

CASE STUDY



America's Finest Charter School K-8 Site Master Plan

San Diego Unified School District
San Diego, California

Site: 2.97 acres

Building: 50,095 sqft
(SMP Alternative II)

Student Population: 420 students (current enrollment) with plans to expand student enrollment in the future

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dated school facilities, a lack of site accessibility and an absence of community presence, America's Finest Charter School (AFCS) needed modernization and expansion in order to improve the quality of their learning environments to meet today's needs and tomorrow's future learning strategies.

Tasked with preparing a long-term development strategy for AFCS, DAHLIN + Rodriguez Park developed a Site Master Plan through a comprehensive and collaborative effort between the school's end users, students, parents, teachers, school staff, and community members. As an integral part of the outreach and design process, they provided insightful information on the wants, needs and desires for their new campus.

Multiple site planning scenarios were developed through an interactive design process, ultimately culminating in two final development approaches for consideration by the Charter School Facilities Committee. The new Site Master Plan proposed replacement facilities for the aged school site of primarily non-conforming portables. The favored approach strategically phased construction where further site improvements could stop indefinitely after each construction phase, and allow school operations to proceed unimpeded.

CHALLENGES

Initially tasked to evaluate the existing school site to accommodate a portable toilet because the existing facilities were not ADA compliant and failed to meet the correct ratio needed for the size of the school, it became apparent on the first site visit, that there was no accessibility across the entire site.

All of the portable classrooms required the use of stairs to access them, and the campus itself was multilevel and without compliant accessibility between the different levels. As a result, it was decided that expanding the scope to prepare a Site Master Plan (SMP) that addressed the issues of accessibility, improved campus facilities, and school safety and security, was greatly needed.

Encompassing an area of nearly three acres (of which 2.3 net acres were usable), the relatively small and restrictive size of the school site presented a tremendous challenge in meeting the District requirements and the recommendations assembled by the stakeholders of the collaborative visioning and outreach process.

With only one permanent building on-site supported by 14 portable classroom structures, the dated structures needed repair or replacement. With no plans in the foreseeable future to expand the current student enrollment of 420 students, the Design Team's task was to maximize and expand upon current needs and requirements to create a state-of-the-art school that will serve as an invaluable asset to the Encanto neighborhood and community.



HOW DAHLIN + RODRIGUEZ PARK HELPED



America's Finest Charter School located within the Encanto residential neighborhood.

Informed Site Design

Located in a residential zone of the Encanto neighborhood, America's Finest Charter School (AFCS) is immediately bordered by residential properties on four sides with frontage along 45th Street and a secondary point of access from 44th and F Streets.

DAHLIN + Rodriguez Park conducted a thorough evaluation of the site context, existing campus layout, and the condition of existing school facilities to document and map the constraints and opportunities of development. This initial site study provided the participants and stakeholders of the outreach process with a basis for understanding the existing and surrounding site conditions from circulation to topography, climate,

zoning, site utilization, utilities, architectural character and more. The site analysis also provided the Design Team with a preliminary assessment of the physical and programmatic feasibility of ideas.

Confirming that much of the school site was non-compliant from an accessibility standard, it was also concluded that the dated school structures within the current campus layout, did not adequately serve the educational needs of the program as well as neglected to establish a presence within the community—lacking of a clear identity and point of entrance to the school. Almost absent as a community place and educational institution, the desire to renew and improve AFCS and its impact on the neighborhood character, became a major project goal.



COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROCESS

Project Team Preliminary Meeting

SMP Purpose Workshop Approach Scope/Schedule

DTF Workshop 1 Kick-off

Purpose/Process Existing Conditions Feedback

DTF Workshop 2 Brainstorm/Design

Visioning Facility Programming Site Analysis/Design Feedback

DTF Workshop 3 Design Options

(3) Site Plan Options Preferred Option Selected Feedback

DTF Workshop 4 Refined Option/Selection

Preferred Option Refined Final Option Selected (for CSFC Submittal)

Design Reviews with SDUSD Educational Specifications/Design Guidelines

Two final alternatives are prepared for presentation to CSFC after design reviews with SDUSD Facilities Planning and Construction.

CSFC Presentation

Final SMP Presentation

Stakeholder Collaboration Behind a Clear Outreach Process

Over a four-month period, a series of workshops to develop a Site Master Plan (SMP) for AFCS was facilitated by the Design Team (DAHLIN + Rodriguez Park) with the participation of the Design Task Force (DTF) committee (comprised of school staff, parents and community members) and San Diego Unified School District (SDUSD) executive management.

Their comprehensive and collaborative engagement as the school's end users, provided valuable feedback on the existing conditions, deficiencies, and the site and facility requirements of designing a new modern school for them. The information revealed by feedback, combined with the output of workshop exercises, defined the project goals and a facility program that translated the wants, needs and desires of all of its stakeholders.

With a program in place, DAHLIN + Rodriguez Park proceeded with design on the premise that all existing permanent and portable buildings were to be demolished and removed at the completion of new school construction, and that facilities met 2030 enrollment projections. Preliminary site design studies indicated that maintaining a strong east-west pedestrian corridor through the site offered the most flexibility to circulation. A total of six concepts were developed as a result of an iterative planning and design process reviewed and refined in the sequence of DTF workshops—two of which ultimately, were proposed as final alternatives for presentation to the Charter School Facilities Committee (CFSC).

Facility Programming:



Site Security / DTF recommended improvements to campus and building security to better manage site access before, during and after school hours. Additionally, they wanted a solution to issues of student safety at the drop-off and pick-up area, unobserved spaces around the campus, wayfinding during evacuation drills, and separate access to designated primary and middle school areas.



Vehicular and Pedestrian Circulation / Improved student safety from vehicular traffic at the drop-off and pick-up area, inadequate staff parking, storage for alternate modes of transportation, and pathways through the campus.



Accessibility / Campus and buildings need compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements.



Landscape and Shading / AFCS teachers and staff expressed the desire for more gardens, shade trees and shading devices for UV protection while supervising outdoor activities.



Campus Identity / Design new buildings in a contemporary style with colors and materials to establish itself as a state-of-the-art facility and distinguish the school as an important community amenity. Campus planning and building layout should also incorporate multimodal teaching and learning.



Welcome Center / DTF suggested a need for a new Administration building that includes an attendance area and entry lobby with areas to display student work and create school identity.



Multipurpose Room / AFCS currently has no multipurpose room and uses the existing grass area east of the site to stage school assemblies. A new multipurpose room may function to support other needed spaces including Visual and Performing Arts (VAPA), indoor lunch dining area, and an updated kitchen.



Learning Commons / The facility also lacks a proper library and DTF requested that a new Learning Commons be incorporated in the new school design, providing a balance of both digital and traditional resources.



Special Education / Two classrooms are needed to meet special education student requirements. Currently, they assemble in undesignated spaces.



Physical Education & Fitness / High on the students' list of physical education activities is basketball. A basketball court and sport storage area is desired. Other suggestions included a soccer field, walking/running track and seating area with shade.



Classrooms with Support Spaces / DTF desires updated technology-rich and flexible classrooms with support spaces including:

Collaboration Spaces that serve as flexible multiuse breakout areas.

A Maker Space that may adapt for multiple purposes such as visual arts, video production, journalism programs, project-based work area, and the delivery of a site specific STEM/STEAM program.

A Professional Center to accommodate short- and long-term planning, and cross the efforts of instructional staff.

AMERICA'S FINEST CHARTER SCHOOL



45th Street / Front Elevation

SMP Alternative I

DESIGN PREMISE

Assumes all existing permanent and portable buildings are to be demolished and removed at the completion of new school construction.

DESIGN CONCEPT

SMP Alternative I is the culmination of iterative planning and design efforts stemming from the outreach process. It retains the existing, east-west pedestrian corridor through the center of the school site. Off-street parking with a drop-off and pick-up area adjacent to the 45th Street entry creates a grand entry procession, permits accessible parking spaces to be located closer to the buildings, and provides safety and control to the drop-off and pick-up area with a main Administration building.

The heart of the campus is composed of a multipurpose room with optional partitionable spaces that could facilitate other program needs, a performance area, kitchen, toilet facilities, and a covered lunch area. This layout provides separation between the kindergarten village and main classroom building which integrates collaboration spaces via a central learning corridor to promote today's new learning and teaching paradigms.

The lower level of the campus to the west, provides staff parking accessible from 44th and F Streets, and a consolidated play area for physical education with a grass playfield encircled by a walking/running path and a multipurpose sports hard court.

Executing the development of this concept, required adding portable classroom structures to relocate existing classrooms and school administration offices to other areas, while new construction of the main classroom building is underway. It was suggested that the execution of this concept could be complex and highly disruptive to ongoing school operations. As a result, the less disruptive Alternative II was conceived for further consideration, as it permitted incremental development that would allow AFCS to defer construction at any point of the project.

TOTAL BUILDING AREA: 58,346 sqft



Level 2 (Second Floor)



Level 1 (at 45th Street)



Lower Level

The Tale of Two Approaches



45th Street / Front Elevation

SMP Alternative II

DESIGN PREMISE

Assumes phased construction in a manner that allows the school to operate unencumbered after the completion of each phase.

DESIGN CONCEPT

SMP Alternative II focuses on a phased approach to campus construction where school operations could proceed unimpeded, while incorporating and maintaining the key design strategies and project goals of all previously proposed concepts. It was determined that existing permanent structures should be evaluated for reuse; that areas void of existing structures offer less disruptive opportunities for new development; and that the area currently utilized for portables could be repurposed to provide better support to the educational mission of the school.

While this design concept retains the same, strong east-west pedestrian corridor through the center of the school site, it does not provide off-street parking with a drop-off and pick-up area adjacent to 45th Street. Instead, a new two-story classroom building designated for elementary grades first through sixth, special education and administration offices, anchors the northeast corner of the site, where currently used as an asphalted play area. A second two-story classroom building for grades seventh and eighth is provided to the south edge of the lower level of the school site.

The one existing permanent structure on campus would be converted into the kindergarten village with a visible play area adjacent to 45th Street, and a multipurpose room and learning commons tucked behind. This central assembly area bridges an L-wrapped configuration of buildings across the campus, and consolidates the grass playfield, multipurpose sports hard court and asphalted elementary playground into an enlarged outdoor commons.

Staff parking is accessible from 44th and F Streets at the lower level to the west, along with the second two-story classroom building and play areas.

TOTAL BUILDING AREA: 50,095 sqft



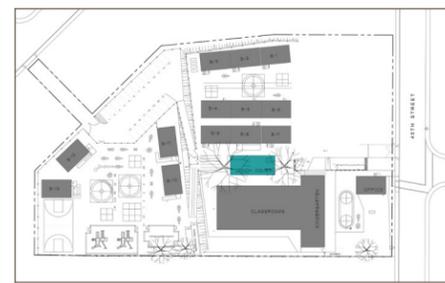
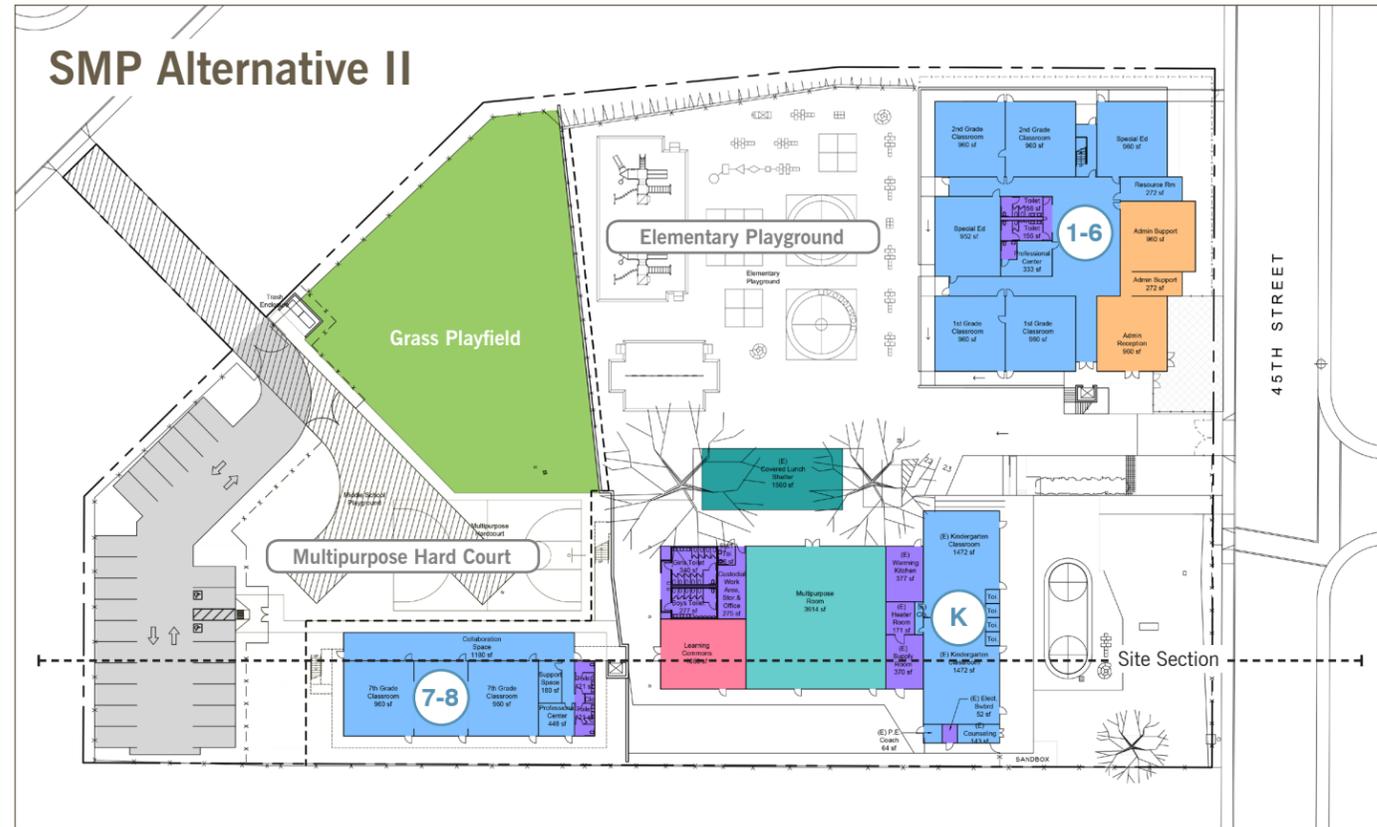
Level 2 (Second Floor)



Level 1 (at 45th Street)



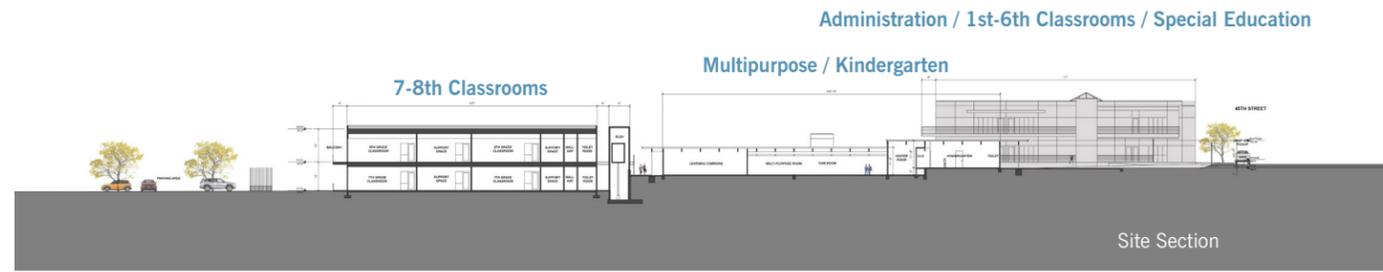
Lower Level



- Administration
- Learning Commons
- Multipurpose Room
- Classrooms
- Building Services
- Covered Lunch Shelter
- Grass Playfield
- Staff Parking

SMP Alternative II approaches site development in three main stages. The kindergarten village stays in its current location in the site's one existing permanent structure, and converts the use of other space for schoolwide assembly and support. Areas of the site without structures are designated for new two-story classroom buildings. This strategy keeps the portable classrooms in place and operational while new facilities are under construction.

Existing Campus Layout



Bringing a School and Community Together

Renewing School Identity, Community Spirit and Neighborhood Character

America Finest Charter School's lack of presence and identity in the community as an educational institution and resource was expressed early on in community outreach workshops.

DAHLIN + Rodriguez Park responded to the stakeholder's desires by designing new buildings in a contemporary style with colors and materials that enhance the architectural aesthetic to distinguish its identity.

The new 45th Street elevation of SMP Alternative II is recognizable without overwhelming the immediate neighborhood. Cutting-edge classrooms with built-in technologies and energy-efficient strategies are integrated throughout the campus. As a community asset, the plans for the new school will promote community spirit and renew the neighborhood character.

RESULTS AND FUTURE PLANS

Nearly a year after the onset of the first project meeting, the final two Site Master Plan alternatives were presented to the Charter School

Facilities Committee (CSFC) as a proposal to the committee's list of projects for consideration.

SMP Alternative II was favored, because it was less complicated to implement and minimized operational disruption in terms of how students and staff would be shuffled around the school site as a part of the phasing strategy. The difference between this concept and SMP Alternative I also amounted to approximately \$4 million less in construction cost. District bonds passed in the last election and the SMP will go before the School District Board for approval in Spring 2019.



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The rendering of SMP Alternative II illustrates an improved AFCS elevation along 45th Street, providing a clear identity and presence within the Encanto neighborhood.