

Education

TEF Design And Project Color Corps Create An Inspiring School In Vallejo

By Meghan Dwyer • December 31, 2018



Photo by David Wakely

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San Francisco-based TEF Design and Berkeley-based non-profit Project Color Corps bring a sense of creativity to a public charter school by way of an awe-inspiring mural.

For a public charter school, Caliber ChangeMakers Academy, in the working class city of Vallejo, California, TEF Design has created a cost-efficient and visionary concrete structure pro-bono, incorporating various design strategies to make it both accommodating and inspiring. Completed on a budget of about \$16,500 in partnership with Project Color Corps, a nonprofit organization founded by Laura Guido-Clark that seeks to infuse a sense of optimism and hope into inner-city neighborhoods through color and pattern, the two story tilt-up incorporates a massive, colorful mural painted onto its interior courtyard.

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Photo by David Wakely

“Caliber Schools is an inspiring organization creating free, public, nonselective charter schools in Vallejo and Richmond, California,” says Bobbie Fisch, founding principal of TEF Design. “The inspiration for the mural design came directly from the four graduate pillars of Caliber School—think, smart, heart, and act—coupled with TEF’s goal to add vibrancy and color to the heart of the school. The dynamic quality of the mural reflects the diversity of the school community, which is one of the most diverse in the Bay Area.”

The new linear structure is able to accommodate up to 800 students, grades K-2, and color is incorporated from the entrance. The building’s south elevation is bisected by a semi-transparent box, dividing the blue and green facade and articulating the main doorway. Inside the school, a central courtyard provides outdoor space, stadium seating for social interaction, and most prominently, a sweeping mural that covers almost all surfaces.

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Photo by David Wakely

“Project Color Corps has a firm belief that the inspiration, color, and energy should come from students, teachers, and the community,” says Guido-Clark. “We engaged the school throughout the process so the students and community voices were heard and their ideas were represented.”

Students, parents, faculty, and the community were all a major part of the mural process. Workshops taught the kids about the power of color and the built environment and the students were eventually able to select the mural’s color scheme. When it came time, the community and the architects painted the mural side-by-side over the course of about three weeks. Bristle Brothers Mural Co. completed the parts that were unreachable and required scaffolding.



Photo by David Wakely

“Families were super excited about the school,” says Fisch. “The colors chosen by the children are theirs, and this is the first place in their lives that they experience color at this scale, up close daily, with an understanding of its power.”

The school’s courtyard now provides an abode for students and teachers to escape the classroom throughout the day, as well as a place for the entire school community to gather. As the first brick-and-mortar structure for Caliber, this school will provide a sense of belonging and foundation for the students.



Photo by David Wakely

“The kids and Caliber community have a deep sense of connection because it is their input, ideas, and passion that galvanized the project from the beginning when we taught them about color and asked them to vote on the palette,” says Guido-Clark. “By the time they come to paint, they are committed to helping their work come to fruition.”
