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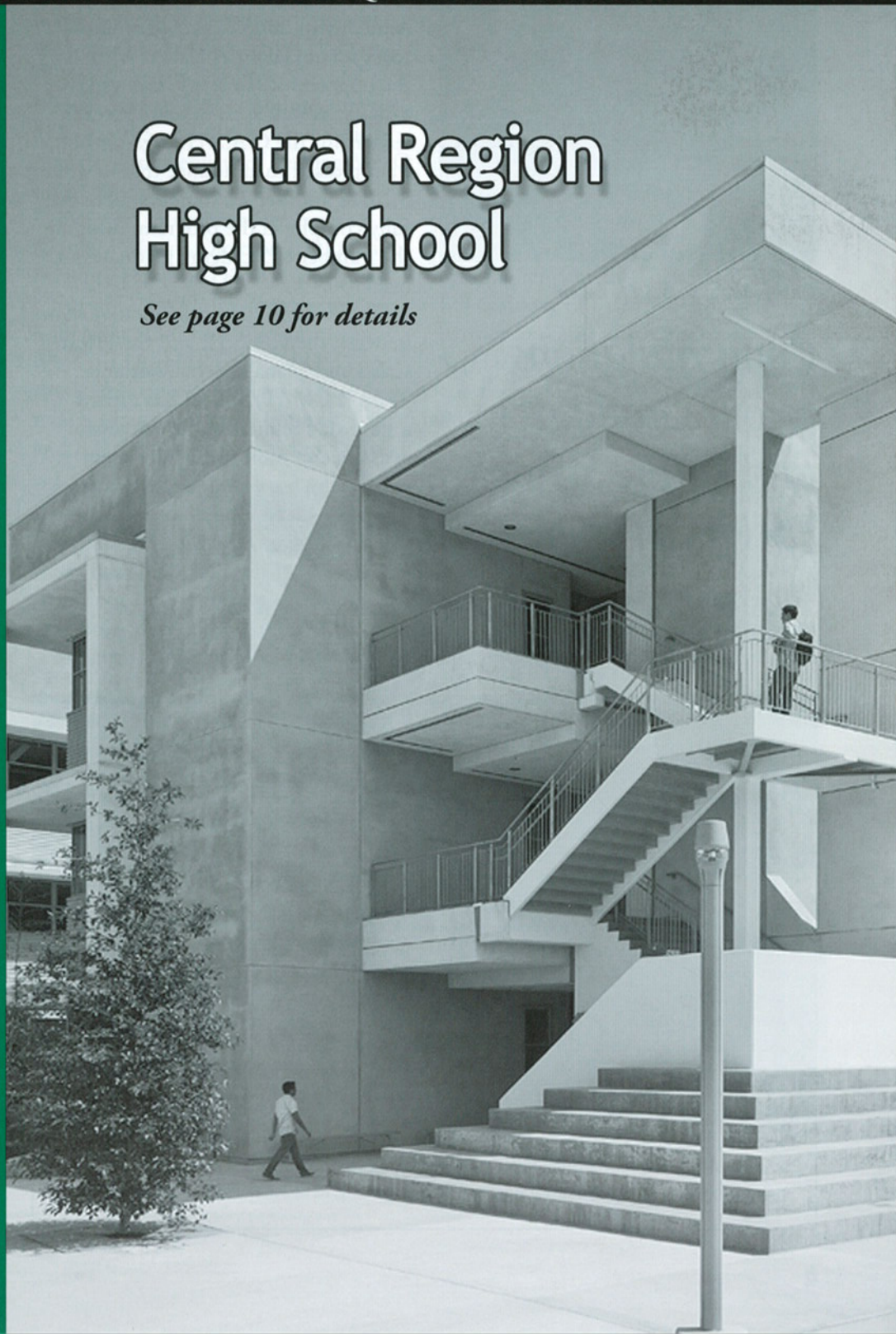
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE COALITION FOR ADEQUATE SCHOOL HOUSING

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Central Region High School

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Fast-Track to Major Sustainability: Central Region High School No. 13

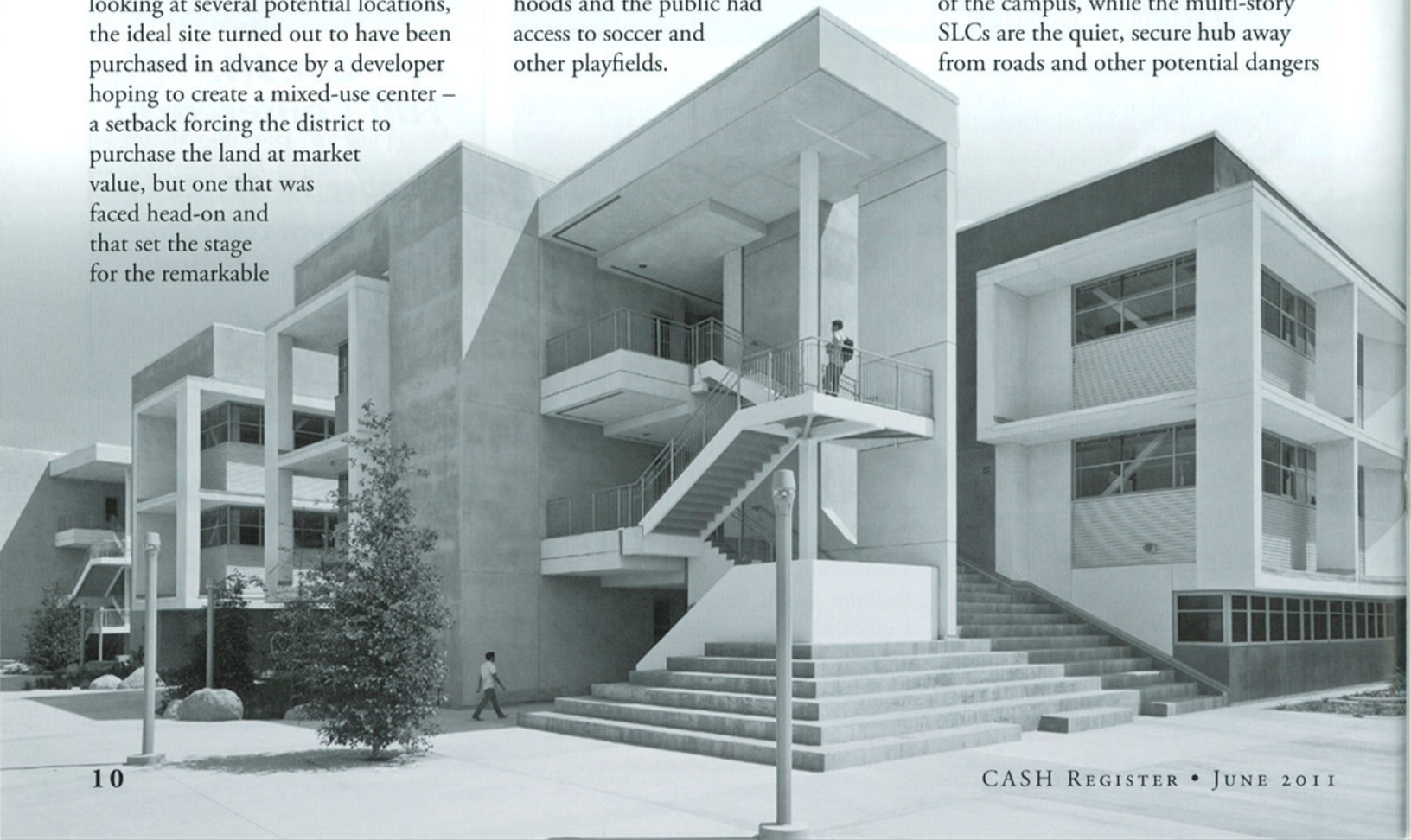
In the new millennium, social and environmental concerns have achieved near-equal footing with value for one's dollar in the educational paths of many young people and their families. In addition to the regular concerns a district may have with accommodating growing numbers of students, there is increased awareness that campuses should set an environmental example as well as providing opportunities for learning about the sciences that underscore those choices. The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) embraced these challenges head-on with its Central Region High School No. 13, a redevelopment project located alongside a historic railway line and the Los Angeles River, in Southern California.

With the need to attract and accommodate the area's more than 2,000 students, the LAUSD had bond money to be spent in a hurry. After looking at several potential locations, the ideal site turned out to have been purchased in advance by a developer hoping to create a mixed-use center – a setback forcing the district to purchase the land at market value, but one that was faced head-on and that set the stage for the remarkable

transformation that opened for the 2011-12 school year.

HMC Architects, whose longstanding relationship with LAUSD made them valuable project partners, conducted a series of workshops including teachers, district leaders, parents, and students to develop the vision for this former industrial zone. The community, comprised largely of professionals with young children, was actively involved in the process. When mixed-use plans for the site had been brought forward by the original developer, public outcry was intense. Parents clearly felt proprietary toward the site and its outcome, and voiced concerns about sustainability early on as well as hopes for a unique learning environment. In addition, the community wanted an "old-school" feeling with real integration, where the edges of the campus blended into the surrounding neighborhoods and the public had access to soccer and other playfields.

This was a tall bill when combined with a fast-track schedule and the desire to build in the most sustainable way possible. Working with LAUSD's in-house design review board, HMC refined the priorities and needs of the stakeholders, and determined the standards for both education and sustainability that prevail throughout the resulting campus. The program that emerged was a Small Learning Communities (SLC) model that is the most sustainable facility in the country's largest school district, as well as enhancing student individuality and personalized instruction. Each of the campus' five SLCs, comprising 85 classrooms, has a dedicated building complete with its own outdoor instruction area – a template for future schools throughout the district. Shared spaces, such as the library, performing arts center, gym, and sports fields, are located at the edges of the campus, while the multi-story SLCs are the quiet, secure hub away from roads and other potential dangers






or distractions. The result is an open campus character, designed with easy circulation, pleasant views, and connection to the community through shared recreational playfields at the periphery.

All of this was achieved despite some pervasive challenges and constraints. The first of these emerged when an environmental report showed that the nearby railroad switching area produced particulate emissions that would affect the campus. The early discovery of this fact dictated the organization of the campus into four linked zones, grouped to form a protective barrier against wind-carried particles while still allowing access to circulatory spaces. These buildings are equipped with special filtration, and confined to indoor uses. As tested air quality improves throughout the campus, outdoor access for passive use increases, culminating in the playfields where vigorous activity is encouraged. Adding to this orientation is the almost unheard-of *single* point for student dropoff and pickup, which promote the “cleanest” entry to the campus’ five SLCs. Additional constraints included a high-tension electric service

traversing the site that needed to be moved prior to construction to preserve safety and drainage capacity, as well as the removal of a significant amount of contaminated soil.

As validated by the school’s LEED™ Silver Registration and pending certification, and its 42 Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS) points, Central Region High School No.13 has met if not surpassed stakeholder expectations for sustainability. Its features include optimization of SLC building layout to minimize solar heat gain; horizontal and vertical sunshade “fins” to reduce heating and cooling loads and maximize natural light; covered outdoor circulation on multiple building levels to minimize heating and cooling loads; and operable, clear-glazed windows in all classrooms for natural ventilation with minimal heat gain. The school’s landscape is no less attentive to environmental concerns, with porous paving, bioswales, and filters for stormwater management accompanying a native plant palette that reduces irrigation requirements and supports goals for the Los Angeles river’s reclamation areas.

Perhaps the crowning achievement of the No.13 project is its Career Technical Education (CTE) lab, which is dedicated to fostering careers in sustainability and makes full use of the campus’ success in sustainable design and ecological conservation. The CTE lab focuses the school’s science curricula around the study of water, soil, and energy – all issues that the planners and designers of the campus contended with as their vision was made a reality. The lab is located adjacent to the school’s preserved bioswale, in a wetland that serves as a working research area while bringing students physically in contact with the natural environment surrounding the campus. The 6,000-square-foot facility serves 90 students in three science laboratories, while also providing a greenhouse amenity and support spaces for teachers and visiting scientists.

As one of the most structured approaches to the SLC design of Central Region High School No.13’s campus, the design of the science facilities expresses the message of sustainability. In practice as well as theory, the campus has lived up to its goal of setting an example for the surrounding community and for other school developments, as well as reinforcing its academic program with a hands-on, intensive study of the environmental sciences. It succeeds not only on its own merits, but as part of the city- and community-focused revitalization of the Los Angeles Riverbed that will have positive effects for generations to come. 

Stats:

Owner: Los Angeles Unified School District
 Location: Los Angeles, CA
 Number of Students: 2,295
 Size: 213, 495 square feet (Main High School);
 6,728 square feet (CTE Lab)
 Completed: Spring 2011