

Program Summary:

Rehabilitation of a historic (c. 1926) school building into the main campus of a French Immersion charter school to serve its parish in rural Acadiana.

Program Statement:

This building housed the town's high school for decades. It remains a parish landmark, famous among generations of local people who passed through its doors. After the high school closed in 1991, the building lapsed into prolonged vacancy. As deterioration worsened, community stakeholders realized it was in danger. The question of a new purpose for the building eventually inspired a charter school to foster the region's Francophone identity for future generations. The rehabilitated building is now that school's main campus.

The project revels in the building's clear spatial organization – a two-story center-hall plan flanked by two open stairwells, creating a central space filled with natural light – as well as its rich material palette. A fresh yet respectful attitude toward colors and illumination, resourceful consolidation of historic finishes, and sympathetic new finishes where needed, infuse the building with a 21st-century sensibility that showcases its history.

Throughout the campus, new covered walkways link the building to adjacent civic amenities. Crucial stormwater detention ensures protection from the rains of South Louisiana's changing climate.

When the school first opened in 1926, it was racially segregated. Many of the children who walked through its doors spoke French as their native language and were punished for it here. The language of their homes and their families was something to be corrected, suppressed, and forgotten. Today, ninety percent of the school day at this charter school is taught in French to a diverse student body. The building has come full circle: not only restored, but also redeemed.

RR-105.01

Building Area (sf):

15,593 SF

Cost per Square Foot:

\$311.53

Construction Cost:

\$4,857,688.11

Date of Completion:

March 2026

RR-105.02

The century-old structure, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, sat empty for over three decades. In 2017, the building's continued vacancy sparked a conversation among community members about its future.

The conversation around saving the building resulted in the establishment of a French Immersion charter school to serve its rural, and historically Francophone, parish in Acadiana.

The new school started at a separate location in town, building its student body through the early grade levels. As the children grew, the need for an upper campus became more pressing.

This building was rehabilitated to become that campus. It is a textbook example of 1920s institutional architecture: a two-story center-hall plan bookended by a stair at each side and two mezzanine levels that introduce a quiet split-level character unique to the building's section.



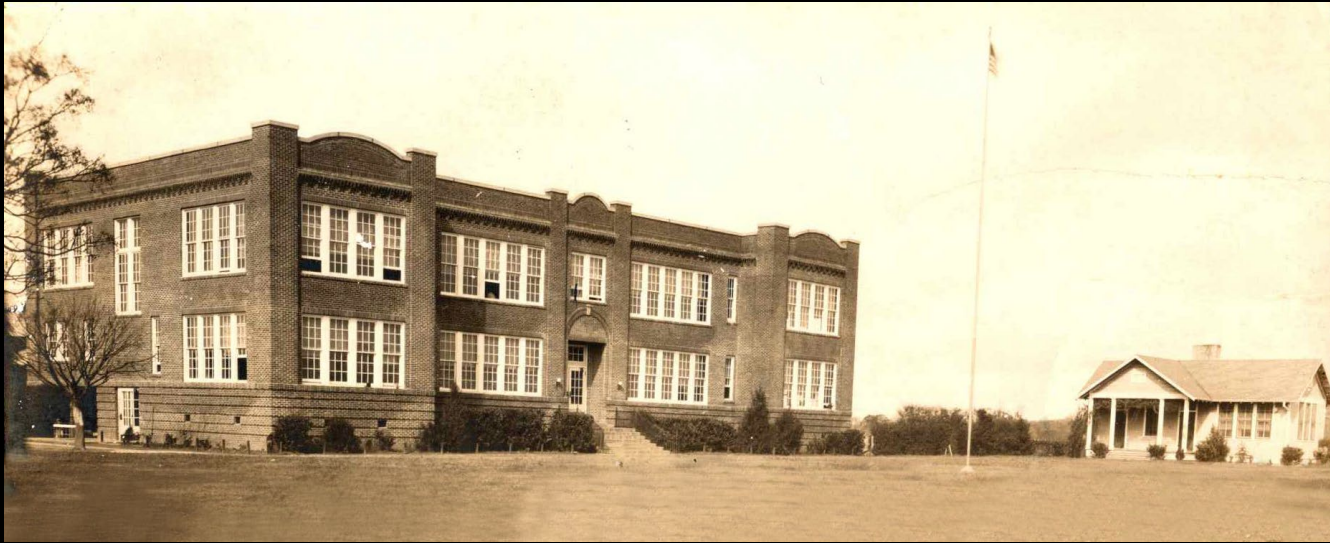
RR-105.03

This school building was constructed in 1926 from a design by an architect based in Alexandria, Louisiana, who designed numerous commercial and institutional buildings in the region.

Historic photos at left:

Upper:
View from southeast showing the front side of the building and neighboring house (since demolished).

Lower:
View from west showing the back side of the building. This was the dropoff location for school buses, both motorized and horse-drawn. Period school buses are shown parked in front of the building.





RR-105.04

The building sat empty for three decades starting with the closure of the local high school in 1991.

Photos taken before rehabilitation showing deterioration due to neglect:

Upper:
View from southwest, showing boarded windows and open loggia.

Lower:
Interior of typical classroom, showing graffiti, boarded windows, and humidity damage.





RR-105.05

Across the building, all windows were reglazed, with nearly half the panes replaced; several windows on the rear elevation, damaged by fire, were fully refabricated to match the originals.

At night, the front facade is illuminated, restoring the building's civic presence on the streetscape.



RR-105.06

A new canopy was reinstated along the sides of the building to shelter students arriving by school bus or car on the same side of the building as the historic bus dropoff. This design is modeled on the existing mid-century canopies encountered on the project site.

The original ground-floor loggia, located under the south mezzanine, was enclosed to expand the interior footprint, creating a dedicated space for art and music.

The colonnade was carefully infilled with modern storefront glazing, transparent enough to preserve the rhythm of the original arcade while meeting contemporary needs for enclosure, interior climate control, and visibility due to security threats.



RR-105.07

All preservation work was conducted in accordance with the guidelines in National Park Service Preservation Briefs.

The original entry door was restored, fitted with new hardware, and painted red to signal a welcoming threshold.

Period-appropriate exterior sconces were selected, based on photographs from the 1920s.

New code-compliant handrails were introduced alongside the restored original guardrails.

All exterior brick was cleaned, repointed, and sealed.

RR-105.08

Beneath successive layers of carpet, vinyl tile, and plywood, the original longleaf pine floor of the center hall lay waiting. Revealed and restored, it now reads with the honest patina of nearly a century of use.

The original wainscoting was stripped down and restrained in a dark espresso-like finish consistent with the archival investigation. The finish of wood trim was coded by function to aid wayfinding: Trim at entry doors to classrooms and offices was stained dark, while trim at transoms was painted in the green trim color used throughout the project.

Above, the pressed metal ceiling, a hallmark of the 1920s institutional architecture, was fully restored, reconsolidated from other places in the building.

New contemporary lighting was introduced that nods to the past while acknowledging the present movement.





RR-105.09

The stairs were carefully restored, with the original newel posts and guardrails preserved in place. Handrails were modernized to meet current codes.

Where original door openings were retained, the historic 5-panel door leaves were retained and restored. Where new door openings were introduced, 2-panel door leaves detailed to match the historic doors were installed.

Additional code-related enhancements for the new school include an elevator in a new shaft to connect all floors and the mezzanine level, improving accessibility for all who enter the building.

RR-105.10

The wainscoting and trim throughout the office spaces and classrooms were painted in a green drawn from the school's colors, not a literal match, but a period-appropriate interpretation that would have been at home in a 1920s building.

In the school's administrative area on the mezzanine level, a Florentine glass opening between offices was restored with new glazing, preserving historic texture while allowing natural light to extend into interior spaces.





RR-105.11

In the double-height spaces of both stairwells, the original wall furnaces were left as artifacts.

The large pendant light fixtures punctuate both the experience of the building's interior and the views in from outside.

RR-105.12

The pressed metal ceilings, restored in the majority of classrooms, are animated by new linear direct-indirect fixtures that wash light upward across the original surface, making the ceiling itself the luminaire.

Original heating furnaces were left in place throughout as witnesses to the building's past life: The rehabilitation brings central HVAC to the building for the first time in its history. The project team deployed fresh air intakes, units, and ductwork with great care to minimize these elements' impact on interior spaces and exterior façades, particularly in classrooms and at window openings.

The classroom floors presented a practical tension: much of the original wood was reconsolidated into the center hall restoration, and the classroom acoustics demanded something more forgiving than the hard surfaces. The solution was a carpet tile that reads like wood from a distance while its palette of greens, browns, and creams match the greater color palette of the project.



RR-105.13

At night, the building announces itself. Lit from the front, the 1926 façade reclaims its presence on the streetscape it defined for generations.

New sidewalks extend the campus outward, connecting it to a public park with basketball and pickleball courts, to a public library, and to a community center at the rear.

The renewed building is the heart of its community once again: by day, a place of learning; by night, a glowing beacon; and at all times, a symbol of a reemerging cultural heritage.

