

Program Summary:

The project creates a living and learning residence for 360 high school students and support staff to complete the campus.

Program Statement:

This premier public high school draws high-achieving high school students from all socio-economic backgrounds across the state to live and learn in Natchitoches, Louisiana. The design team set out to enable the school's vision to intertwine academic and community culture with a living/learning commons.

Three wings pinwheel out from a central lobby to compose the building footprint. The layout of the wings frames two courtyards - then weaves and steps with the topography to preserve lines of pine and cypress trees along the north and south edges before aligning the south end of the lobby with a large live oak tree. Brick masonry wraps the residences and vertical circulation, while zinc and glass enclose connecting social spaces, serving as an inviting counterpoint. Warm and tactile cypress weaves through and unifies the ground-level shared spaces.

Ten independently functioning "neighborhood halls" nest within the building and organize the student residences, comprising nine four-person suites, each with a distinctive accent color punctuating wall and ceiling surfaces. Students circulate through a light-filled hall commons - an appealing place to hang out, share a meal, or hold a group meeting. Each "neighborhood" has a laundry, trash & recycling center, and a quiet study lounge overlooking the courtyards. A student life advisor oversees the 36 teenagers within each neighborhood and maintains an office and residence on the hall.

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Building Area: (sf)
108,300 sf

Cost per Square Foot:
\$232 (building & site)

Construction Cost
\$25,100,000

Date of Completion:
August 2021

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Living & Learning

High-achieving high school students are drawn from all socio-economic backgrounds across Louisiana to this premier public high school to live and learn, tuition-free. Since the school's founding in 1982, students have lived in two aging dormitories, cast-offs from the adjacent university campus. The separation of the students' living community from the high school campus precluded the realization of the school's complete vision of a student experience that intertwines academic and community culture.

To meet the school's aspirations, the design team set out to complete the campus by adding a living/learning commons that extends a walkable connection to the adjacent dining and classroom building and seeds the development of a vibrant student community culture.



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Completing the Campus

The building organization comprises three wings that pinwheel out from a central lobby. The wings combine with an existing classroom building to frame a courtyard to the east and a backyard to the west. The layout of the building bends, weaves, and steps with the topography to preserve a line of pine trees along the north edge and a line of cypress trees to the south before aligning the south end of the lobby with a large live oak tree.

Walkable pathways extend the connective fabric of the campus and lead to casual interactions among students. The circulation of the surrounding university campus is carefully redirected around the high school campus edge as an added security measure.



FIRST FLOOR / SITE PLAN

- 1 Reception Desk
- 2 Teaching Kitchen
- 3 Coordinator of Res. Life Office
- 4 Study Room
- 5 Club Meeting Room
- 6 Coordinator of Res. Life Residence
- 7 Multi-purpose Room
- 8 Hall Commons
- 9 Laundry + Recycling
- 10 Student Life Advisor Residence & Office
- 11 Study Lounge



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Community Connection

A mature live oak visually anchors the south end of the lobby, preserved by stepping the building's footprint around the tree's canopy. Permeable paving extends beyond the tree's canopy and creates a shaded space to gather for outdoor school & community events. A masonry plinth at the entry conceals access to the lobby and collects roof runoff down rain chains into a terraced rain garden.

Custom signage at the base of the entry stairs reinforces the school's identity, welcomes the public, and guides visitors up to a secure access point into the lobby.



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Massing & Materials

The tree canopy above the pathway is at the edge of a line of mature cypress trees that march along the southern edge of the Girls' Wing.

Inspired by the tree species found on site, warm and tactile native cypress wood weaves through and unifies the ground-level shared spaces. Brick masonry with projected coursing lines encases the private residences and vertical circulation, while zinc and glass-enclosed volumes stretch across the connective social spaces, serving as an inviting counterpoint.

A110.06

Internal Connectivity

An inviting front porch springs up from the double-height lobby to greet students as they return from class. The transparent lobby allows students to transition between the formal courtyard and classes on the east side to the casual backyard, with several areas for students to rejuvenate on the west side. Two glazed residential hall commons stack above the lobby, overlooking the courtyard and backyard.

The simple masonry volumes that house the student residences respond to the neighboring classroom building through color, texture, scale, and mass. A new sidewalk running along the brick arcade of the existing classroom building aligns with the main entry into the lobby. The formal courtyard between the buildings is the site of a future art installation and outdoor classroom honoring the legacy of the noted American naturalist Caroline Dormon.



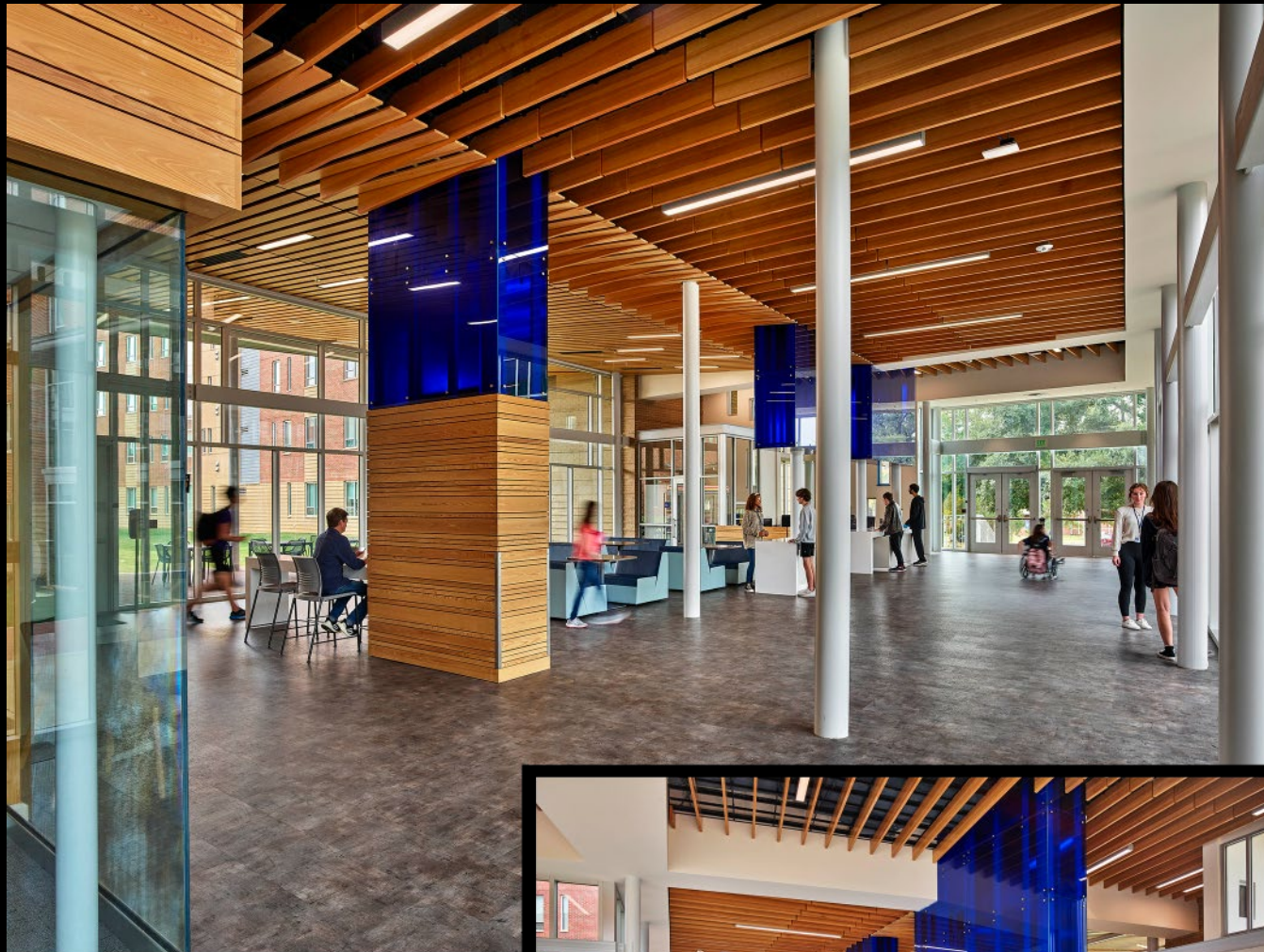
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Front Porch

Morning sun illuminates the double-height front porch, completely shading the area throughout the afternoon as students return from classes. This key student entry point is attuned to the rhythms of circulation throughout the day, and the porch has become a busy meet-up spot on campus. The north-south orientation of the lobby generates the pinwheel arrangement of the three building wings.

The sloped angle of the wood-slat porch ceiling extends into the interior and pulls natural light deep into the lobby.





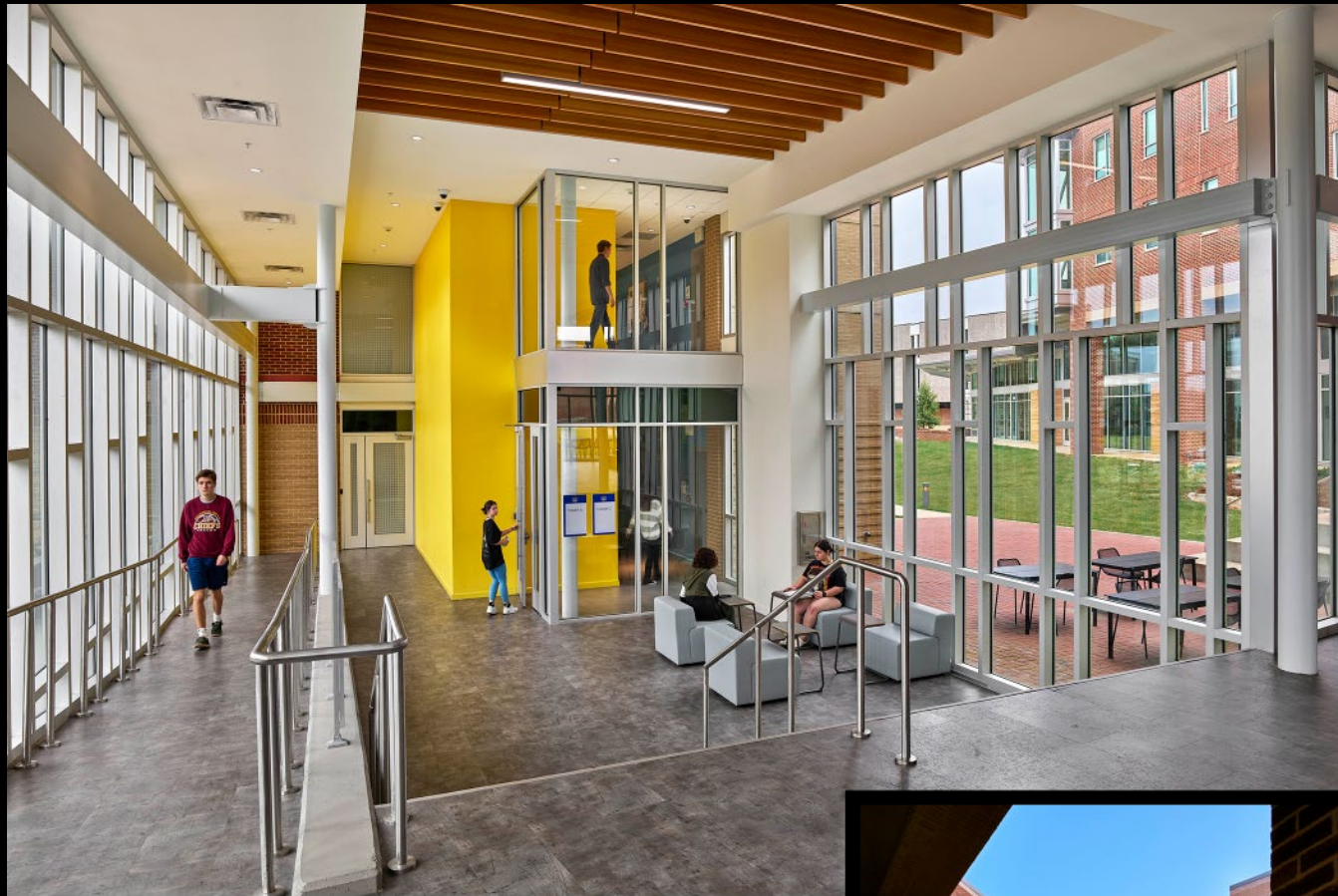
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The Hub

The three wings of the building are linked together by a double-height lobby that connects the formal courtyard to the east to the terraced "backyard" to the west. The glazing at the south side entrance frames the view of a substantial live oak.

Cypress wood slat ceiling members slope down from the front porch, concealing HVAC systems and making a delicate finger-joint transition to horizontal wood baffles. A series of sapphire-blue glass volumes align with the wood transition and extend down from the ceiling - a nod to the school colors.

All students circulate through the lobby multiple times each day. By design, the layout creates opportunities for chance meetings and conversations. Along the lobby's thoroughfare are the reception desk, snack shop, information kiosk, teaching kitchen, wellness center, resident coordinator's office, and secure access vestibules to residential halls. The lobby has the flexibility and capacity to support meetings and events for the entire student body.



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Stepping Down

The building integrates into the existing topography, stepping down to the natural grade from the lobby level to the Girls' Wing. Exterior and interior accessible circulation paths occur along natural circulation patterns at both sides of the curtain wall. A social stair resolves the two levels and provides additional seating looking onto the backyard. The seat profile of the social stair extends out to the exterior forming a series of seat steps that cascade down from the lobby terrace to the backyard.

Secure access to the wings is through transparent vestibules, observable by staff and visually connected to the lobby. Distinctive colors identify the four-story vertical circulation elements that are legible from the exterior, especially at night.





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Unwind, Connect, and Recharge

Providing a respite from the students' hectic academic schedules, a procession of support and social spaces extend from the lobby, including a shared demonstration kitchen, wellness center, club conference room, study spaces, craft/multi-purpose room, game room - and marching along the hallway, a series of cypress-clad volumes with recessed seating nooks lead to a student lounge that anchors the wing.

At the student lounge, a ribbon of cypress wraps around the room - simultaneously forming a karaoke stage, seating, desk space, and screen wall for a large display monitor. The stage/seat overlooks a covered wrap-around porch and communal firepit, allowing larger groups to spill out and gather around.





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Ten Neighborhoods

Ten independently functioning “neighborhood halls” nest within the building and organize the student residences, each comprising nine four-person suites. The arrangement allows students to engage in smaller groups and become more closely acquainted with one another. A graduate-level Student Life Advisor (SLA) oversees the community engagement, academic development, and mental health of the 36 teenagers within each neighborhood and maintains an office and residence on the hall.

Each neighborhood hall has a distinctive accent color that punctuates wall and ceiling surfaces. Students pass through a light-filled hall commons going to and from their rooms. These inclusive spaces are appealing places to hang out, share a meal, or hold a group meeting. Each “neighborhood” has its own laundry, trash & recycling center, and a quiet study lounge overlooking the courtyards.



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View from the athletic field



A110.13

Beacon

The twilight hour reveals colors and textures within the interior. Wherever they are, students feel connected and cared for. The students' nightly rituals, rhythms, and movements animate the building as each day draws to a close. Stacked study lounges at the end of the wings overlook the backyard.

To the left, the popular firepit near the student lounge sites along cardinal points, opening to the west. The school requested twenty individual time capsule vaults be recessed into the firepit walls to house each graduating class's memories and artifacts.

