LEARNING BY DESIGN Grand Prize 2016

John Adams Middle School
Santa Monica, CA

An infill and strategic improvement program for a 1,000-student campus leverages site improvements and a small amount of new building to transform a classic, mid-century campus in need of revitalization and upgrades. Nine new classrooms with associated outdoor learning spaces, a student store, 11,000 sf of new administrative space and an adaptively reused attendance office for studio art define the programmatic scope of the project. School-wide systems upgrades including data, power, and instructional equipment further define the extent of the project.

While the work is defined by the buildings, the associated landscape efforts are equally important. The project establishes a car-free campus by relocating existing parking consistently to the campus perimeter and advances a drought-tolerant agenda through new landscaping design that attacks the fringe of existing joint-use artificial turf fields. The design emerged through a series of workshops with parents and educators and employs an approach to new form that highlights sustainability and knowledge building. The new entry is defined by the new attendance office and relocated art room to create a welcoming, safe and active entry sequence.

The east classrooms create a new face to the commons and replace deteriorated classrooms that were compromised by level changes and substandard thermal performance. The design draws on the campus's mid-century roots with similarly thin, naturally ventilated buildings that include one distinctive formal variant—solar chimneys. The chimneys provide an empirical learning opportunity on differential pressure and dispense with the need for air-conditioning. The superheated south-facing glass rises 11 feet above the ceiling line, supplementing daylight and inducing hot air to rise through automated louvers at the top. This action, in turn, pulls cool air from earth tubes below ground that are fed by fresh air inlet vents incorporated into outdoor worktables.

The project draws inspiration from the underappreciated historic (and environmentally progressive) context and demonstrates an approach to design that harnesses sustainability to enrich the usability of the campus, builds stronger social space, embeds information for students in the architecture itself and achieves distinctive form-making.

Remodel/Adaptive Reuse/ Restoration

Entire school/campus building

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DESIGN TEAM
NAC Architecture, Architect of Record
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OWNER/CLIENT
Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District
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KEY STATS
Grades Served: 6–8
Capacity: 1,000
Size of Site: 16.4 acres
Building Area: 19,243 sq. ft.
Space per Student: 19 sq. ft.
Cost per Student: $8,256
Square Foot Cost: $429
Construction Cost: $8,256,000
Project Cost: $12,900,000
Completion Date: June 2013
Sustainability Rating System/Applied/Status/Level: Applied for CHPS

PHOTOGRAPHY: ERIC STAUDENMAIER