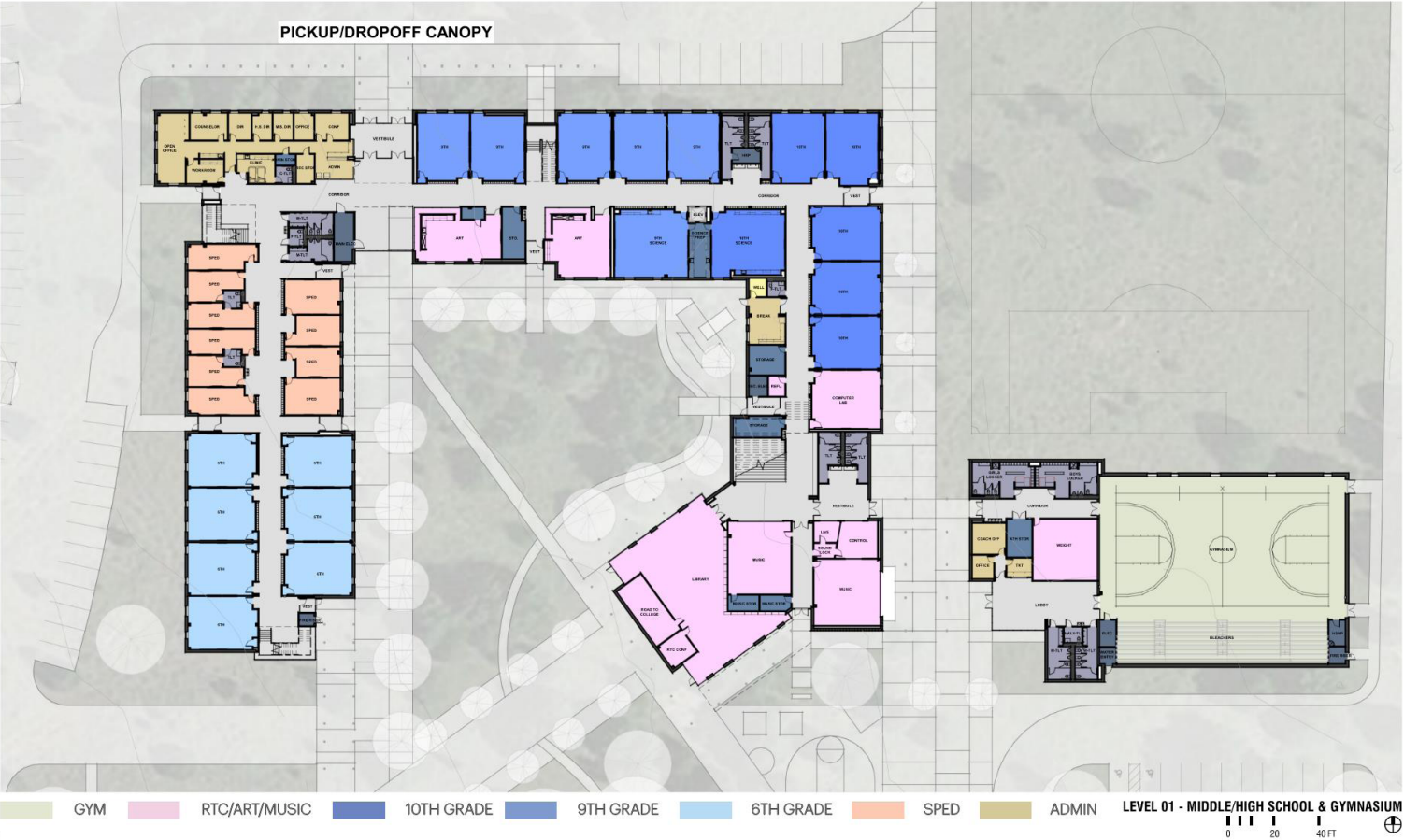
Middle and High School Lobby Space
- 3

Middle and High School Collaboration Space
- 4

Learning Stair
- 5

RTC (Road to College) | Library
- 6

Cafeteria



Physical Environment

RESPONSE

As a non-profit public charter school system, **Uplift has limited funds for facilities**. Efficient building forms are combined with a restrained but versatile material palette **providing high efficient budget value**.

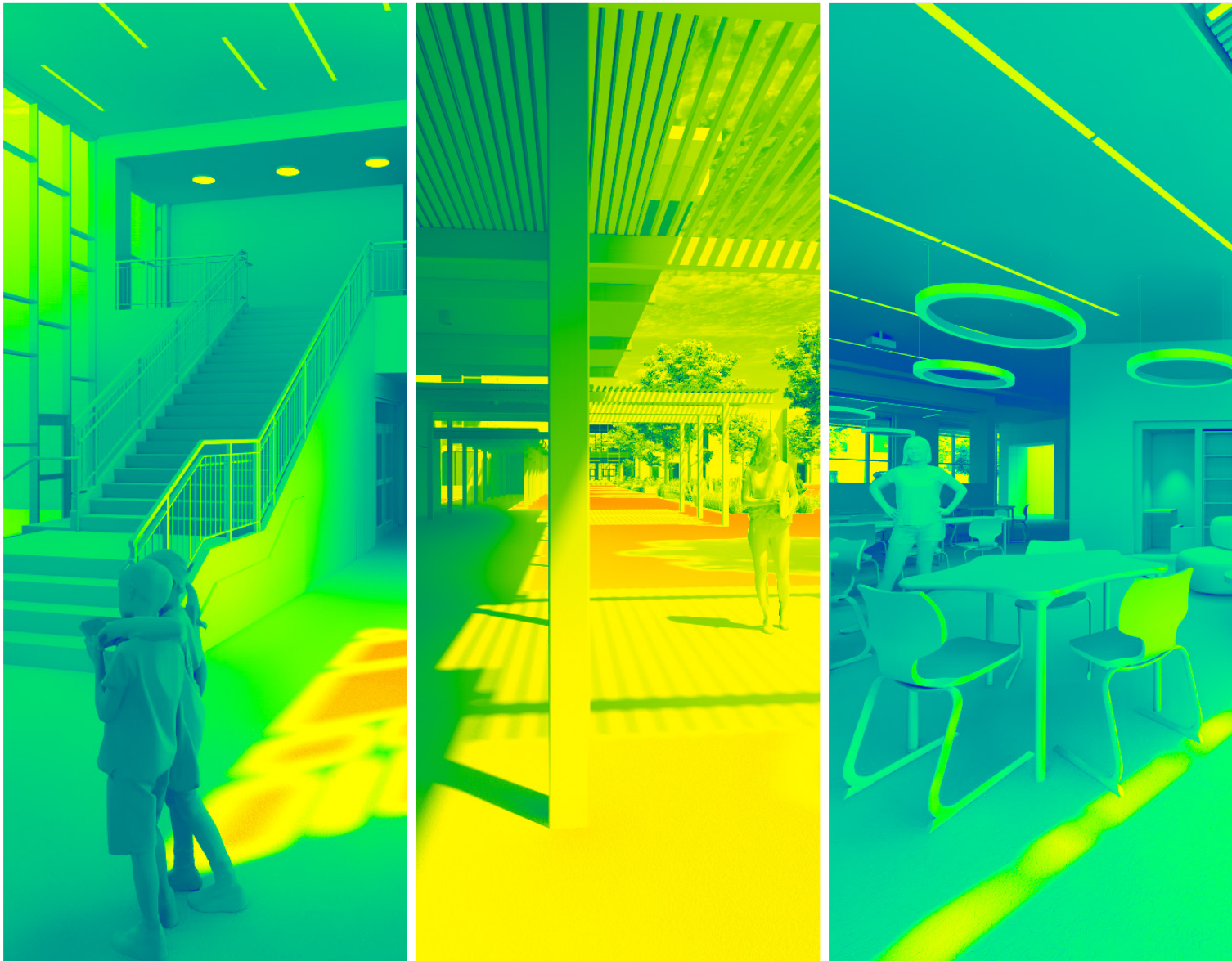
The project takes advantage of masonry to create a singular overarching façade design with multiple variations in tone and pattern that plays a supporting role to the shining, metal-clad crown jewel of the central Road to College space.

Various concrete finishes, synthetic turf and native plant species within the quad contribute to **highly durable and pleasant outdoor spaces** that respect budget constraints as well as minimize future maintenance cost.



Physical Environment

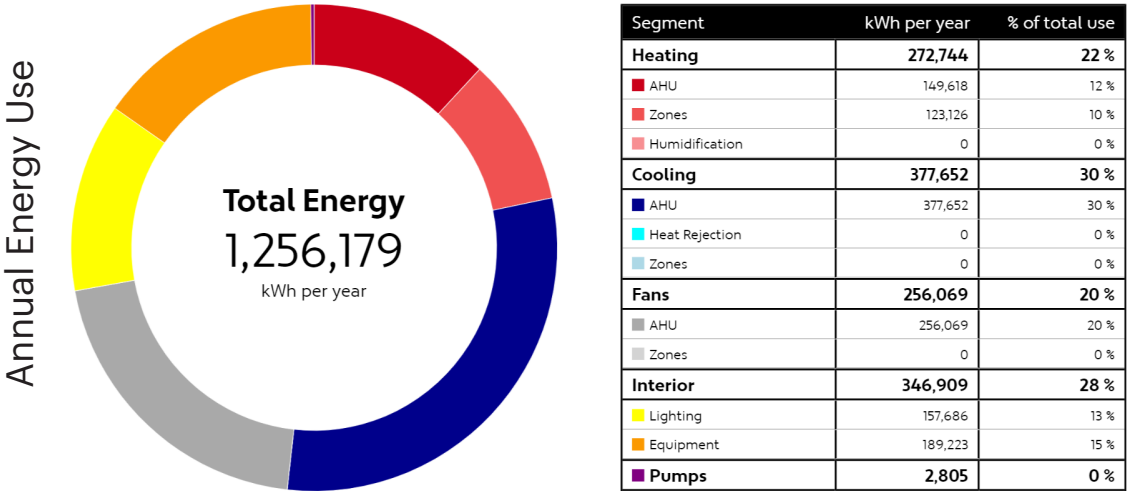
RESPONSE



Healthy Environments, Sustainable Futures

In order to meet both project budget and energy reduction targets, an energy model was developed to inform the design. The model has been submitted per performance path code requirements to maximize design flexibility; over-reliance on insulation otherwise required by prescriptive path compliance would have increased project cost by over \$500,000 without meaningfully reducing building energy use.

Complexity of mechanical systems is similarly measured, instead leveraging daylighting and automated occupancy sensors to respect client need for minimal maintenance. **The campus’ projected EUI is 23 kBTU/SF/year, a 68% reduction below the baseline of 71.** Ongoing discussions took place with Uplift regarding facility operations and user behavior to increase awareness of user impact on building performance and accuracy of energy models.



Educational Environment

SPACES THAT SUPPORT LEARNING IN ALL FORMS



Vision

Uplift’s educational vision centers on **equity, access and academic excellence** for a historically underserved student population. The school aims to provide a learning ecosystem that prepares all students; not just for academic achievement but for long-term success.



Curriculum

The campus is purposefully designed to support Uplift’s college-prep curriculum, with learning environments that promote interdisciplinary teaching. A central courtyard, enclosed by the surrounding buildings, **functions as an outdoor classroom** and gathering space, extending learning **beyond traditional walls**.



Learning

Recognizing the diversity in how students learn and teachers teach, the design incorporates **a flexible mix of spaces** that accommodate direct instruction, collaborative group work, one-on-one support and independent study. These environments empower educators to tailor their teaching while fostering a culture of exploration and engagement.




Flexibility

Flexibility is embedded in the layout through adaptable learning zones, shared collaboration spaces and classrooms that support multiple instructional formats. **The design allows for programmatic evolution over time**, ensuring the environment remains responsive to changing pedagogical approaches and student needs.



Innovation

Innovation is reflected in how **the design supports a dynamic and inclusive educational experience through flexible, multi-use spaces** that adapt to diverse teaching and learning styles. The Road to College anchors the campus both physically and symbolically, reinforcing a culture of aspiration and long-term achievement.



Result

“ Having a thoughtfully designed courtyard space and gym with ample seating for scholars and parents alike has been a game-changer in being able to bring large groups of people together for what will become culture traditions at our campus over time. ”

- Katie Woodiel

Head of School | Uplift Luna Secondary

Result

FROM VISION TO OUTCOME

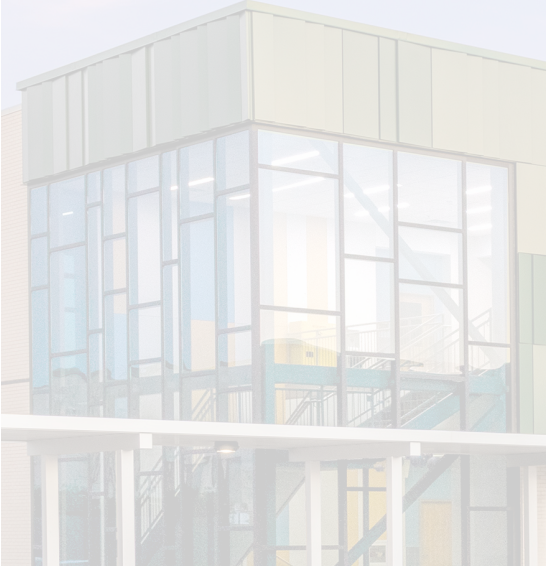
The Design Impact

A shift in focus away from the formal classroom and toward more holistic social and emotional development has resulted in higher college matriculation rates for Uplift graduates. The shift emerged as a defining thesis in this campus and points toward a future with a more intentionally fluid, adaptable educational model.

Teachers at Uplift Luna now have more learning spaces, including outdoor areas that allow flexibility and creativity in their curriculum. Students enjoy dynamic outdoor spaces that allow for more socializing, activities and autonomy. Teachers and administrators have reported back that students are spending more time outside before and after school and during their lunch — providing meaningful opportunities for social connection and rest throughout their school day.

Goals and Objectives

The project supports Uplift’s educational mission by creating a flexible, inclusive environment that nurtures academic excellence and college readiness. Spaces are designed to accommodate a range of instructional methods and foster interdisciplinary learning.



School District Goals

The new campus represents a significant upgrade for existing students while also extending its impact to the surrounding neighborhood.



Community Goals

The campus is integrated into its urban context. It reflects a commitment to community engagement by supporting family involvement.



Unintended Results

“We have seen a significant increase in scholar pride and engagement in classes since moving to the new building, while simultaneously experiencing a decrease in discipline escalations.

Our well-lit, bright, and cheery building physically shows scholars that they are cared for, and they have expressed that they feel valued by the new space and like they have to demonstrate a higher level of responsibility to maintain it.”

- Katie Woodiel

Head of School | Uplift Luna Secondary



Value and Financial Stewardship

The design embraces the principle of doing more with less, using standard materials like brick with patterned extrusions; to achieve visual impact without added cost.



Sustainability and Wellness

The project promotes wellness through abundant daylight, visual transparency, and outdoor learning spaces that encourage movement and connection.

The result is a healthy, adaptable learning environment that supports both student and ecological well-being.

