

# 7 Oakman



Address: 12920 Wadsworth

Parcel: 22023094

District: 7

SNF Area: n/a

Owner: City of Detroit

Site Area: 2.60 ac

Gross Floor Area: 47,500 sf

Floors: 1

Plan Type: O

School Type: Elementary

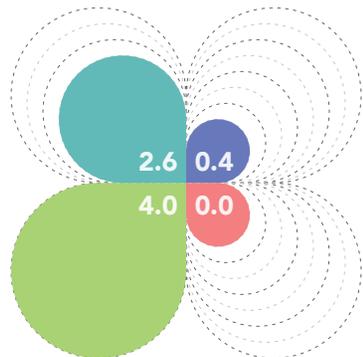
Year Built: 1929

Zoned: R1

Base Rehab Cost (est): \$1.8M

Total Rehab Cost (est): \$11.9M

Condition Market



History

Neighborhood



## Building Overview

Single story, double-loaded square ring with central courtyard.

Originally designed as a school for disabled children, with all spaces fully accessible.

Brick exterior with stone details and large stone porticoes over primary entrances.

Interior features terrazzo flooring and extensive use of glazed block on walls, including rounded corbel details framing windows.

Corners are anchored by four large communal spaces with their own entrances: gym, auditorium, cafeteria, and “cot room.”

Street-facing classrooms have individual access to exterior terraces.

Main interior facing classrooms have individual access to courtyard.

The school site is small and lacks open play space (thought unnecessary for disabled students).

Building exhibited water and fire damage, but appeared to be in stable condition.

## Neighborhood Overview

Located in Pride Area Community

Large number of vacant residential lots in surrounding area

Located one block north of Plymouth Road, a major east-west corridor. The nearest section includes churches and small apartment buildings, but no businesses.

The school is located a quarter mile south of Grand River Ave, one of the City’s major radial corridors.

The nearest section includes a small supermarket, small restaurants, and chain discount stores.

Parker School, another City-owned vacant school in this study, is located two blocks south of Oakman.

Third New Hope Baptist Church, advertising a “community center coming soon” in the large vacant lot south of the school.

Adjacent to Kendall Homes, a 2006 low-income housing development comprised of 38 detached units. Some homes are located facing the school on east and west sides.

## Development Overview

### Opportunities

- Each classroom designed with individual access from exterior terrace—ideal for housing units or retail.
- Accessible design could support senior or disabled housing.
- Corner spaces have separate access and could be used independently from the rest of the building.
- Architecturally significant building includes beautiful finishes and details.

### Challenges

- Distressed neighborhood with high vacancy
- Small lot, with no room for new construction.

### Real Estate Market summary:

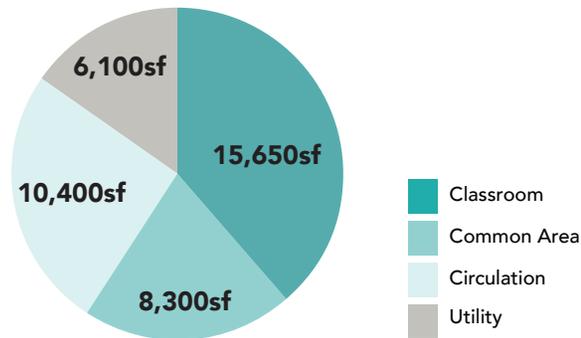
(1-mi radius, compared against subset of 39 City-owned vacant schools)

- Multifamily: Below Average
- Retail: Average
- Office: Below Average
- Industrial: Above Average

### Market-based Use Recommendations

- Best market for retail due to high retail rents in area; however, location in residential neighborhood is challenging.

## Existing Floorplan + Program



40,450 sf net floor area  
8,700 sf enclosed courtyard

### Structure

- CMU bearing walls or CMU-encased concrete frame

### Roof System:

- Steel frame and gypsum deck with slate shingles, exterior drains (sloped)
- Concrete slab/beam with mod-bit membrane, interior drain (low-slope)

### Floor System:

- Concrete slab

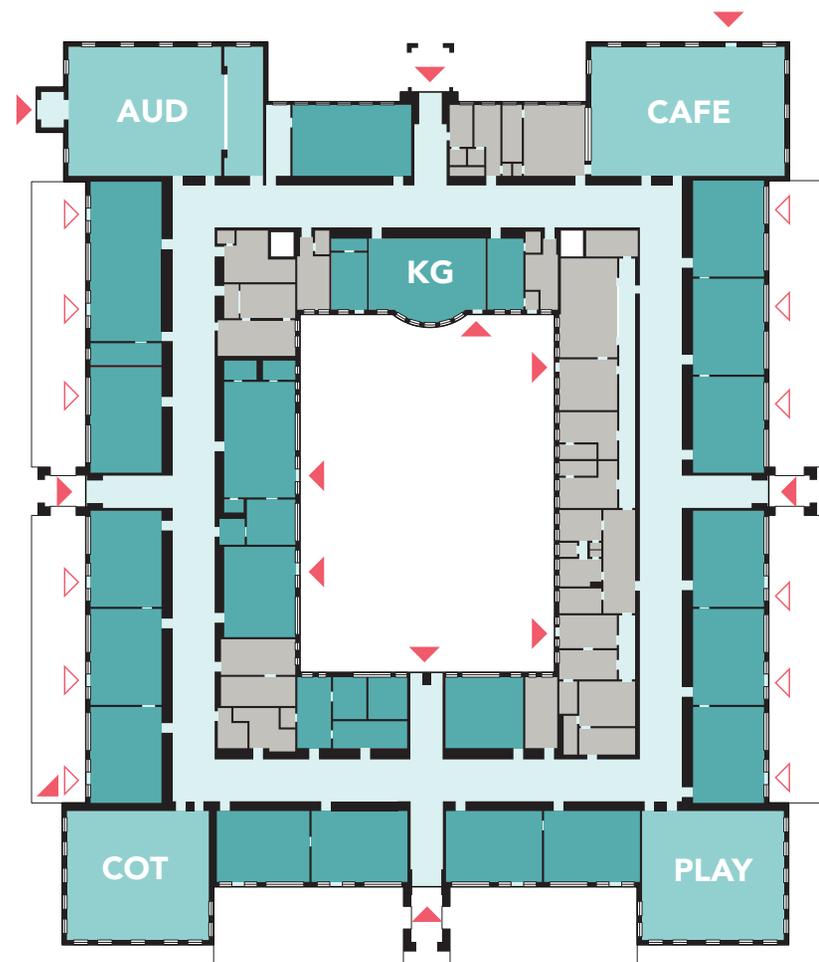
### Facade:

- Brick masonry with CMU backup
- Decorative stone, steel, and cast-iron accents

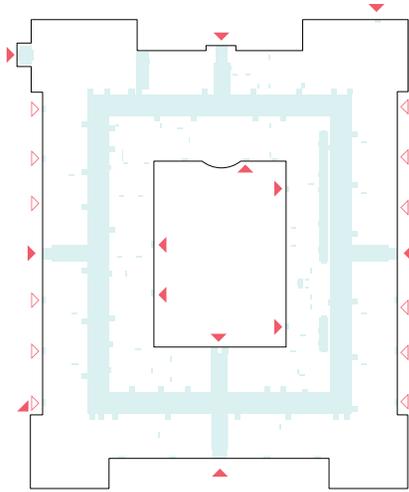
### Interior Finishes:

- CMU and glazed-tile walls
- Terrazo and VCT floors
- Aluminum-frame replacement windows

## First Floor



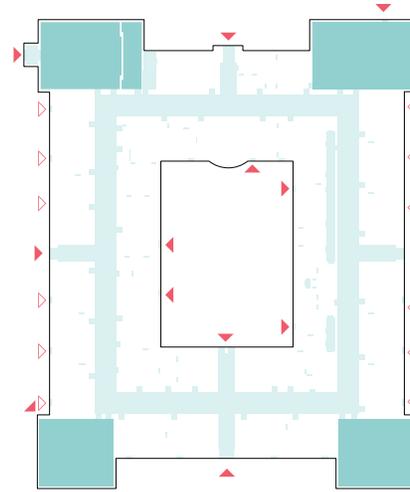
## Existing Floorplan + Program



### Circulation

Oakman has a rectangular courtyard layout, with a double-loaded main corridor forming a single ring. The four main corridors are 13' wide with 10'3" ceilings. Entrance corridors are 10' wide.

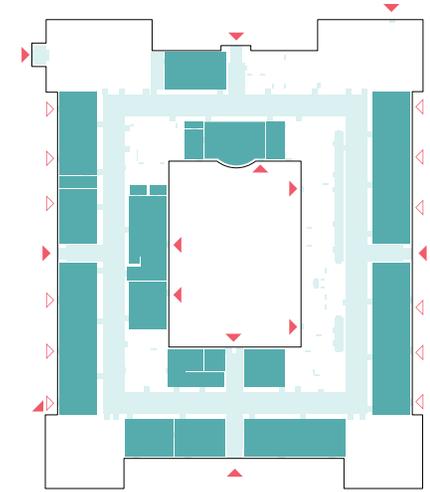
There are four main entrances in the center of each elevation; the primary entrance is to the south. Each of the large corner spaces and exterior classrooms also has their own entrances.



### Common Areas

Oakman features a unique corner-anchor arrangement of its common areas. The school features separate playroom/gym, auditorium, cafeteria, and "cot room" each located in the corner of the building, and each with exterior access.

The auditorium and lunch room at the north corners are 40x60'm while the cot and play rooms in the south are 40x44'. The spaces have sloped ceilings between 15-19' high.



### Classroom Areas

Classroom areas are located on all four sides of the building, with the majority of classrooms facing the three street frontages. Each street-facing classroom formerly had a doorway that opened onto shared terraces. Courtyard-facing classrooms have direct access to the large central courtyard. Classrooms are typically arranged in blocks of two or three conjoined rooms. Typical classrooms are 22x29'9" with 12' ceilings.

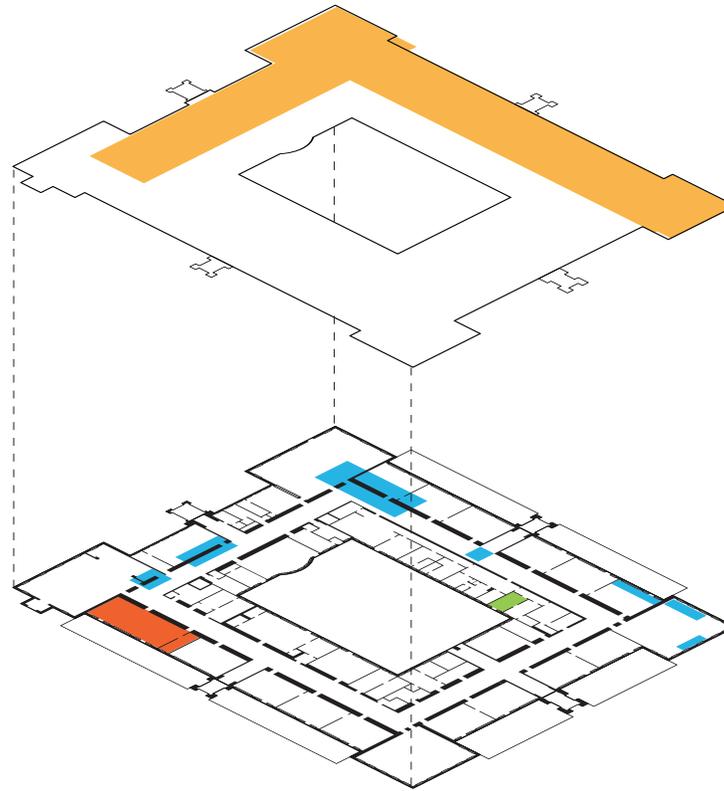
# Building Distress

## Roof

- Structural deterioration of roof deck over auditorium and gymnasium.
- Slate tiles have fallen from sloped roof sections and require replacement/repair; extent of damage difficult to assess due to snow cover at time of visit.
- Inspect and repair clogged roof drains.

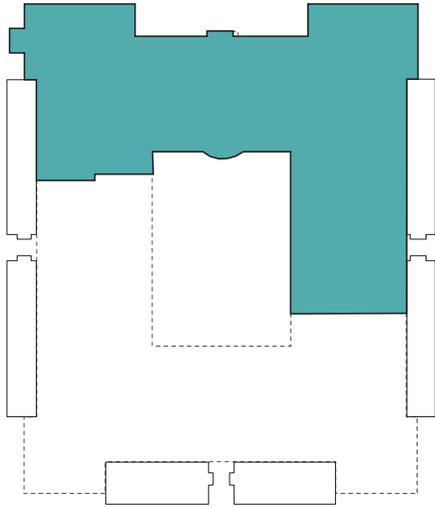
## First Floor

- Overall good condition, with most finishes and windows intact.
- Water infiltration in classrooms on east side of building.
- Fire damage in classrooms in northwest corner of building.
- Metal windows are intact around exterior of building, but have been scrapped from courtyard-facing rooms.



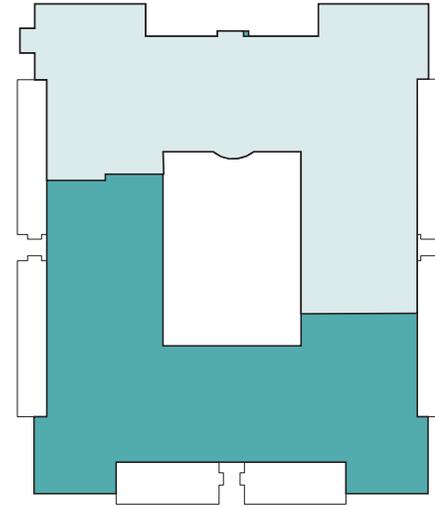
- Roof Damage
- Structural Damage
- Water Damage
- Fire Damage
- Scrapping Damage

## Building Evolution



### Original Unit - North (1929)

Site plans for Oakman show the building in two sections, north and south. The north unit is labeled "First Unit 1929", while the south unit is unlabeled.



### Original Unit - South (1929)

Records show that the south unit was also completed in 1929, though it is drawn without dates or labels on the 1929 site plans. The south half of the school may have been designed as a separate unit to provide the option to construct the school in phases instead of all at once.

## School History

Oakman, Dr. Charles H., School for Crippled Children (Dr. Charles H. Oakman, Elementary Orthopedic School)

Prior to around 1920, students with special needs were often restricted to an education that was substandard in quality. Although the doctrine of compulsory education prevented these students from being excluded altogether, they were often educated at home or forced to relocate to remote facilities operated by the state. The city of Detroit, with its greater population and tax base, had the resources to be at the forefront of a Progressive Era movement to bring equal opportunities in education to formerly marginalized segments of the child population.

The first class in the Detroit school system dedicated to children with physical disabilities was organized in 1910. The first school devoted exclusively to such students was the Nellie Leland School for Crippled Children, established in 1919. Over the next decade the education of students with physical disabilities, formerly excluded from public education, became more commonplace. In 1929 a second facility was opened, named after Dr. Charles H. Oakman, a dentist, oral surgeon, and member of the Detroit Board of Health and the Detroit House of Correction Board.

During his career, Oakman worked to increase the availability of dental care to the city's children. He successfully lobbied for the

creation of publicly funded dental clinics for children. Oakman also worked to improve the living conditions endured by inmates in the Wayne County prison system.

Oakman School was built on land recently annexed from Greenfield Township as the City of Detroit continued to grow in population and expand its boundaries to the northwest. Constructed at a cost of \$586,412, it was designed to accommodate 450 students. It's site was chosen for its proximity to Grand River Avenue, enabling the school to more easily receive students commuting from other areas of the city. It was located on the city's northwest side to complement the location of Nellie Leland School on the near east side. The two schools continued to share some administrative functions and were supervised by a common principal until 1955, at which time the schools began to operate independently of each other.

Smith, Hinchman & Grylls, the architectural firm that designed Oakman School, also designed Nolan Intermediate (1926), MacKenzie High (1928), Denby High (1928), Pershing High (1929), and Osborn High (1957) Schools. Founded in 1853, it is one of the oldest architectural firms in the United States, as well as (presently known as the SmithGroup) one of the largest. Although the firm was not especially well-known for its school buildings, it was one of the most prolific firms in Detroit, perhaps second only to Albert Kahn & Associates. It is especially well-known for many monumental structures

built from 1922 to 1930, when Wirt Rowland was its head designer. These include the Guardian, Penobscot, and Buhl Buildings in downtown Detroit, among many others. The exterior stonework on Oakman School was designed by Corrado Parducci, to whom Rowland frequently turned for architectural sculpture. Parducci (1900-1981), an Italian immigrant, resided and worked in Detroit from 1924 until the end of his career.

Built with concrete block and reinforced concrete slab floors, Oakman School is a single-story building with a rectangular footprint, arranged around a central courtyard. The building's design allowed classrooms, a library, and an arts and crafts room to open inward, permitting students to easily access the courtyard space. The building also included offices, a conservatory, solarium, auditorium, and playroom. The school also contained showers and medical and dental facilities to accommodate the needs of the student population. The equipment for dental care was donated by the family of Charles Oakman. The corridors were equipped with handrails for student use, and frequent mirrors, thought to encourage the development of healthy posture.

*Excerpted from United States Department of the Interior National Park Service National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (Draft). Oakman, Dr. Charles H., School for Crippled Children. Boscarino, T., City of Detroit Historic Designation Advisory Board (2009)*





Oakman's west elevation viewed from the northwest corner. The nearest visible entrance on the left leads to the auditorium. One of the four primary school entrances is visible in the center of the building, marked by a stone portico.



The inner courtyard viewed from a small roof deck. The courtyard is accessible from classrooms on all four sides. The rooms on the right of this image are part of the former physical therapy wing, which is made up of many small rooms and offices that served the school's disabled students.



Oakman has exterior terraces on the south, east, and west sides. Classrooms around the outside of the building once had access to these terraces, but the doors are now gone. The brick infill where a door once stood is visible beneath the second window from the right (bottom right corner of photo)



Typical classroom windows are modern aluminum-frame replacements. The wood shelf visible in the bottom right of the image is filling in the opening where there was once a door leading to the exterior terrace.



The school's corners are anchored by four large spaces with similar dimensions. The auditorium is distinguished from the other three spaces by its extended stage, a mezzanine projector room, and a dedicated street entrance with vestibule. It also has fewer windows than the other corner rooms.



The play room/gymnasium anchors the southeast corner. It is surrounded by tall windows and was brightly lit even with its windows covered in plywood. This image highlights the extensive use of rounded glazed block throughout the building.

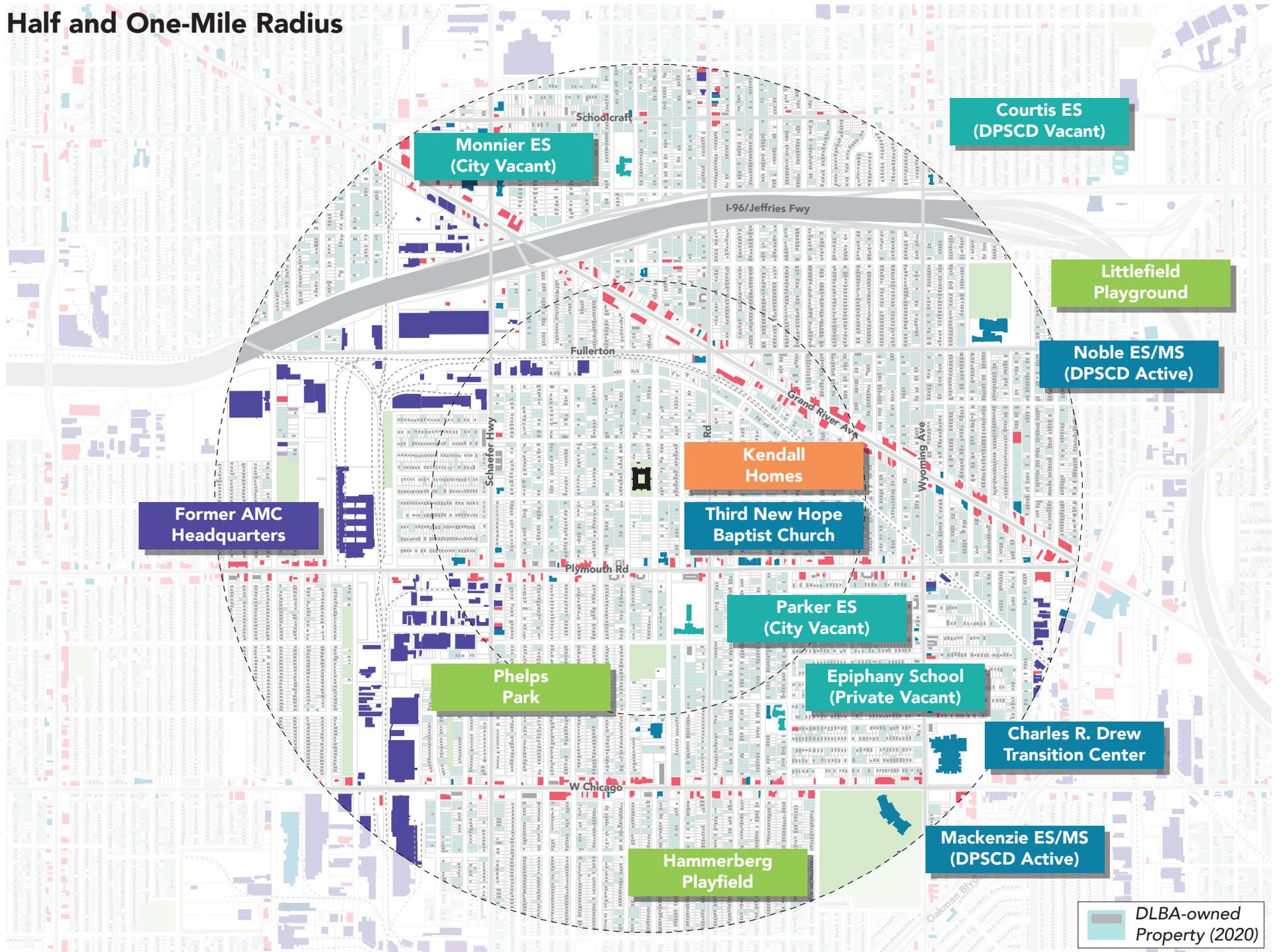


The "sewing & cooking" room is an example of a courtyard-facing classroom. Classrooms facing the interior have tall windows and direct access to the large courtyards. The durable concrete and glazed block finishes are in good condition.



The kindergarten features a shallow bay window that extends into the central courtyard. This space also has direct access to the courtyard play area.

# Half and One-Mile Radius



## Neighborhood By The Numbers

14/100

**Walkscore**  
Car dependent

0.2<sub>mi</sub>

**Transit Access**  
Less than 5 minute walk to nearest  
DDOT Connect Ten or Key Route

0.7<sub>mi</sub>

**Freeway Access**  
Less than 5 minute drive  
to nearest freeway ramp

0.3<sub>mi</sub>

**Park Access**  
Less than 5 minute walk  
to nearest park (1+ acre)

1.3<sub>mi</sub>

**Nearest Recreation Center**  
More than 15 minute walk to  
nearest city rec center

2.1<sub>mi</sub>

**Library Access**  
No public library  
within walking distance

51%

**Vacant/DLBA Property**  
High rate of vacancy  
within 0.25 mile radius (2020)

130

**Building Alteration Permits**  
Moderate construction activity  
within 1mi radius (2016-2018)

1.3%

**Senior Population Growth**  
Low projected growth  
within 1mi radius (2019-2024)