



**Wunderland**

Round Rock ISD

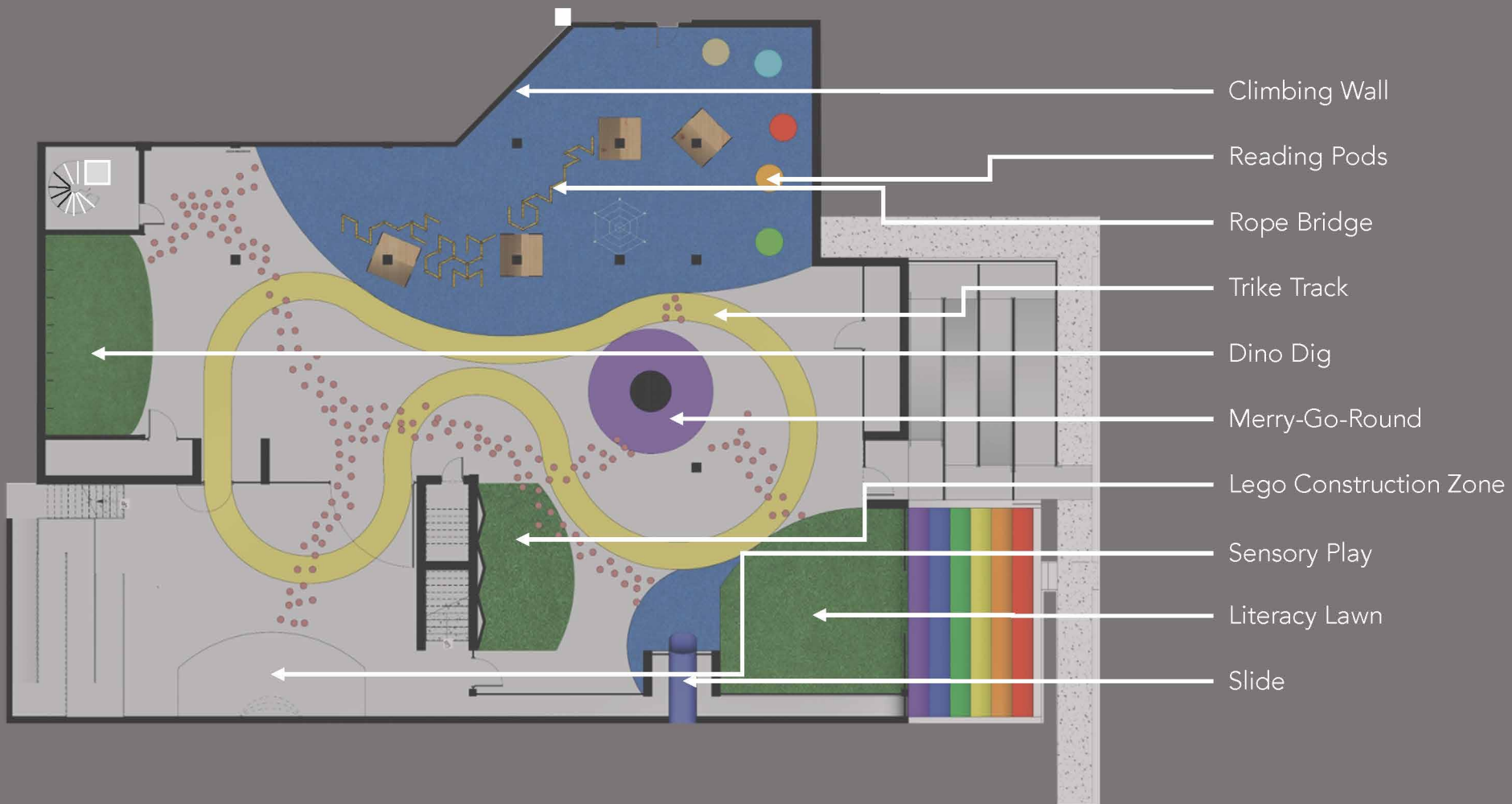




This neighborhood elementary school has a campus-wide focus on literacy and serves three district special ed programs. Like its neighborhood, it has some age on it, but innovative thinking activated a hidden treasure.

GRAY, COLD, UNORGANIZED, AND UNDERUTILIZED... All descriptions of the space formerly known as "The Dungeon." On her first campus walk-through, the new principal was challenged to find a useful and innovative use for the space.

By rehabilitating a dark, dank concrete area with a district grant, they created an inclusive, activity-based, open-air learning environment. Equipment designed for multisensory learning enhances social, emotional, and academic discovery for children of all ages and abilities.



# Project Scope

Wunderland is an 8,095 SF alternative play area in a large space below an elementary school. The campus and District were interested in turning this one-of-a-kind space into an engaging and exciting feature. With limited grant money available, Pfluger worked on a solution that wove together standard play equipment with educational activities for a total construction cost of \$167,585.

The dig tables feed a spirit of exploration and assist with fine motor skills.

A 2015 study shows climbing helps children learn spatial awareness and helps improve motor skills and memory.

Houses were designed to spark imagination and encourage autonomous play. They offer space for non-directed symbolic play to display their attitudes and beliefs, stimulating their physical, social, and cognitive development.

Riding tricycles around the track improves balance and coordination. As students ride through the space and maneuver around obstacles, they gain self-confidence.

Students learn spatial awareness as they step across two apparatus that teach balance.

Reading pods swaying from the ceiling provide solitude in this open space. They can be used for study or enjoying a book.



# community engagement

The surrounding community was excited about giving faculty and students something unique, and pitched in to make this project a reality. Parents and neighbors braved a rare thundersnow to put their creative skills to the test by painting, cutting, and weaving to add their mark to this one-of-a-kind space.

We asked students from a high school art club, many of whom attended the school, to graffiti the walls. *(Their reactions were as you would expect: "Really!?")*

A parent, who also happens to be a graffiti artist, added the finishing touches.

When it was time to open the doors of Wunderland, the kids weren't the only ones excited to experience this activity-filled learning environment! The grand opening, attended by the superintendent and media, brought attention to this older campus.





## LEADING, SUCCEEDING, SERVING

The campus goals for this school are to promote critical thinking and problem solving in math, science, art, and engineering. They strive to provide a safe environment, and partner with families and the community.



Creativity thrives in a life-filled space



Boy Scouts meet in Wunderland



A safe place to create



School Ambassador



Children learn cooperation and independence



Families celebrate high school graduation



This multi-functional space can be used as a **creative extension of the teacher's lesson planning**. For instance, the Lego construction zone or the sensory play area can be used for language arts, math, or art projects.

Other spaces offer **alternative learning opportunities** like balance or climbing, which help children learn spatial awareness and improve motor skills and memory.

In Wunderland, **learning isn't only about school and textbooks**. It's about absorbing information and applying it to one's world.





Activity spaces were designed for **gross and fine motor skill development** that complements and supplements curriculum. Throughout the design process, each element had to meet blended parameters for outdoor and soft-play codes and all vertical and horizontal planes were evaluated for creative possibilities and opportunities for the space to continuously evolve.





The design of  
Wunderland  
aligns with  
campus and  
district goals  
which are...



Build social/emotional skills to thrive



Develop the whole child



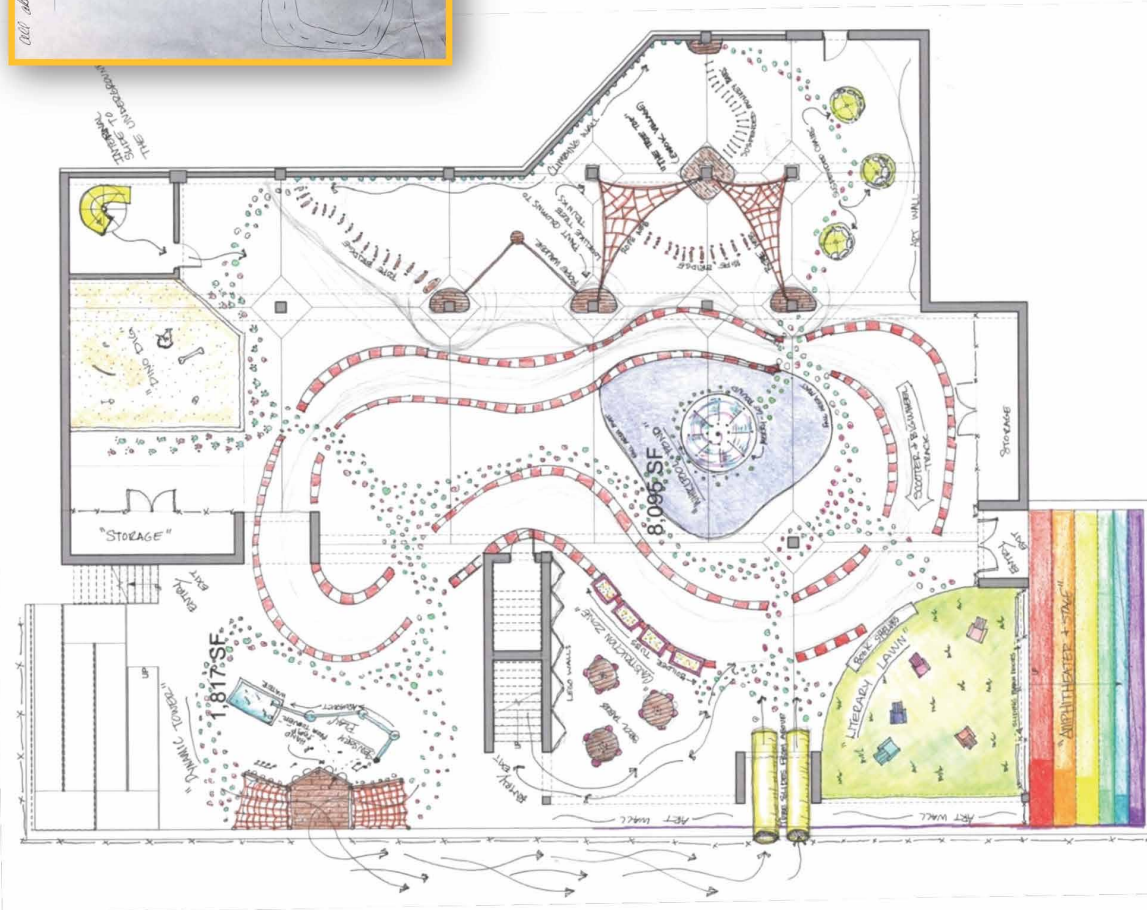
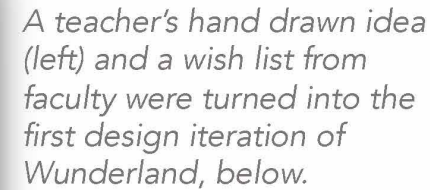
Provide learning & enrichment opportunities



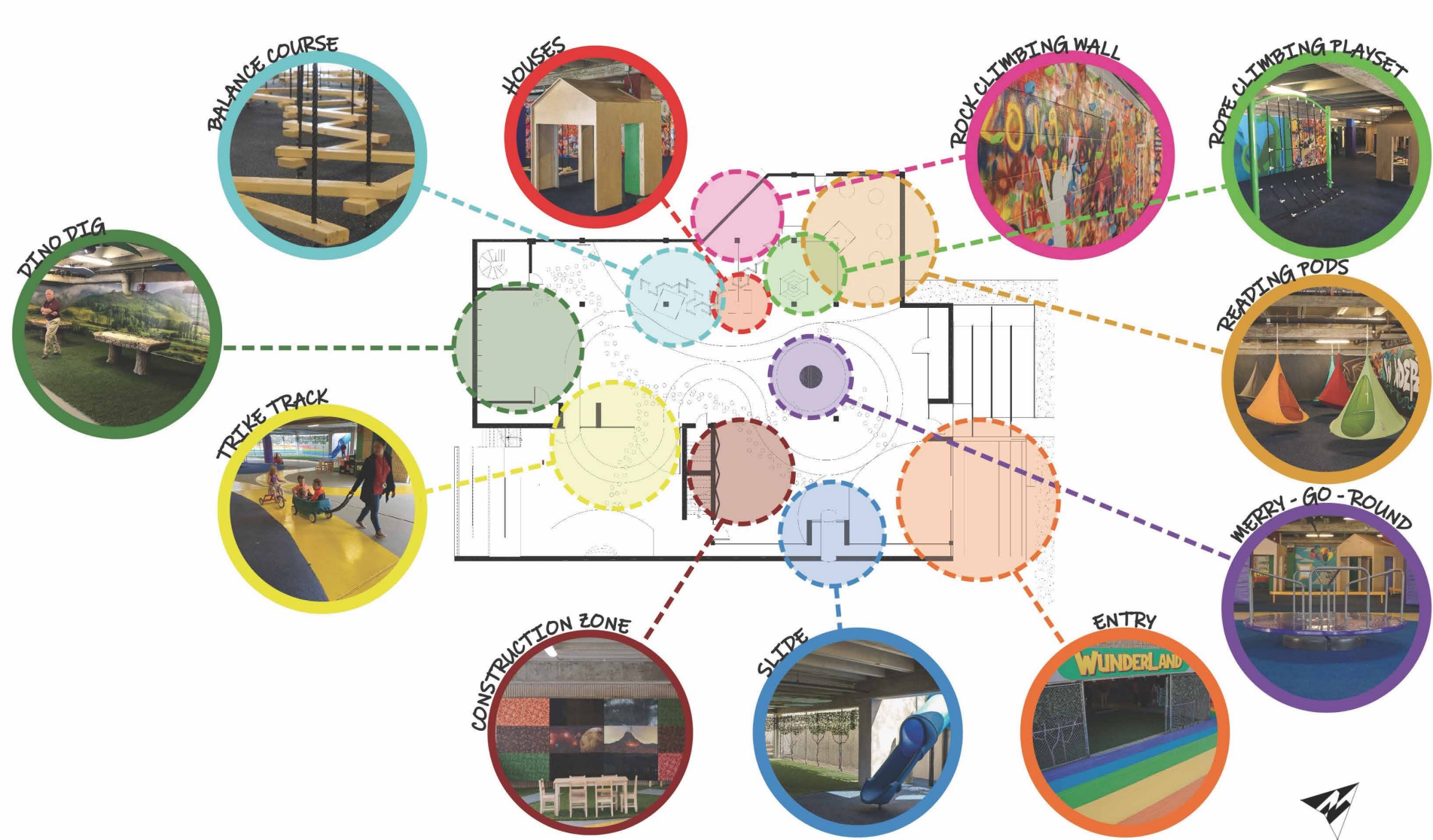
Attract and retain talented teachers



The design team took that drawing and the teachers' wish list and brought the ideas to life.







Students of all ages and abilities can participate in the open-air, activity-based learning environment. Students exercise their body, imagination, emotions, and intellect through physical and educational play.





Spaces were designed to accommodate large and small groups so that, depending on the teacher's lesson plan, students can participate in interactive, group activities or quiet time for individual learning.





Planning started on campus with the school administration, teachers, and stakeholders in the lead. The team knew the design intent and facilitated a collaborative effort. All parties had to adapt as ideas were generated and discarded. This was a grassroots effort that involved many voices and each contributed to a successful project.



*Many of the ideas for the space were not strictly playground-activity based. Several concepts came from the sphere of a children's museum.*





A teacher survey focused on mindset for classroom learning, student independence, and risk and resilience in the classroom.

- Teachers reported a 6% increase in independence.
- Nearly 100% of students maintained and most increased grade appropriate reading levels.
- Most students increased a full year in writing ability.
- No student group failed to grow and most increased by a full year.





*“...I have watched something great happen to [this school] in the last three years. I even see a difference in the kids as they leave the building. They seem so much happier.”*

- a neighbor who homeschooled her daughter for four years.  
Her daughter now attends this school.

