EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD NEW ORLEANS
GARDEN CLASSROOM AND KITCHEN

at PHILLS WHEATLEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL,
a FIRSTLINE SCHOOL
ESY NOLA Wheatley Outdoor Classroom and Kitchen Vision is a collaboration of:

Edible Schoolyard New Orleans (ESYNOLA)
FirstLine Schools
Phillis Wheatley Community School
and The Albert and Tina Small Center for Collaborative Design
at Tulane School of Architecture

with support from:
Johnson Controls Incorporated
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OVERVIEW
edible schoolyard new orleans
esy mission
outreach

PROCESS
vision
existing site conditions
scope of uses + site options
preliminary proposals
desired program

FUTURE
proposed program
proposal
floor plans + interior perspectives
Edible Schoolyard New Orleans (ESYNOLA) changes the way children eat, learn, and live at four FirstLine public charter schools in New Orleans. Our aim is to improve the long-term well being of our students, families, and school community, by integrating hands-on organic gardening and seasonal cooking into the school curriculum, culture, and cafeteria programs. We work to create a strong and vibrant school community where students are engaged in experiential learning through hands-on kitchen and garden classes and special events, and where students are provided with healthy, nutritious meals and snacks through school-based meal programs in an inviting and sustainable cafeteria setting.

ESYNOLA involves students and the school community in growing, harvesting, preparing and enjoying food together as a means of awakening their senses, cultivating an environment that promotes a sense of pride and responsibility for our land and natural resources, and developing a love of fresh, seasonal foods. We help our children find a place at the table, and in the world, by nourishing their minds and bodies, building community through our programming, and creating a beautiful environment that stimulates students’ curiosity and desire to learn about the natural world. As part of this vision, the whole school community – students, families, teachers, and neighbors – is able to participate in the growing, harvesting and sharing of food together as a means of building community and improving the health and well-being of all those we serve.
EDIBLE SCHOOLYARD MISSION:
TO TEACH CHILDREN TO MAKE HEALTHY CONNECTIONS THROUGH FOOD

Our aim is to ensure the long-term well-being of students, families, and school communities by:

- Integrating hands-on kitchen and garden classes into the school curriculum and culture
- Inviting students, families, and the community to experience local food through joyful events involving chefs, farmers, and community partners
- Supporting core academic learning in garden and kitchen learning environments
- Maintaining beautiful school gardens that stimulate students' curiosity and desire to learn about the natural world
- Cultivating safe spaces for social and emotional development
- Collaborating to provide healthy delicious food in welcoming school cafeterias

GARDEN EDUCATION  Teaching children how to grow their own food
VISION

Edible Schoolyard New Orleans envisions generations of New Orleans children who have healthy relationships with food, the natural world, themselves, and their community.

OUR VALUES

These are the cornerstones of the edible experience at FirstLine Schools:

- Food education is taught in conjunction with core academics.
- Children learn by doing.
- Health and wellness contribute to the success of the whole child.
- Beauty is the language of caring.
- Local farms and sustainable farming practices are an important part of our past and future.
- School food reform supports the education and wellness of the whole child.
- Families and communities are a vital part of our recipe for success.

CULINARY EDUCATION

Teaching children how to prepare and enjoy the food they grow
Engagement of different project stakeholders at different times in the school year was a large part of the design team’s process. From shadowing students in their garden classes to observing open garden day and surveying the neighborhood for traffic and pedestrian patterns, these interactions and observations provided insights into the neighborhood context as well as the day-to-day operations of ESYNOLA at Wheatley.

Additionally, the design team surveyed other ESYNOLA schools to understand the sizing, functions, and materials of the classroom and garden spaces across the ESYNOLA program at FirstLine Schools. Reading discussions lead by the Small Center Engagement Manager helped to frame the site specific design and research within the larger New Orleans neighborhood and educational context.

**Outreach**

Schematic design feedback was provided by a core team of educators and stakeholders from Wheatley, FirstLine Schools, and ESYNOLA. This core design team established direction on the program and placement of the design. Parents and students also provided their feedback on materials, qualities of space, and the history of the site through targeted outreach at Family Food Night.

**Family Food Night**

Parents engaged: 14  
Wheatley students engaged: 32

Materiality survey preferences (in votes):  
(27) Recycled plastic wood  
(21) Perforated Aluminum  
(15) Carpet squares  
(13) painted ply (green)  
(12) Homosote  
(11) Tile  
(9) painted ply (dark blue)  
(8) stained ply (redish)  
(7) painted ply (white)  
(6) Felt  
(3) Acrylic  
(15) Dark (ipe-like) wood  
(9) Medium (heartpine) wood  
(7) Light (Birch) wood

-Docomomo US website

“I REMEMBER WHEATLEY! I HAD A LOT OF FAMILY GO THERE. GOOD MEMORIES OF THAT PLACE!”
-Woman in her 40’s attending Family Food Night

“THIS SCHOOL LOOK COLD MAN! WOW, THIS SCHOOL LOOKS COLD. THIS USED TO BE HERE? THAT’S COOL.”
-3 female students attending Family Food Night
SITE AND PROCESS

SITE: PHILLIS WHEATLEY COMMUNITY SCHOOL
VISION

Our outdoor classrooms allow us to help children and their families make healthy connections to the environment, themselves and their communities through food. Non-traditional school learning laboratories like gardens and kitchens allow us to create joyful and memorable community experiences that allow us to achieve this goal. This project will help us develop a more sophisticated model for outdoor learning that will be our most widely useful, and financially sustainable yet, one that can be adapted to any school realizing a similar mission.
SCOPE OF USES

Nestled between iconic New Orleans restaurants, Dooky Chase and Willie Mae’s, the Wheatley garden is now two years old, and features a “gumbo garden” where many of the herbs and vegetables used in Leah Chase’s gumbo grow. There is also a small production garden, lovingly tended by Wheatley students and ESYNOLA staff. Fences around the school are covered in beautiful muscadine and passionfruit vines. The urban campus has recently added a community orchard, with plantings of fig, satsuma, grapefruit, orange, lemon, lime, kumquat, and papaya trees.
Two main options presented themselves as locations for the Edible Schoolyard New Orleans Teaching Kitchen. Site A positioned itself adjacent to the existing, large planting area and open space that is shared with the playground. Site B took advantage of an unutilized corner of the property between the recreational field and a rear entry. Each site carried with it a series of advantages and disadvantages related to several topics of study, including permeability, solar access, maximum gathering size, nearby sound/distraction levels, proximity to restrooms, circulation sequence to indoor classrooms, and, of course, buildable area. It was decided to develop preliminary design options for each site to help envision which direction would be the best fit.
SITE A:

This proposal created a series of planted trellises bordering the northern edge of the school to maximize the plantable area of the site. The interior portion of the project is located in an unused utility area. The main entry to the outdoor area from the street is bracketed by the teaching kitchen and the trellises, creating a lush, planted archway.

The existing demising fence between the playground and planting area is envisioned as a colorful, green wall for climbing vines and hanging plants.
SITE B:

This scheme locates itself in a narrow corner of the site near an exit stair. The long interior volume of the classroom is intended to open up and "spill" into the adjacent covered patio area, which is flanked by planting beds.

A gestural butterfly roof provides opportunities for water collection.
PROGRAM

After the first round of proposals, the ESYNOLA and TSC design teams re-evaluated the amount of square footage reasonably available at each site and began to reconcile that with the (larger) amount of program that would be ideal.

Although each scheme addressed specific pieces of the program very well, neither scheme seemed to be an ideal fit.
PROPOSED PROGRAM

The scheme was re-worked to raise the bulk of the interior program to be accessible from the second floor of Wheatley, which allowed much greater utilization of the ground for covered teaching and planting spaces.

The program was also pared to focus on the creation of larger, more open teaching areas, rather than smaller spaces for parcelized program.

> reduce program to fit on site
> raise program to create covered outdoor classroom
> locate garden spaces adjacent to covered outdoor classroom, with main floor accessible to Wheatley's second floor

DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF PROPOSED PROGRAM
PROPOSED SCHEME

The proposed scheme lifts the main teaching classroom to the second floor, accessible from the adjacent existing stair and walkway. This frees up the ground floor to have a wide array of options for planting, teaching, and storage areas.

The main level hosts the main teaching kitchen area and pantry area, as well as an open office area for ESYNOLA staff along the western side. The western wall is composed with vertical dividers to segment the office space desks and provide protection from harsh sunlight.

The overall massing and program is intended to be reminiscent of the original Phillis Wheatley School, with the benefit of 63 years' worth of hindsight.
ROOF OVERHANG ON SOUTHERN FACE
A generous overhang allows a greater expanse of glazing to allow ambient natural light into the space. The southern edge provides a natural location for climbing or hanging plants as well.

FINS ON THE WESTERN WALL
Colorful internal fins in the colors of the school add a liveliness to the main facade and serve to block harsh western light and create desk dividers.

STORAGE AND RESTROOMS AT GARDEN
Restrooms and tools are positioned in a built-out area underneath the main structure for easy access.

GARDEN TEACHING AREA
A large covered teaching area is located underneath the main structure, surrounded by planting areas.

PLANTING AREAS ENCIRCLE BUILDING
Allowing the structure to float above the planting areas allows significantly more area for teaching gardens.
The addition utilizes the existing vertical circulation at Phillis Wheatley Community School. The new volume overlooks the sports field and the planting areas below.
SUNLIGHT, CIRCULATION, VIEWS
TEAM

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FirstLine Schools
Joseph Neary

Phillis Wheatley Community School
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Tulane School of Architecture
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Small Center
Emilie Taylor Welty (Project manager), Sue Mobley (Engagement),
Maggie Hansen, Donn Peabody, Nick Jenisch, Shoshana Gordon

Master planning and Schematic design for the Edible Schoolyard New Orleans at Phillis Wheatley Community School was a collaboration of the Edible Schoolyard New Orleans, Small Center, and Tulane School of Architecture students, with Seth Welty as design lead.
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