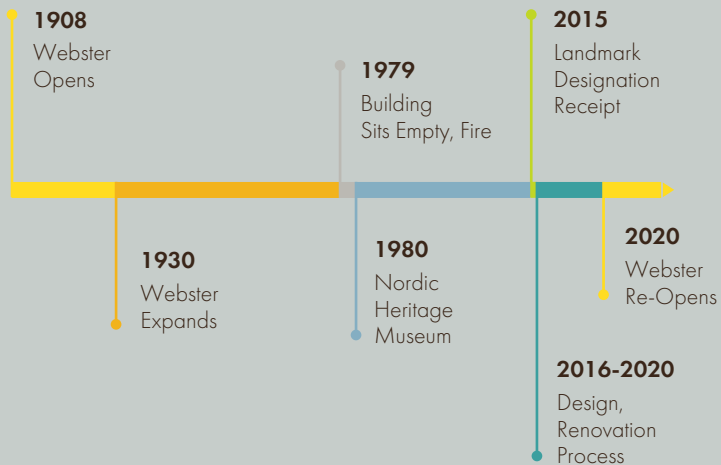


**WEBSTER SCHOOL RENOVATION**  
FOR LICTON SPRINGS K-8  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON







### Brief History

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a thriving waterfront population fueled canning, fishing, sawmills and boat-building industries for the then-independent City of Ballard. In 1908, just as Ballard formally joined Seattle, Webster School opened as a 12-classroom schoolhouse. The brick and cast-stone structure designed by Frederick Sexton located two levels of classrooms and offices over a daylight basement of support space.

In the 1930's an L-shaped addition, designed by a second prominent architect Floyd Naramore, included a two story dining room, library, and classroom wing combined with a low playcourt extension that obscured the northeast end of the building.

Following closure in the 70's—then later a fire—Webster was readied for use in the 80's by the Nordic Heritage Museum; this organization performed incremental improvements across four decades to support a wealth of exhibits.

Fast forward to more recent times when, in parallel with the museum's relocation strategy, Seattle Public Schools initiated plans to recommission Webster for district use. Reconversion of the newly-landmarked building would require extensive code-driven upgrades, widespread general repair, protection of historically significant elements, and more space.



North and east facades of 1908 building, c. 1920

# 1

## executive summary

The re-opening of the Webster School building represents a significant milestone for Seattle Public Schools, as well as its tenant, Licton Springs K-8 (LSK8): completion of the major modernization in 2020 gives LSK8, a program previously co-located in a crowded space, the means to offer expanded views of history and education within its own spacious, transformable, uplifting environment.

Work involved demolition of a single-story former open-air playcourt element; modernization of classrooms, hallways, library and cafeteria space; conversion of an underutilized daylight basement into admin, meeting, offices, and additional learning areas; and a new activities wing that beckons shared community use.

At the project's initiation, the building was slated to become a neighborhood elementary school for 450 students. However, the District's plans for the facility evolved, as its use underwent reassessment. Design proceeded, following the ed specs for a standard elementary school as a guide. It was only after the building was permitted that the design was slightly modified to anticipate grades K-8.

Crafting a school environment to meet modern standards within a 100-year old building—while still hitting the budget target—proved to be a significant challenge. In addition, the City of Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods Landmarks Preservation Board

required special treatment of 6 historically significant (or "landmarked") spaces located across each of 3 floors. To help meet myriad stakeholder criteria in a feasible way, the configuration of the original floor plan was largely maintained, with the exception of the lowest level of the original building.

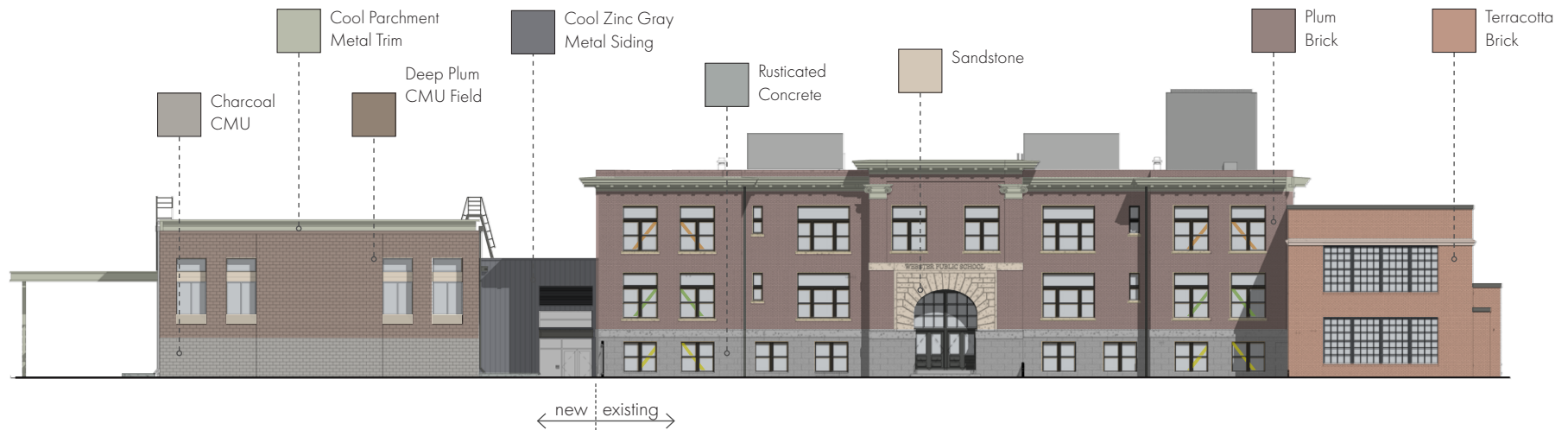
Today, every space within the school is refreshed and capable of providing students and staff with functional, adaptable educational space. Webster is again preserved to serve as a valuable asset, both for the school district and the community, for another century.

### 5 OVERALL GOALS AND OUTCOMES

#### 1. Return the building to its origins.

As a long-time tenant, the Nordic Heritage Museum occupied Webster for nearly 4 decades (see sidebar, left), making modest upgrades and tenant improvements throughout this time. Pending the museum's plans to construct its own facility then relocate, Webster would become available to Seattle Public Schools for use once again.

Extensive code-driven upgrades, widespread repair to correct user modifications and deferred maintenance issues, protection of historically significant elements, and the addition of more space for indoor gathering and physical activities, represented the hurdles in the path to re-conversion.



Above: A study of sympathetic materials, proportion and color at the south-facing elevation.

Below: Webster with 1930's addition. Note: the playcourts to the north are obscured from view.



## 2. Improve physical access.

Nested tightly amongst an established residential neighborhood, the relatively flat, 1.55-acre site sits surrounded by narrow perimeter streets lined by overgrown trees.

Navigation from the site into the building was difficult. The gentle cross-slope of the right-of-way to the southeast placed Webster's main facade high above the public way. The split-level front entrance led to an interior labyrinth of hallways and stairs that connected offset floor plates between the 1908 and 1930's genres of construction.

A big design move helped resolve site access: flipping the front of the building to the back of the site placed the new "front door" to the north, where the grade would accommodate accessible parking and a clear path of approach. Note: the grand entry is maintained as a drop-off point for students not in need of accessible entry.

A new elevator connects 4 of the 6 floor levels.

## 3. Site and mass a large addition, a tight fit between the school & adjacent park.

The bulk of the building sat snugly against the eastern edge of the parcel, leaving a small parking area between itself and Webster Park to the west.

The activities addition preserves remaining space for student play and community recreation. (Refer to the Site Aerial Diagram on page 6.)

## 4. Honor the formality of the original architecture while creating a modern learning environment.

Earning approval by the City's Landmarks Preservation Board represented only one facet of an extensive permitting process.

Iterative study was undertaken to:

- refine the compatibility of the new addition, in size, modulation and color
- demonstrate the approach for restoration vs replacement of windows
- set the bounds of the work within 6 historically-significant interior spaces
- define landscape improvements to correct decades of neglect, preserve walkability of sidewalks, and protect a cherished cherry tree.

## 5. Craft a construction package to fit the fixed budget, relying on incomplete drawings from the 30's (and nothing from 1908).

Intrusive site investigations had to wait until the museum moved out. In the meantime, a 3D building scan helped the design team quantify and understand the existing conditions to the greatest extent possible.



## 2 scope of work and budget

Extensive renovation brought Webster up to current standards for occupant health, safety and comfort.

Work to the existing exterior envelope replaced the roof, restored the cornice and repaired brick cladding to re-establish weather-tightness. The majority of windows and doors were replaced, greatly improving thermal performance.

With the former playcourts demolished, a new activities wing provides interior space for physical activity and gathering. Separating the new element from the historic construction, a minimalist “hyphen” feature provides circulation and informal seating.

Webster’s lowest level of the 1908 portion was fully reconfigured to create a consolidated, efficient admin floor comprised of reception, a principal’s office, health room, staff lounge, work areas, and storage.

At the upper two levels, the size and layout of the circulatory system and wide hallways have been left largely unchanged.

The ground level of the 1930’s addition maintains the platform, dining (commons), and kitchen in their original locations.

Construction was extensive, with much of the work hidden from sight: the structure received earthquake safety improvements; new heating, ventilation and natural cooling systems; and updated electrical infrastructure. Stormwater management strategies help the environment at-and-below ground. In these ways and more, the building and site are up-to-code, reflect consistent standards among SPS facilities, and support goals for operational efficiency.



### Site Size

1.55 acres

### Student Capacity

400-450

### Cost

\$26.2m MACC

### Building Size

44,800 sf, renovated  
7,700 sf, new

### Grades Served

kindergarten - 8th

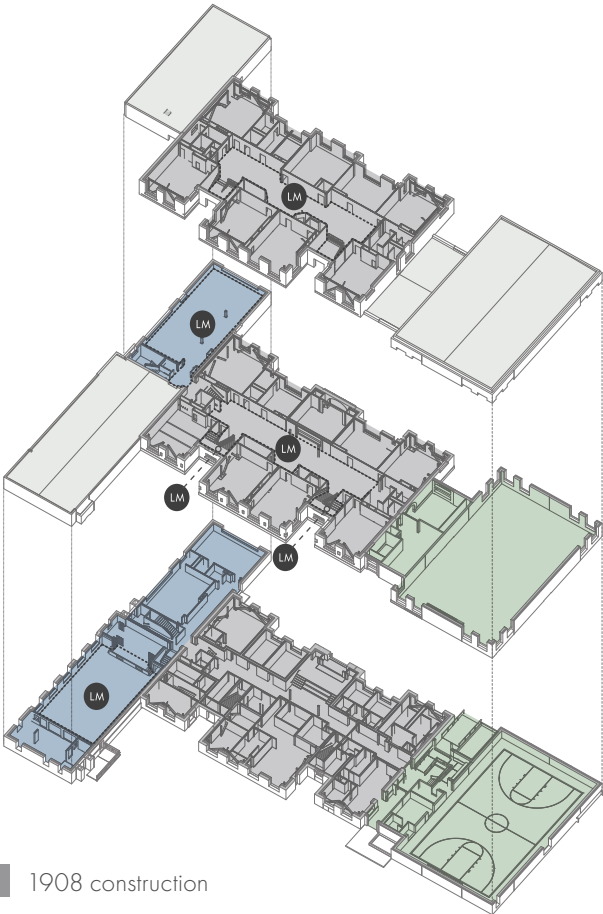
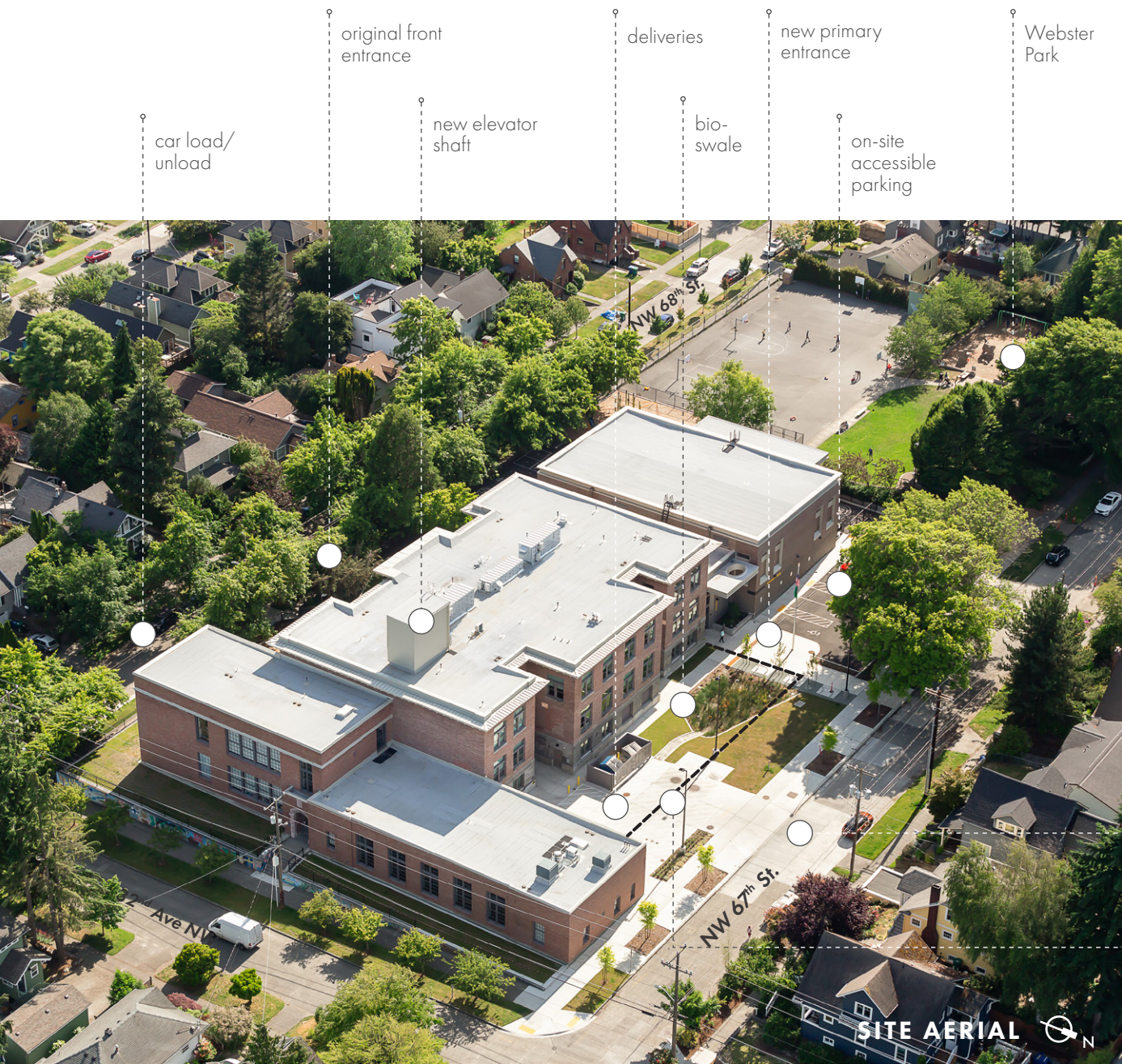


Before: Dining/Platform



Below: Aerial view of Webster;

Right: The 3-story building contains 3 genres of construction. Inside the landmarked exterior envelope of the 1908 and 1930's portions, the 6 interior spaces also deemed "significant" include: the dining room (first floor); wide hallways/shared learning areas at the second and third floors; the library (second floor); and two open stairways connecting the second and third floors.



- 1908 construction
- 1930 construction
- 2020 construction
- LM Landmarked areas

bus load/  
unload

line of demolished  
play courts



This page: the Library.

Once comprised of smaller reading and reference rooms, the opened-up library is conducive to collaborative work and supervision. To earn approval by the Landmarks Preservation Board, the design team conveyed the educational value, their approach to sensitive treatment of the perimeter, and intent to express modern interventions, like the honest reveal of the once-hidden structure (below right).



# 3

## school & community engagement

### STAKEHOLDERS

Seattle Public Schools' prototypical elementary ed specs and technical building standards gave guidance for functionality, and preferred systems and finishes. Representatives from Capital Projects helped resolve building-specific issues in conflict with the standards.

In the absence of a designated user group during design, dozens of District-level representatives served as project advocates during room layout conferences. Individuals specializing in teaching, library and health—along with security, equipment, maintenance and I.T. professionals—engaged in collaborative conversations to address scenarios for day-to-day operations, building and site security, means for safe and equitable access to toilet facilities, and how the design would encourage shared community use.

The decision that Licton Springs K-8 (LSK8) would move to Webster was finalized at the onset of construction. With work underway, LSK8 staff were consulted in time to make minor adjustments that would personalize the space. Modifications to science and art rooms were among the few adaptations sought.



Library, Before





## THE COMMUNITY

The Ballard Neighborhood is largely comprised of single family residences constructed between 1900-1950. Residents appreciate the peaceful quietness of the neighborhood.

During outreach events, citizens shared concerns related to traffic impacts to the surrounding streets and the overall suitability of the school's design. These comments directed focus toward mitigating the impacts of vehicles, while preserving human scale and walkability.

## THE IMPACTS OF ENGAGEMENT

The challenges identified in working with stakeholders from the City, school and community shaped the outcome of the design:

**Program:** It was apparent from the outset that the existing historic building would not accommodate a full-size gymnasium (a requirement of the District's Ed Specs). It was determined that the limited available site area would be dedicated to a more compact gymnasium addition, and the balance of the building would support the remainder of the educational program.

**Neighborhood parking concerns:** The site was just large enough to house the building, playground, service yard, stormwater facilities and 7 parking stalls. (The City's on-site parking requirement for this school was over 100 stalls.) Neighbors were rightly concerned about traffic impacts among the narrow streets. However, an analysis showed that adequate parking did exist throughout the neighborhood.

**Building access:** The original main entrance to the 1908 school was accessed by traversing 10' of stairs from the south sidewalk. Now, a new, fully accessible entry at the opposite side of the building defines a new formal front door that enters into a lower, narrow circulation space between the existing building and gym.

**Small spaces:** The layout of the building and protection of landmarked elements forced some interior spaces, such as classrooms and offices, to be smaller than what is considered typical by today's standards. To counter this, the original central hallways—approx. 20' in width—

were preserved. These are used as shared learning areas, outfitted with flexible furnishings and technology to support a variety of activities.

**Landmarks:** As a registered landmark by the City of Seattle, Webster's scope of work underwent a rigorous process of garnering approval from the Landmarks Preservation Board. Elements that were carefully scrutinized: demolition of the playcourts, the gymnasium addition, replacement and refurbishment of historic windows, and the bounds of preservation vs. modification for the many key interior features.

**Structural issues:** A heavy, unreinforced masonry building, Webster required significant structural upgrades to comply with current code. In addition to the need for massive footings and thousands of clips between the brick and new framed walls, massive brace frames thread through the classroom spaces—an effort described by the general contractor as "building a ship in a bottle." The brightly-painted steel was left purposefully exposed to preserve square footage and act as a dynamic illustration of how the building is structured.

**Designing flexibility without a user group:** As stated earlier, the final user for the project was not identified throughout a majority of the design process. The team worked with District-level representatives of various specialties to design spaces that would be adaptable to any program.

## Available Assets

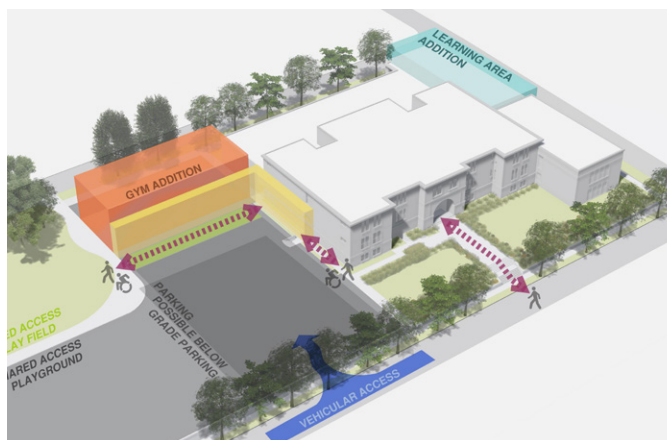
**The neighborhood:** The Ballard neighborhood, located in a northwestern portion of the City of Seattle, is defined by tree-lined streets that create a "quintessential Seattle" atmosphere.

**The site:** The school is located on a small but relatively level site in a residential neighborhood on Ballard's western edge. Sharing the block, a small park sits directly to the west. The property is bordered to the south and east by a retaining wall that follows the site's slope, and the school sits well above the level of the adjacent streets on these two sides. Single family homes border the site to the south, east and north, giving the neighborhood a quaint and appealing character.

**The historic building and its features:** Webster is a designated historic landmark; this includes both the building and site.

**The park:** Owned by Seattle Parks and Recreation, Webster park contains a pleasant grassed area, play structure and basketball courts. A Joint Use Agreement allows scheduling to support student recess and physical education, an efficient use of public space within the dense urban neighborhood.

Below: early massing and accessibility studies.







## VALUE OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT TO THE COMMUNITY

**Project:** The transformation of Webster back into a school has reinstated a significant community asset. In a classic example of "the whole being greater than the sum of its parts," the school and park are complimentary. The park offers expanded space for school activities, and the school provides after-hours amenities that the park did not previously have. Activity throughout the day and evening hours makes the site is safer and more usable.

**Process:** Being known for the last 40 years as a museum, it was important to redefine the idea of Webster as an educational facility. Through several community meetings, the school district and design team described to neighbors how school functions would improve the neighborhood; their feedback influenced design decisions.



# 4 educational environment

SPS's educational vision for the school sought a welcoming, inspiring learning environment for young users.

## THE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS THE CURRICULUM

As a Kindergarten through 8<sup>th</sup> grade program with a small but growing population of students, LSK8 was in need of a "just right" place to call home. Webster's integration of historic and contemporary spaces has proven to be a great fit. The compact building keeps students close to one another (a valuable scenario outside of a pandemic), while the 3-story layout provides appropriate separation between grade levels. The general classrooms, commons, and music, art and science rooms offer a range of learning areas for students.

*"We are a K-8 school and we also have a Developmental PreK program. Having our PreK and Kinder students on one floor and our 2-4<sup>th</sup> students on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and our 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> students upstairs aligns with how we organize our student grade bands."*

*"We are a school serving students who have not had welcoming or positive experiences in their neighborhood schools. This sometimes means they have special or additional learning needs. The ample learning spaces in the hallways for pull-outs or small group learning ["fit" the personality of the LSK8 program]. The bright colors make it feel welcoming and exciting."*

- LSK8 Principal Emily Butler



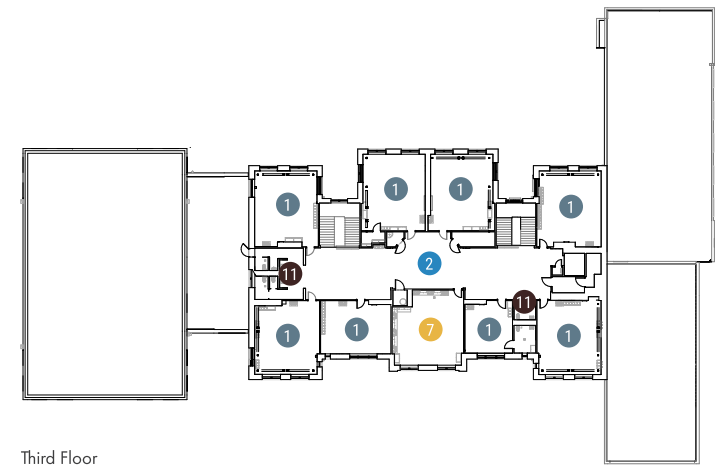
## THE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS A VARIETY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

Webster contains a mix of traditional classrooms; flex learning areas directly outside—and visible from—classrooms; small group learning areas; performance space; and specialty learning areas. This variety offers a place for every learner.

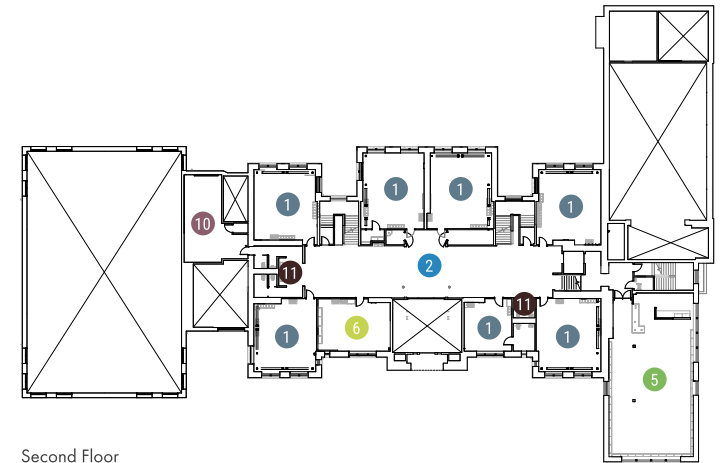
The historic classroom spaces are smaller than a typical contemporary model, offering a more intimate setting for learning. Open flex spaces provide opportunity for break-out and/or large group activities.

## ADAPTABLE AND FLEXIBLE

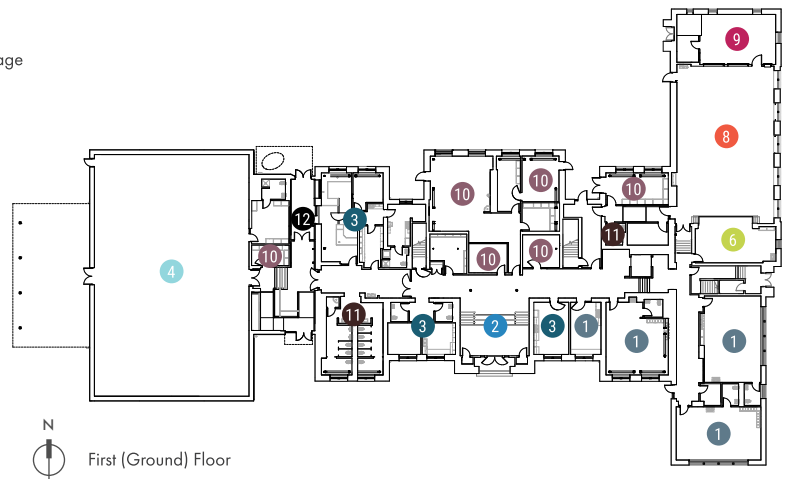
Having functioned as a school in its early life, followed by a museum and now once again a school, Webster itself is a model of adaptability and flexibility. While the existing layout largely dictated the floor plan, it is adaptable to elementary, middle, or even specialty high school programming through a change in layout, furniture and equipment.



Third Floor



Second Floor



First (Ground) Floor

- LEGEND**
- 1 Core Instruction
  - 2 Shared Learning
  - 3 Administration / Staff Support
  - 4 Gymnasium / Activities
  - 5 Library
  - 6 Music / Art
  - 7 Science
  - 8 Commons / Dining
  - 9 Kitchen
  - 10 Building Support / Storage
  - 11 Restrooms
  - 12 Hyphen





# 5

## physical environment

### PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

LSK8-Webster's design carries forward themes from its origins as a school built within a largely Nordic community. The exterior design, interior finish and furniture palette employ bold color as a means to inject a sense of fun within a historic structure that communicated a serious tone. To offset the solemn demeanor of the brick and concrete outside and dark wood tones inside, new materials, colors and shapes were selected to "respectfully lighten the mood."

### FIT WITHIN COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Within the larger context of the dense urban neighborhood, Webster efficiently packs many features into its small parcel.

The site provides one of the neighborhood's few open spaces. Locating the play area near the park extends an invitation for community use. Families and residents are drawn here to relax and play. Now, more than simply acting as a neighbor to the park, the new Webster gym, play canopy, and play grounds provide additional amenities that enlarge the collection of public assets.

### THE PROJECT INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES

Webster's cohesive features, finishes and furniture unite varying architectural genres to create an engaging learning environment for students. Energetic accent colors appear in large-scale wall graphics and at exposed structural steel. Across the school, yellow, orange and green add interest and cue way-finding.





Left to right: a colorful tack board in a shared learning area lets the historic rail run behind; arch, rusticated concrete base, and brick maintained in the hyphen; a small learning stair at the former split-level main entry.

## 6 results of the process and project

### ACHIEVED: EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The renovation and expansion of Webster School gives LSK8 a place to offer expanded views of history and education, within a building and site that engage students, families, and citizens of greater Seattle in celebrating Ballard's multi-cultural history.

Yet, shortly after the last of the furniture was installed and final paint touch-ups applied, Covid 19 shuttered schools across the State. Licton Springs K-8 classes were eventually conducted on-line, with access to the building restricted. Students, staff, families, and the many, many design and construction professionals who played a role in actualizing the project had to wait to witness how the building would function as intended.

### ACHIEVED: DISTRICT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The design achieves the school district's goals through simplicity, practicality and creativity.

#### A Unique Learner-Centered Environment

- The "students first" approach emphasized optimized instructional spaces within the historic context of the building.
- Areas for displaying student work are located throughout, and custom-designed, large format tack boards in common spaces add bright blocks of color.
- Within the new hyphen, a large display case runs parallel to the ramp. Variation in adjacent floor height allows smaller students to adjust their vantage point to better view the objects inside.
- A small learning stair fills the area that was once the building's primary entrance.
- The openness of wide hallways offers flexible learning areas immediately outside of classrooms, encouraging students to participate in creative projects.
- Exterior areas surrounding the building (hard, soft, grassy, sunny, shaded, structured, non-structured) support varying outdoor learning activities.

#### Ability to Personalize the Environment

- Varying space sizes, and the furniture with which they are outfitted, allow adaptation to suit a variety of learning styles, for large group lessons, smaller group activities and/or individual interactions with instructors.
- A display case in the library features interesting "artifacts" found throughout the original building, with placards describing their former use and function.
- An easily-visible seating feature in the hyphen can be repurposed to hold a large, 3D art installation or table for display materials.
- Webster's unique design elements—old and new—work together to create a one-of-a-kind, memorable place.

*"For the first time since 1969, our school has its own building. For a school that has been moved 5+ times, having a permanent home that is not shared with others means a lot. That it is new and beautiful means even more. Our school serves a majority of Students of Color Furthest From Educational Justice, so housing our school in such an amazing building definitely enhances our students' access to equitable education and communicates to students that they are important."*

- Emily Butler





Top: Traditional main entry arch and protected tree. As one of three surviving trees donated by a former Ballard family, the Matsuda Cherry is an example of World War II neighborliness, acceptance and endurance.

Bottom: Arched detail, covered play canopy.



### Program Adaptability

- Furniture that varies in size from floor to floor supports a range of instruction across grade levels.
- Integrated technology allows students to see well, hear better, and interact easily with the teacher and each other.

### Community Connections

- Community-use spaces, such as the gym and dining room, are easy to access from the outside, and can be closed off from school-specific areas to accommodate separate, concurrent use.

### Aesthetics

- Inviting materials, textures and colors accentuate the historic architecture.
- Careful protection of architectural features in the old portions of the school, and modest detailing in the new addition, convey a visual history told across Webster's 3 construction genres.
- Sensitive treatment of the old building and new addition convey a strong civic presence.

### Safety/Accessibility

- Safety and security strategies include good sight lines across the building and site, supplemented by the integration of technology.
- Cleared vegetation, a more oft-occupied building, and enhanced lighting also contribute toward a safer environment.
- The new north-facing primary entrance provides much-improved access for people of all abilities.

### Collaboration

- Collaborative areas are central among core learning spaces.
- Open areas promote greater interaction among students and staff.
- Meeting rooms, work areas and rest rooms are located throughout the building to provide easy-to-access, professional, supportive spaces.

### ACHIEVED: COMMUNITY GOALS

In a neighborhood where everything seems to have its place and no space is wasted, Webster School and the adjacent Webster Park offer a pleasant break in the rhythm of tightly woven residences.

Although it housed the beloved Nordic Heritage Museum, the site lacked the daily activity that promotes safe spaces. The vegetation was overgrown. Now, after extensive renovation inside and out, Webster offers a safe place for students during the day and for community members during non-school hours.

Webster's own history is a microcosm of the Ballard community. Greatly influenced by, and still connected to its heritage, Ballard celebrates Nordic roots during its annual Viking Days. Design elements threaded through the building connect past, present and future, inspiring an environment able to be appreciated by generations to come.

### UNINTENDED RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

*"With COVID, we were unable to have many students back in 20-21 after our move. The building absolutely has had a positive impact on our staff morale, though. My favorite moment of last school year was when staff came into the building the first time after it was finished to see the space and their new rooms. That was a hugely needed energizing boost during a really difficult year."*

*We had more teachers opting to come into the building to teach than staying at home after our move as well. Any time you can get people together in the same space, it enhances teamwork and staff morale. That we were in this amazingly beautiful new building with new furniture and equipment made everyone feel special."*

- Emily Butler





Comprised of simple, affordable, maintainable materials, the “hyphen” between old and new contains space for circulation, gathering and display.

# 7

## sustainability and wellness

### ENERGY EFFICIENCY

New mechanical, electrical, plumbing and low voltage components, tied together into an energy management system, work efficiently—and on demand—inside the densely-insulated building envelope. With a projected EUI of 29, Webster is designed to outperform a Seattle Energy Code baseline building by 24%. Further, by meeting requirements of the Washington Sustainable Schools Protocol (a self-certifying system modeled to parallel LEED Silver), as well as those for the Seattle Energy Code (among the most robust in the nation), Webster is built to last effectively and efficiently for another 100 years, seeking balance between lightened resource consumption, ease of operations and occupant physical comfort, and reduction of its overall impact on the environment.

Below:

The roof of the gym is structurally enhanced, containing conduit ready for the future installation of solar panels.





## DURABLE, HEALTHY MATERIALS

Renovation of historic buildings brings increased emphasis on saving doors, windows, finishes, and other materials, to a level beyond a typical modernization. This resulted in substantial resource conservation.

Many of Webster's materials and systems were prescribed by Seattle Public Schools' Technical Building Standards. But for those not specifically covered, or others deemed impractical due to conflict with the budget or existing conditions, the design team presented alternatives identified for performance, cleanability, affordability, and contribution toward a healthy environment. Together, Webster's materials and systems work to produce a fun, dynamic learning environment.

The design team kept the palette simple and 'honest.' Where possible, building components remain unfinished or lightly finished, with many areas left exposed, to avoid unnecessary additional layers. This minimalist mindset served to reduce both waste and cost.

Interior and exterior materials, such as CMU and concrete, convey their natural color and texture. One hard-working product, linoleum, brings multiple benefits, such as comfort underfoot; assistance in noise reduction; natural compositional content; simplicity in maintenance... and—like the Webster School building itself—is anticipated to endure while looking handsome, for a long, long time.



## COMFORT IN THE CLASSROOM

An **energy management system** controls components based on hours of occupancy and critical nature of operations. Pre-programmed settings for heating, lighting and outlets are over-ridable via motion sensors and manual controls.





Harvested from hidden areas of the building and reused, patched-in brick hides evidence of a former addition.  
The stately gymnasium wing offsets a new main entry created to extend welcome to all.