

# from ..... HIGH SCHOOL to CORPORATE LIFE

by Tim Kunz, Principal

Situated in Houston's Third Ward community, in a city that is home to more than 5,000 energy-related firms, Houston Independent School District (HISD) is paving the way for

**THE PHRASE,  
“FIRST OF ITS  
KIND”  
IS OFTEN USED  
TO DESCRIBE  
ENERGY INSTITUTE  
HIGH SCHOOL.**

a new kind of energy boom—a corporate culture of industry-ready students.

In 2013, HISD embarked on a new magnet program. Their aim was to create an environment that promoted high-level cognitive and social learning skills, centered on the energy industry. The first class of 200 students set the stage for success in a renovated 1960s elementary school. The following year, 650 students applied to the school—three times the number of available seats. With momentum on their side, HISD quickly embarked on the next chapter of their magnet program and started planning a permanent home for future Energy Leaders.

Traditionally, magnet programs throughout the U.S. have focused on specialized curriculum,

drawing students from across district boundaries to support a shared academic goal. At the Energy Institute High School, the goal was simple: Attract students who aspire to a career in the energy industry. VLK's first task was to renovate Holden Elementary School in preparation to house the first class of students. Newly appointed principal, Lori Lambropoulos, and Dean of Students, Noel McGregor, helped foster the school's identity by reaching out to local industry and community partnerships. Wishing to move beyond traditional teaching methods, the leadership team encouraged VLK's design team to think outside conventional design practices, insisting that the next generation of industry leaders should learn in an environment aligned with corporate culture. So, how do you create a high school campus that promotes corporate social practices? Our answer? Curation: VLK's think-tank to promote innovative ideas and solutions. Alongside HISD, VLK Architects led a Project Advisory Team (PAT) to research, ask questions, give feedback, and reach consensus on the physical and emotional character of the new building. After two days of intensive thought and reflection, the team had narrowed their focus. Developed collectively with the PAT, the new 114,000 square foot campus was designed to support pathways for 850 students through collaborative learning communities. Comprised of three buildings connected by an outdoor learning courtyard, learning spaces are interconnected to support project-based-learning in offshore technology, geosciences, and alternative energy. Each





community provides individual work spaces, flexible collaboration zones, integrated technology, and hands-on lab space for specialized curriculum. To promote student engagement and innovation, technology intensive media labs and presentation halls enable students to prepare and deliver professional presentations. For the first time in history, high school students will learn the fundamentals of engineering and present prototypical solutions to global energy leaders.

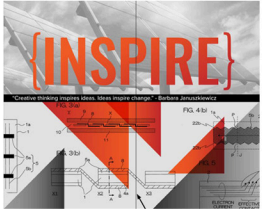
Situated in the Energy Capital of the World, inspiration for the physical character of the building was at our fingertips. With an emphasis on mirroring corporate culture, VLK Architects extracted elements reflective of the energy industry. Simple yet bold, contrasting masonry and brilliant metal panels showcase the activities within. The glass cube entry is an icon for the school, analogous of corporate surroundings; while the science labs are clad with reflective iron-spot brick; a staple to the school's program. The campus converges at the covered outdoor learning courtyard, giving students and staff the opportunity to teach, learn, and reflect.

Being a one-of-a-kind high school has created a sense of belonging where student intellect and curiosity fuel not only a distinctive sense of pride, but an entirely new life-long learning dynamic. With HISD's investment, Energy

Institute High School students may begin by dreaming of becoming a CEO in robotics, but can end up producing a framework of sociological change. For VLK, there has been no better reward than to witness this evolution and to be a part of their future.

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***I can proudly say that we did more than just build a school, we built a vision and a culture for the Energy Institute High School to be proud of and to carry on for many years to come.***  
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*Energy Senior, Timothy Chung*



**IN PROGRESS:**  
THE STUDENTS  
OF ENERGY  
INSTITUTE HIGH  
SCHOOL WILL  
MOVE INTO  
THEIR NEW  
HOME IN 2018.

