



DESIGN FOR EQUITY:

FOR AN INDIVIDUAL

FOR THE CITY

WING LUKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Seattle, WA

A4LE 2023 Planning and Design Award: Commendation

**"THIS WILL BE A MULTI-CULTURAL SCHOOL."**

— *CLIENT*



# WING LUKE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Seattle Public Schools

A4LE 2023 Planning and Design Award:  
Commendation

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: REACHING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE. REACHING COMMUNITY WHERE THEY ARE.

**For One and All.** Design for equity resonates on both individual and city levels at Wing Luke Elementary. The school's exceptionally diverse student population, reflecting families speaking 17 different languages, presented educational design challenges as well as intriguing opportunities. In the existing building, teachers had worked hard to organize pedagogical activities that could “reach students where they are,” spanning grades and subjects to make sure no one was left behind. Planning efforts then involved identifying ways to amplify spatial choices to support these academic strategies, along with a wide variety of neuropsychological factors associated with childhood development and personal growth.

**Reaching Students and Families Where They Are.** This phrase resounds as the design theme. We focused on creating an inclusive learning environment to help teachers connect with their students according to individual needs, while at the same time reaching out to parents and families in a variety of ways to gain their input and feedback. By attending events hosted at the school, scheduling meetings after hours, and joining gatherings held by



Wing Luke's central courtyard is the heart of the school community. The mascot—a dragon—conveys the message, “You have the power to overcome obstacles and achieve anything.” The dragon comes to life and engages students as an interactive feature in the paving.

recent immigrants at a nearby housing complex, we tapped directly into the richly diverse neighborhood's interests and concerns. This concerted approach achieved above average participation and enhanced the community's trust that the new school truly is for them.

**New District Model for Excellence.** Located in an academically underserved part of Seattle, the new Wing Luke Elementary addresses a longstanding demarcation and is turning the city's education expectations around.

Teachers in the previous school had dedicated themselves to overcoming drawbacks; the new environment now sets the stage for learning equity and accelerates their success. Tasked with being an inclusive multicultural school, Wing Luke manifests an extraordinary vision for public education that ensures every child, teacher, and family knows they are welcome, valued, safe, and served.

## PROJECT DATA

Design Capacity:	<b>500 students</b>
Building Area:	<b>76,413 sf</b> Previous building was 50,720 sf total, comprised of main building (30,650 sf) and recent addition (20,720 sf).
Total Project Cost:	<b>\$47.5 Million</b>
Construction Cost:	<b>\$34.5 Million Total</b>
EUI ( <i>estimated</i> )	<b>18</b>

## Neighborhood Context And Topography



Breaking down the school's massing creates a friendly scale suited to its residential context.

### SITE FLOW: WORKING WITH RECESSED TOPOGRAPHY

While the school brings the scale of a major public building to the neighborhood, the rhythm of its elements creates a friendly juxtaposition to the surrounding residences. Its community porch wraps around the entry plaza and west side to provide a sheltered space where families, teachers, and students can gather at the beginning and end of the school day. This highly valued amenity is in direct response to feedback acquired from school families during neighborhood outreach.





The power of Wing Luke's exceptionally diverse community and its communal attitude was evident in the enthusiastic turnout for Academic Night at the previous school.

## SCHOOL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: PLANNING PROCESS

# Reaching Community Where They Are

### KEY DESIGN GOALS:

- + Honor Wing Luke's legacy of diversity; honor multiple cultures.
- + Holistically support teaching for equity.
- + Support the communal spirit of Wing Luke.
- + Provide multiple spatial choices to address the needs of all students.
- + Establish a civic presence that enriches the surrounding neighborhood.

### CHALLENGES: COMMUNITY OUTREACH

"Reaching community where they are," became the design mission—discovering how architecture could create a spatially communal environment to honor multi-cultural heritages.

Many Wing Luke parents work two jobs and were unable to join regularly scheduled evening meetings to discuss planning and design. In turn, the design team expanded efforts to reach community and family members at events they were already attending, such as Academic Night at the existing school. Filling the stage and posting drawings attracted amazing energy from all ages and created an evening to remember. Also, with many Wing Luke families living at the nearby housing community, the design team joined a summer festival there to gather perspectives from stakeholders who would otherwise miss the planning process.



Many Wing Luke students walk to school from one of several planned mixed income communities in the area that give families new to the United States a foundation to build on. These communities are the reason Wing Luke's zip code (98118) is the seventh most diverse in the entire nation.





The chance to provide feedback was a new experience for Wing Luke parents and siblings. Students led the way, feeling right at home giving their ideas and drawings. Sharing digital site models with students.

## SCHOOL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: REACHING VOICES OFTEN FORGOTTEN

# Community Input

## PERSISTENT AND SUSTAINED PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

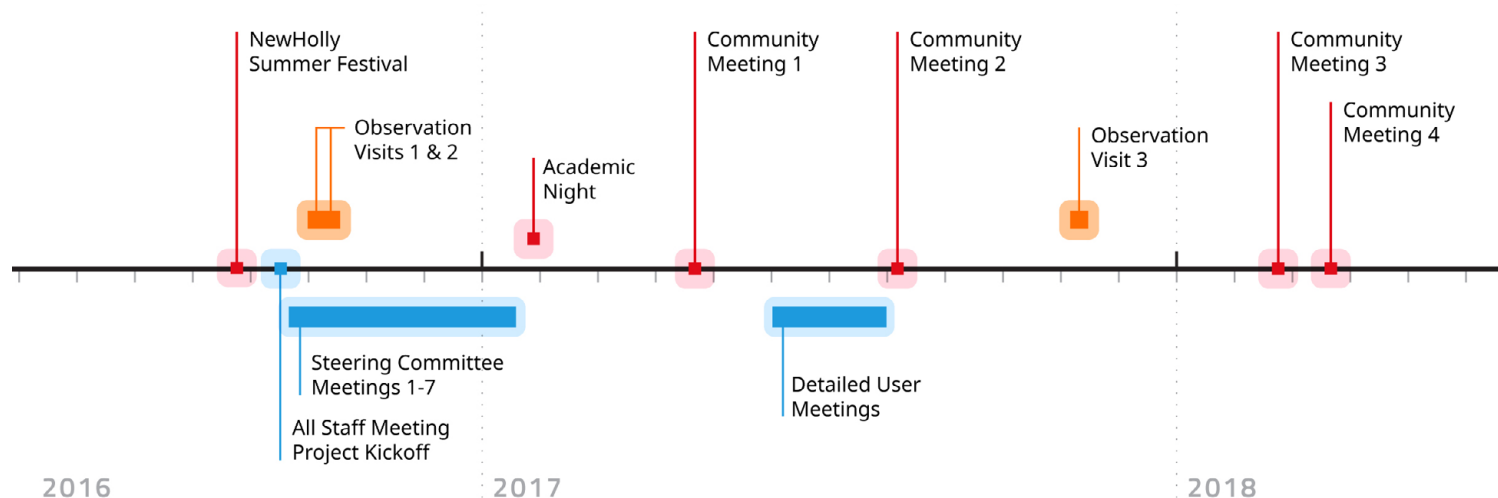
To reach the broadest cross section of the community, we joined regularly attended annual events. From this engagement, the key concepts became clear.

**WELCOME.** A high percentage of families walk to school. They want to wait with students until the bell rings and then be at the school when students are let out.

**TRUST.** Sending a child to school is the first time many families engage with a government agency.

**SAFETY.** Enhancing trust for the school and community required providing clear security for the play areas.

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY.** With respect for the diversity of the surrounding community, the school must honor all cultures. This is the legacy of Wing Luke.



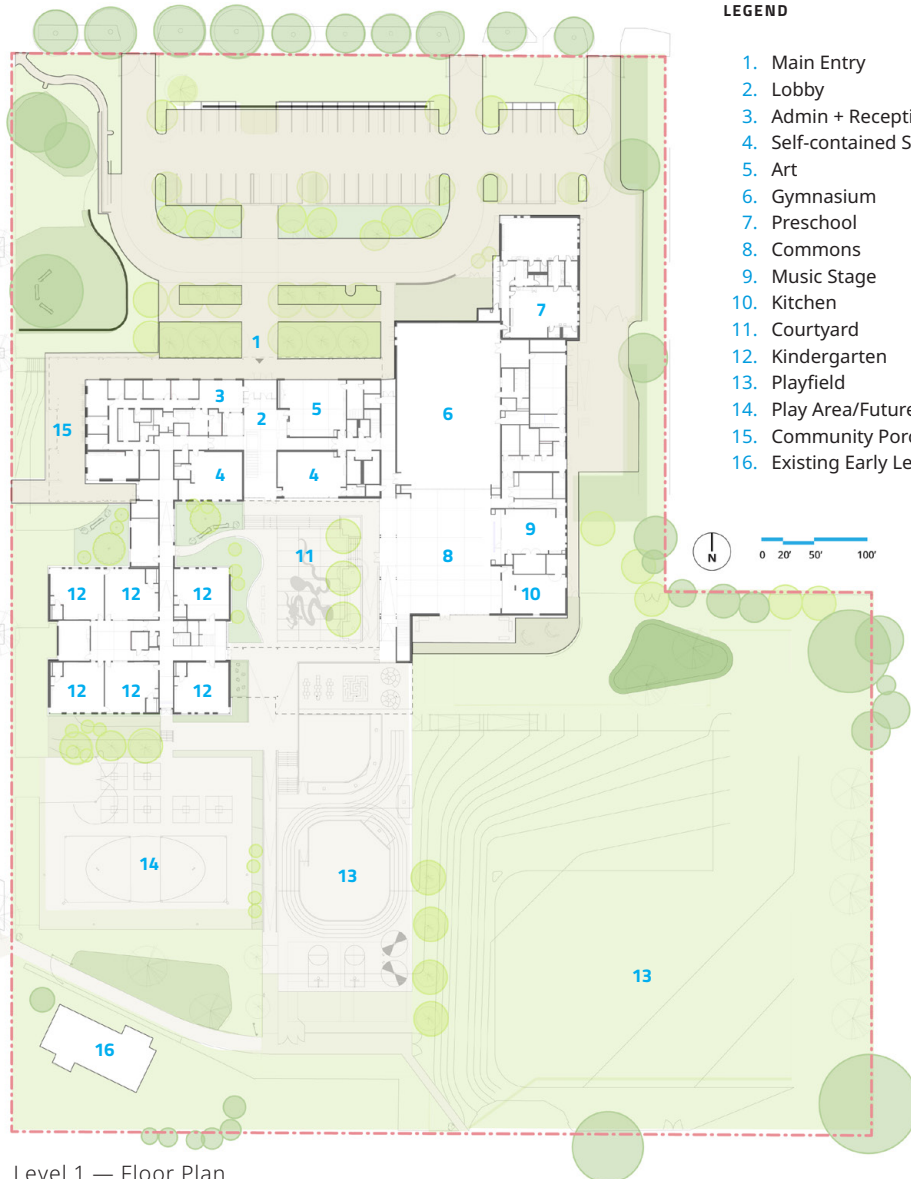


## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: SUPPORTING VARIOUS LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

# Teaching for Equity: Activity Choices Inside and Outside

### LEGEND

1. Main Entry
2. Lobby
3. Admin + Reception
4. Self-contained Special ED
5. Art
6. Gymnasium
7. Preschool
8. Commons
9. Music Stage
10. Kitchen
11. Courtyard
12. Kindergarten
13. Playfield
14. Play Area/Future Addition
15. Community Porch
16. Existing Early Learning



Level 1 — Floor Plan



The courtyard provides a protected environment serving many educational purposes, as well as social, performative, and communal functions.

Top Image: Math class taking measurements;  
Bottom Image: 5th grade graduation ceremony.



## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: EDUCATIONAL VISION AND GOALS OF THE SCHOOL



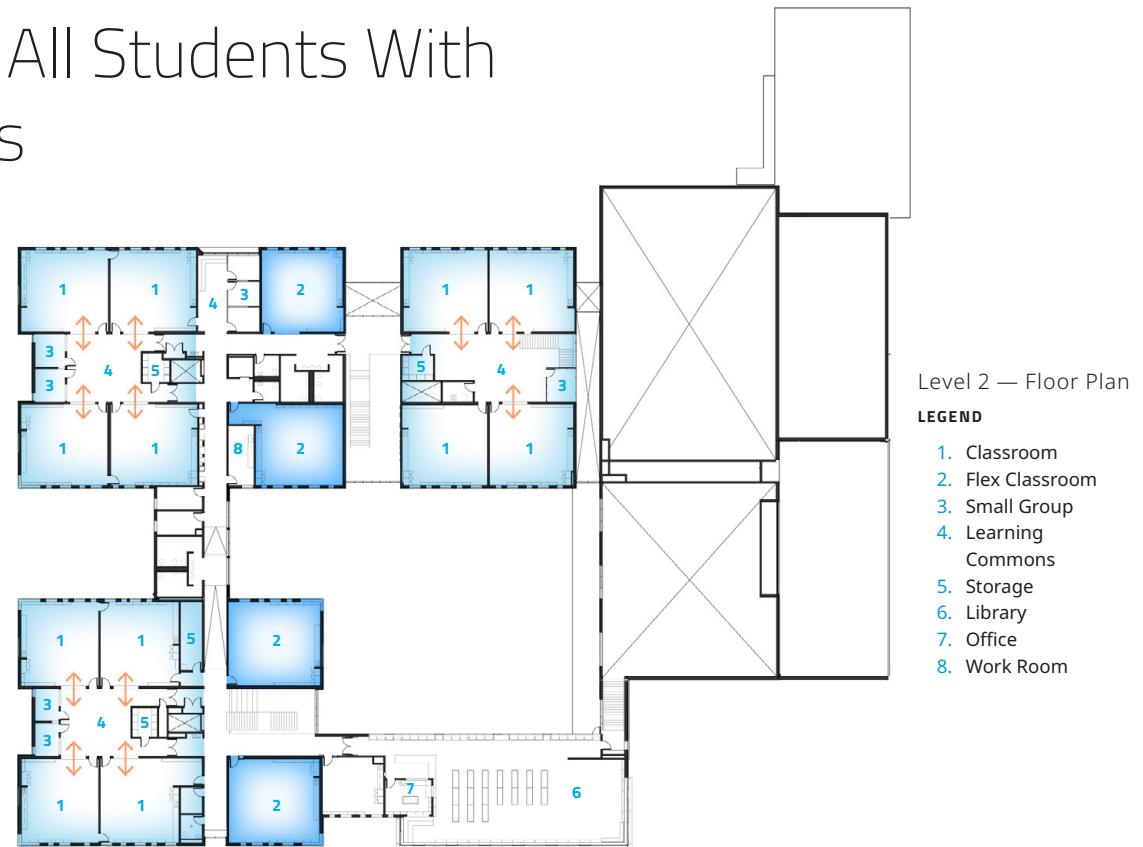
Looking ahead, the assistant principal anticipates the classrooms and their shared spaces functioning like a grade-level Montessori school where students flow through them according to interests and aptitude. The school's design will naturally support pedagogical change over time, strengthening the progress now being made with teaching for equity.

# Teaching For Equity: Reaching All Students With Adaptable and Flexible Options

Classroom neighborhoods are destinations within the school, not places to pass through while on the way to somewhere else. The assistant principal noted that the areas between classrooms are working well for specialist intervention opportunities. They smoothly transition to activities serving a variety of groups in smaller zones that do not interrupt each other.

Teachers and students are using the academic spaces in three main ways:

- + Individual classrooms complemented by shared areas for separate instruction.
- + Shared areas serving as extensions to the classrooms.
- + Classrooms serving as extensions to the shared areas to support student agency.



Second floor plan shows multi-grade neighborhoods reflecting central spatial organization.





## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: SUPPORTING VARIOUS LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

# Teaching for Equity: Reaching All Students Where They Are

**Reaching students “where they are.”** Inclusive teaching and learning permeated the school's educational vision, based on its history of using many small groups and individual tutoring across grade levels to match aptitudes rather than ages. **Called “Dragon Blocks,”** this approach in the new school removes the stigma of focused learning by placing shared areas of various sizes near classroom neighborhoods and throughout the school. Ranging from individual to large group use, activities can take place outside the classrooms or in tandem with in-classroom teaching and learning.



2nd Floor Plan Example of Academic Neighborhood and Adjacent Flexible Areas

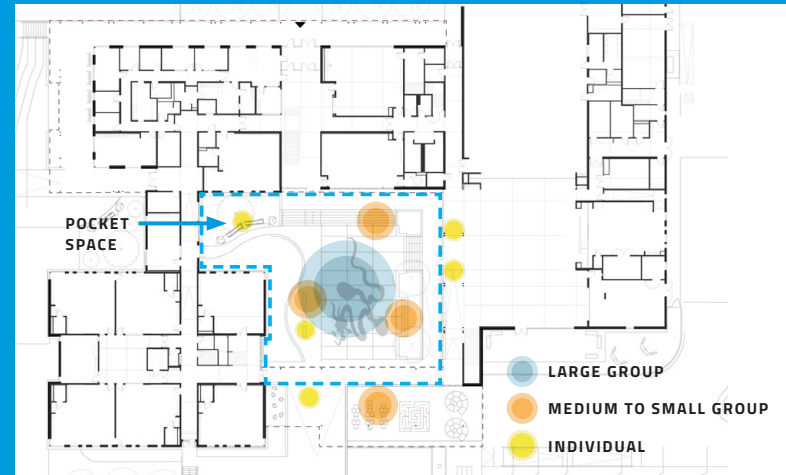




## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT AND PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT: THE INFLUENCE OF RESEARCH

### Social      Communal      Pedagogical

The school community's exceptional diversity and sense of family heightened the design impetus to provide spatially rich environments—quintessential communal spaces. Wing Luke offers multiple interpretations of spatial inclusivity for all purposes, from individual use to large gatherings.



Serving as a quintessential communal space, the courtyard has ample spaces for a variety of activities.

## COMMUNAL SPACE STUDIES

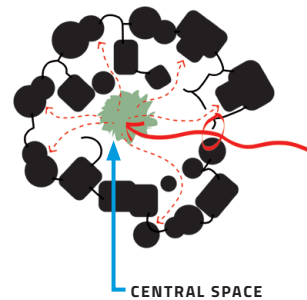
### VILLAGE ORGANIZATION



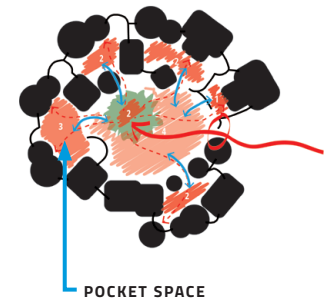
### FIGURE GROUND



### PROGRESSION



### SOCIAL INTERACTION



Serving the school's broadly diverse population, communal gathering spaces include a variety of formal and informal areas.

The large central space is complemented by smaller, informal "pocket" spaces where introverted students can relax and recharge, or where new students can be close to the action while gaining the confidence to venture into the center.





# Student Wellness: Spatial Inclusivity, Inside and Outside



A garden "pocket" space offers respite and serves as an outdoor learning area. It can also provide a sense of privacy to help introverts and newly arrived students feel more comfortable interacting. Larger gatherings and performances take place in the open space beyond.





## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT: EDUCATIONAL VISION AND GOALS

# Individual Experience with a Sense of Community

The school is designed to allow Dragon Blocks to occur throughout the building, including several spots in the library. Advancing educational equity further, the librarian has pursued a new collection of books to spark even broader interests in the students.

Sakura cherry trees (visible through the window) give a nod to Japanese gardens. When they bloomed this spring, several teachers and school administrators commented on their beauty. Including them in the landscape reminds students of Seattle's long connection with Japan and underscores the school's respect for multicultural experiences.



Sakura cherry trees are visible from Library and Commons.



# Honoring Cultural Heritages: Tactile — Physical — Educational



Major circulation nodes are highlighted with a “dragon skin” wall texture and red baffles on the ceilings.

Wing Luke arrived in the United States from Hong Kong at age 6. After years of public service, at age 37, he was the first person of color elected to Seattle’s city council. The historic image at left captures Wing Luke signing official documents in English as well as Chinese while he served as acting mayor of the city. Wing Luke’s seal on that document, the same seal that is featured prominently on the lobby wall, is a symbol to students of the school with life stories similar to Wing Luke that this school is here to serve them.





Students engage in the "Dragon Walk" as a way to transition from outdoor play to focused indoor academic activities.



## **RESULTS:** ACHIEVING DISTRICT AND COMMUNITY GOALS

# Subtle Honoring of Different Cultures — Honoring Human Craft

Sharing cultures through art and craft, the courtyard's significance as the heart of a diverse community merited capturing the larger-than-life spirit of the school's mascot, the dragon. The brushstroke quality of the traditional painted dragon felt achievable through the use of hand-placed stones.

Exposed black Mexican river rocks are set in a form with spacing in certain areas giving the illusion of a 3-dimensional form. The installation process required a CNC'd plywood template to ensure every stone was placed accurately.





# Design for Equity & Wellness: A Student-Centered Environment



## UNEXPECTED ACHIEVEMENTS

### 3RD GRADERS' MISCHIEF: APPRECIATING VIEWS AND BIOPHILIC DESIGN

Through the project's planning and design, the steering committee recognized the potential for extraordinary views from the library, showcasing Lake Washington, the Cascade Mountains, and Mount Rainier.

During a recent site visit, the librarian shared a story confirming the impact of the design on learning experiences. She was pleased to have solved a mystery involving her after-hours reading class. Typically, they would meet in a room without views. For several days, the space was locked, so she and the students gathered in the library instead. Initially thinking the issue was a custodial error, she discovered that a 3rd grader was the culprit. He explained that he and the others wanted to be in the library where they could see the "ocean," actually Lake Washington. His mischief demonstrates how design matters even at younger grades and confirms the power of biophilic design principles to inspire student engagement.



Design for equity and wellness for the city:  
Wing Luke's library has the most scenic views in  
the district—a new perspective for this previously  
underserved neighborhood.



# Wing Luke: Embodiment of a Truly Inclusive Public School

