

# VARIETY SCHOOL



LOCATION: LAS VEGAS, NEVADA

AREA: 80,616 S.F.

OPENED: JANUARY 2013

## Executive Summary

Variety School is a special education school for students aged 5-22, relocated from a 50 year-old existing campus. The school specializes in students with autism, mental challenges and emotional challenges. Each group is provided a distinct classroom hub, bound together by common spaces, including the multi-purpose room, gym and a shared activity space. Emphasis was placed on designing spaces that both suit and enhance the school's curriculum. A vocational hub teaches skills including food preparation and service, laundry, graphics, and recycling. An independent living space simulates an apartment for students to learn daily life skills. Shared outdoor spaces include a playground, walking track, sport courts and a gardening area. Classroom hubs contain courtyards, which serve as an outdoor teaching space and enhance the building's appearance. Creative site strategy maximizes usable space while strengthening the school's physical presence in its community.

***Variety School was designed to enhance every aspect of student life and education while supporting the teaching faculty in their efforts to provide the very best education and training to the special education students who need it most.***



VARIETY SCHOOL



EXTERIOR

**NORTH FACADE AT LIBRARY**



VARIETY SCHOOL



INTERIOR

**SHARED ACTIVITY SPACE**



## Scope of Work and Budget

The scope of work constituted the design and construction of a new 80,000 square foot special education facility on a brownfield site within an urban area east of downtown Las Vegas. The project site was 11 acres, adequate for construction of a one story school but requiring careful use of space. The budget was approximately \$14 million for building and site improvements. Primary teaching spaces include three teaching hubs of eight classrooms each, as well as shared facilities such as a flexible gym and multi-purpose room, a library media center, administrative offices, outdoor play and teaching spaces, and a multi-disciplinary vocational training center.





VARIETY SCHOOL



EXTERIOR  
**PLAYGROUND AREA**





# School and Community Engagement



## School and Community Engagement

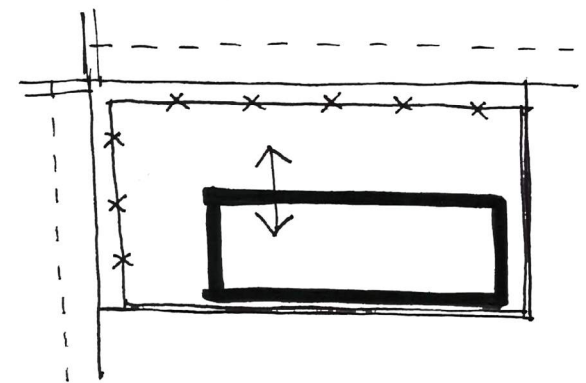
As a result of interaction with students and staff at the existing Variety School, the design team was able to augment the original programming for the vocational component of the school by formalizing spaces for activities such as gardening and recycling that students had shown an interest in, resulting in a suite of vocational training rooms ideally suited to the school's programs. Corporate community partners were enlisted to provide expertise in areas such as the design of a hospitality-style training kitchen and the integration of the school's new recycling program with the operations of the local disposal utility. ***The integration of the design team, school staff and community partners to optimize both physical and operational aspects has resulted in a stronger-than-ever vocational program.***

Though Variety's student community travels to the campus from all over the city, the school's physical presence in its neighborhood was still of importance to the design team. The team addressed security concerns (including students with a tendency to run out of the school) without a prison-like perimeter fence, instead placing a compact, organized building footprint adjacent to the street edge with main entrance doors facing the center of the site. Emergency exits lead to smaller-scale walled courtyards or playground. ***The careful site arrangement allows the school to keep students safely away from the street edge while putting a positive, uplifting face out to the neighborhood.***

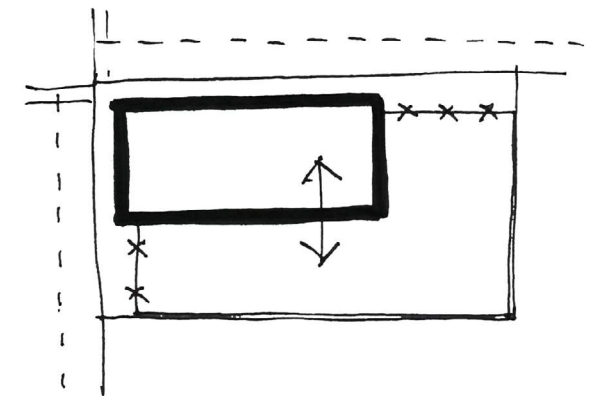




SCHOOL REQUEST:  
PERIMETER FENCE



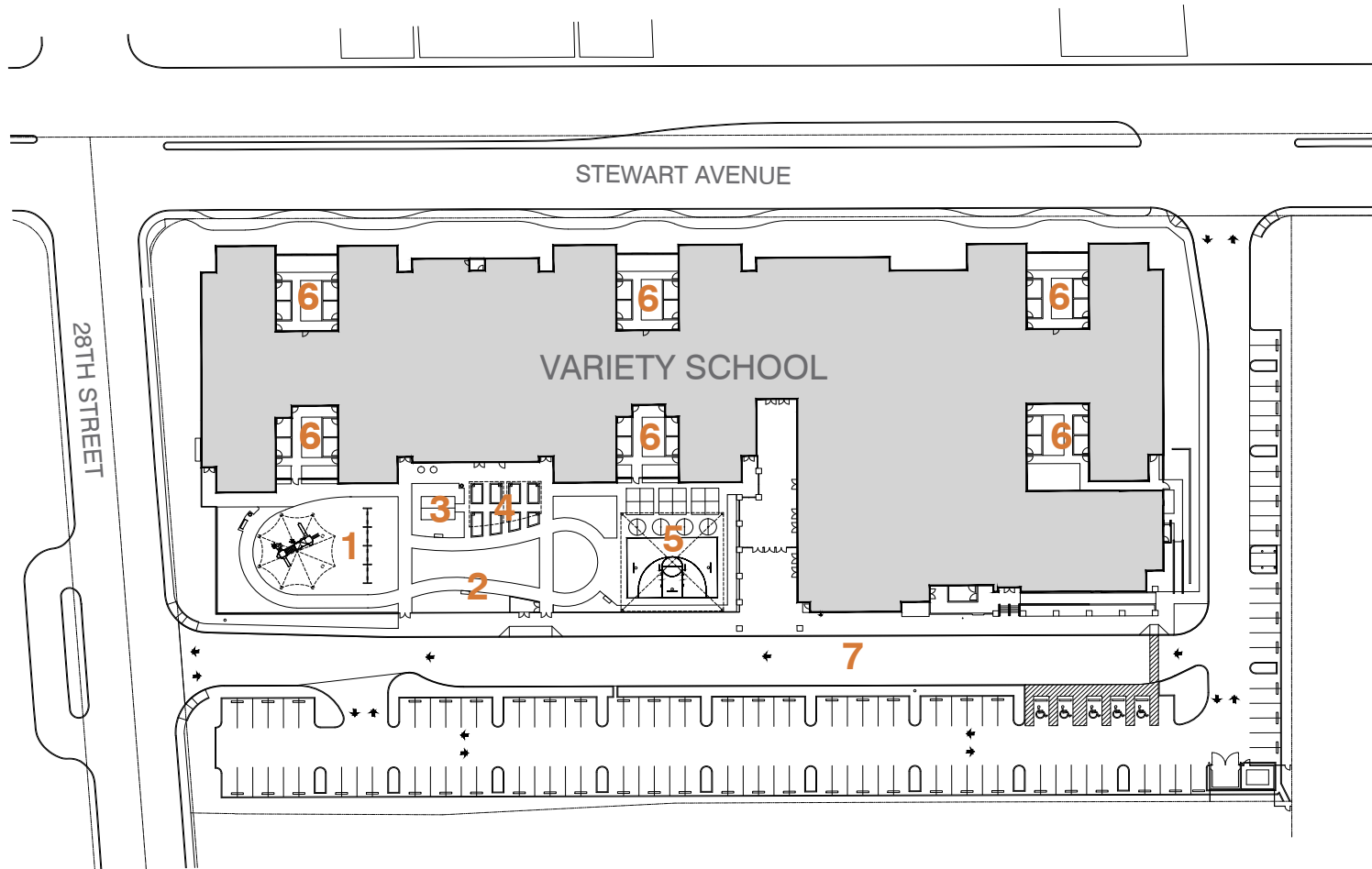
DESIGN SOLUTION:  
BUILDING AS PERIMETER



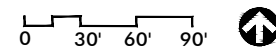
BETTER FACE TO NEIGHBORHOOD!

EXTERIOR

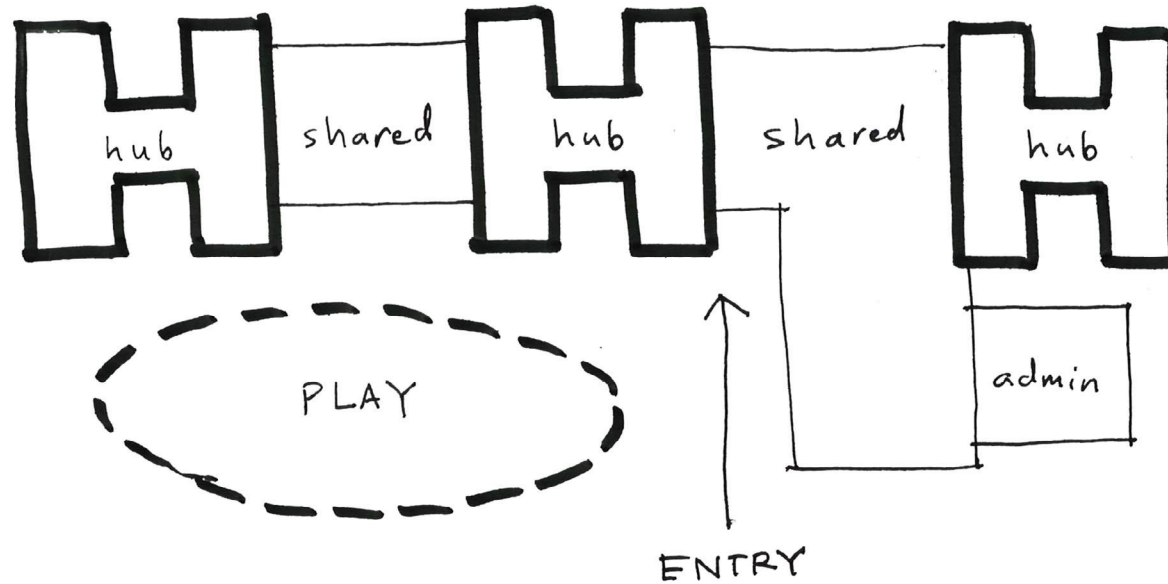
**NORTH FACADE AT CLASSROOM HUB**



- 1 PLAYGROUND
- 2 WALKING TRACK AND PLAY AREA
- 3 GREENHOUSE
- 4 GARDEN
- 5 SPORT COURTS
- 6 CLASSROOM COURTYARDS
- 7 BUS LOADING LANE







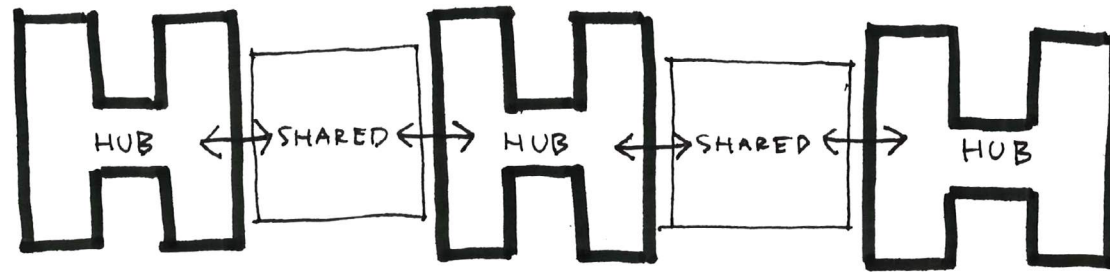
PLAYGROUND AND GARDEN

STUDENT ENTRY



EXTERIOR

**PLAYGROUND AND GARDEN/ENTRY**



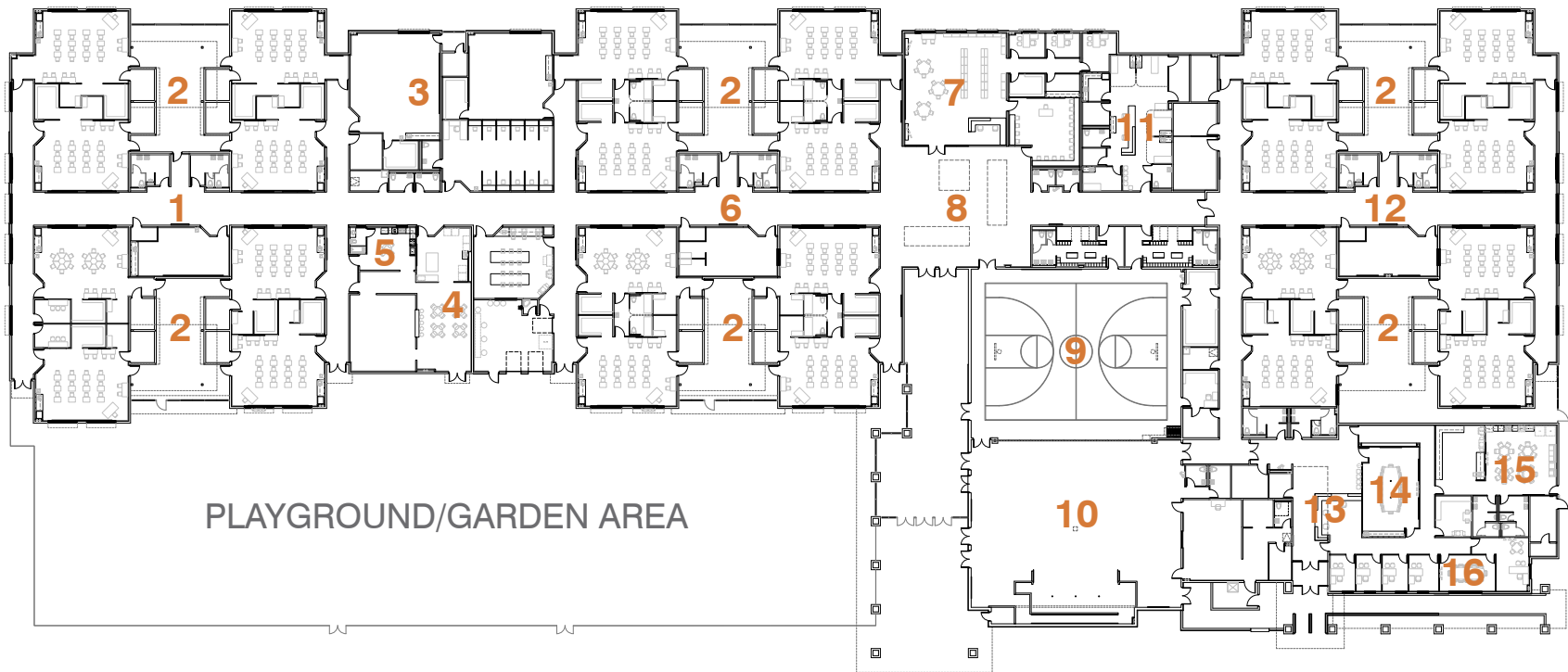
**3** STUDENT TYPES → **3** HUBS  
SEPARATED FOR DISTINCT IDENTITY  
SHARED SPACES IN BETWEEN



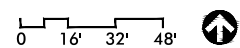
VARIETY SCHOOL

EXTERIOR  
VIEW FROM NORTHWEST CORNER





PLAYGROUND/GARDEN AREA



- 1 AUTISM CLASSROOM HUB
- 2 CLASSROOM COURTYARDS
- 3 SPECIALTY CLASSROOMS
- 4 VOCATIONAL HUB
- 5 INDEPENDENT LIVING SPACE
- 6 MENTALLY CHALLENGED CLASSROOM HUB
- 7 LIBRARY
- 8 SHARED ACTIVITY SPACE

- 9 GYM
- 10 MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM
- 11 HEALTH CENTER
- 12 BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGED CLASSROOM HUB
- 13 ADMINISTRATION LOBBY
- 14 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 15 TEACHERS' LOUNGE AND WORKROOM
- 16 ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

VARIETY SCHOOL



EXTERIOR

**PLAYGROUND AREA**





# Educational Environment



## Educational Environment

The educational mission of the Variety School is to help students with various levels of significant special needs the ability to grow and achieve to their fullest potential. The goal for younger students is to move into a mainstream school environment within three to four years after enrolling at Variety. Students who remain at the school long term begin vocational training at age 14, and are able to continue their training as needed until age 22 so that they are better able to integrate into the community at large as adults, able to earn a living working in the community, and get help with daily life skills.

***The vocational training center was carefully designed to be equipped similar to environments where students may work after they graduate.*** Those environments include a hospitality kitchen similar to those found in Las Vegas restaurants, a recycling center complete with sorting line, a graphic design center with computer and printing equipment, a commercial laundry space, and an outdoor student garden and greenhouse. An “independent living” space is effectively a miniature apartment with residential kitchen, bathroom and dining area, for students to learn daily life skills.

***Teaching and outdoor environments are also specialized for the special needs student population.*** Such features include indoor and outdoor calming rooms, an observation room for parents and educators, tactile-visual feature walls, and a walking loop in the outdoor space for students with autism who are calmed by repetitive motion.



THE  
INDEPENDENT LIVING  
EXPERIENCE

THE  
LAUNDRY AND SEWING  
EXPERIENCE

THE  
OFFICE AND COPY SHOP  
EXPERIENCE



THE  
HOSPITALITY KITCHEN  
EXPERIENCE

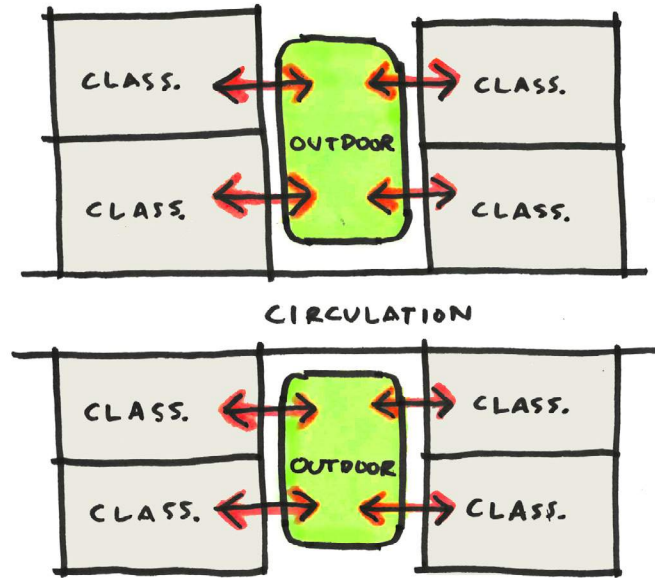
THE  
"BULLDOG DINER"  
RESTAURANT SERVING  
EXPERIENCE

THE  
RECYCLING CENTER  
EXPERIENCE





INTERIOR



OUTDOOR  
LEARNING  
FOR  
EVERY  
CLASSROOM



EXTERIOR

EXTERIOR

TYPICAL CLASSROOM COURTYARD



## Educational Environment

**Instructional spaces at Variety are designed to be flexible and reconfigurable to suit various teaching styles.** At the head of each classroom is a teaching wall where technology such as smart boards are focused. All rooms are designed for multiple configurations of students, so teachers can group or separate students as needed. Because every classroom has outdoor access, instruction can move outdoors when beneficial. The outdoor spaces also provide easy access to other classrooms to allow students to rotate between rooms when appropriate for the curriculum.

Shared spaces provide significant flexibility. The gym and multi-purpose room are able to be open as one space or separate as two depending on daily needs. The library media center is designed with reconfiguration in mind so it can double as an instructional space. The vocational training center is designed to allow for flow between rooms so a smaller number of staff members can supervise students engaged in multiple simultaneous training activities.

In addition to the programmed flexible educational spaces, the design team conceived of a Shared Activity Space in the center of the building, which acts as a circulation hub and also allows the school an additional space for activities. **This multi-use instructional space also greets students upon entry and acts as the symbolic 'heart' of student life.**

VARIETY SCHOOL



INTERIOR  
**SHARED ACTIVITY SPACE**



VARIETY SCHOOL



INTERIOR

**MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM**



VARIETY SCHOOL



INTERIOR

**GYM OPEN TO MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM**





# Physical Environment



## Physical Environment

**Each of the three teaching hubs features a distinct color scheme to assist with wayfinding and provide each student group a sense of identity.** Identity separation ensures, for example, that an emotionally challenged student understands that they are considered differently than a student with severe learning disabilities.) Tactile-visual accent walls unique to each hub incorporate art donated by a photographer introduced as a community partner by the design team. The teaching hubs are separated by common spaces, including the gym, multi-purpose room, and Shared Activity Space, where the three colors representatively join in spaces shared by the entire student body.

**Outdoor spaces play a significant role in student life.** Every classroom has access to outdoor spaces incorporated into each teaching hub. A shared outdoor area incorporates playground, walking track, sport courts and student run garden. The design-build team's approach to spatial organization allowed a sizable outdoor area to fit on the relatively compact site. The outdoor spaces include shade canopies which protect students from the sun, allowing the space to be utilized as an outdoor classroom. The outdoor spaces also serve to break the roofline and massing of the building into appropriately-scaled pieces, which are then further softened by the use of multiple colors of concrete masonry and metal accent panels, a material palette which provides an uplifting appearance to a utilitarian construction type, all while helping to keep the project within budget.



VARIETY SCHOOL



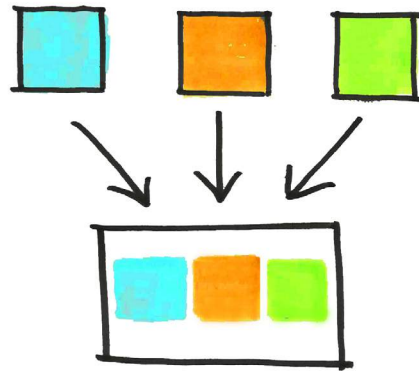
INTERIOR  
**CORRIDOR**

BEHAVIORALLY CHALLENGED HUB



AUTISM HUB

UNIQUE HUBS -  
UNIQUE COLOR IDENTITY  
FOR WAYFINDING



MEET IN SHARED SPACES -  
SENSE OF COMMUNITY



MENTALLY CHALLENGED HUB



## Physical Environment

**Variety School inspires and motivates by celebrating the educational environment as a place of possibility.**

A thoroughly functional and economical project becomes something greater through the careful application of color, joy and imagination. The design team's endeavor was to inspire growth, transformation and happiness facilitated by a thoughtful, student-focused built environment.



SHARED ACTIVITY SPACE



INDEPENDENT LIVING FACADE



ADMINISTRATION LOBBY

INTERIOR

**INTERIOR SPACES**





# Results of the Process and Project



## Results of the Process and Project

The thoughtful design process and collaborative spirit which led to the final Variety School campus have resulted in a campus that helps the teachers and administration to better execute the work of improving the lives of each of their students, as they have done for fifty years. The facility design has translated into positive improvements in day-to-day operation, as intended, and even offered some unintended positive results such as an increase in collaboration and transfer of students between classrooms, facilitated by the ease of access across the shared classroom courtyards. ***The Variety School project was a remarkable opportunity for the design team to re-imagine how the built environment enhances this unique school's contribution to its community.***

