

Barbara Vick Western Branch

CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Executive Summary

GOALS AND OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

By transforming an unused commercial bank building for the Barbara Vick Early Education Western Branch, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) invests in the Beverly neighborhood's high demand for early education spaces while illustrating how others can turn empty storefronts into community assets. The design embraces the building's unique features, creating vibrant, airy classrooms and public areas to support a play-based curriculum and network administration offices. Upon entry, energetic blues, oranges, and yellows dance among warm wood tones, illuminated by a large, glass atrium. A large central stair connects the classroom levels, encouraging students and staff to linger and socialize. The colors zigzag into six generously sized classrooms on the first and second floors, each with unique spaces to learn, explore, and play, including nooks for small groups or quiet learning. To create opportunities for students to connect with nature, the teller drive-through is converted into a covered play environment for outdoor education rain-or-shine. Breathing new life into the former bank building, the early education design enriches both the intellectual and physical capital of the neighborhood.

SCOPE

The architect was originally contracted with the Chicago Public Schools to perform test fits at three locations to determine the best fit for the new home of a satellite PreK program. While identifying the oversized bank/office building that would be the new home of the Barbara Vick Western Branch, CPS sought to include network administration offices in the same facility. The design would need to accommodate both user groups while providing for the safety and security of the school.

BUDGET

Conceptualized in 2021, the original project budget was \$6.7 million. Due to project delays and rising construction costs during the COVID-19 outbreak, the final construction cost of the project came in at \$9.9 million.



School & Community Research Engagement

PROCESS

VISIONING PROCESS

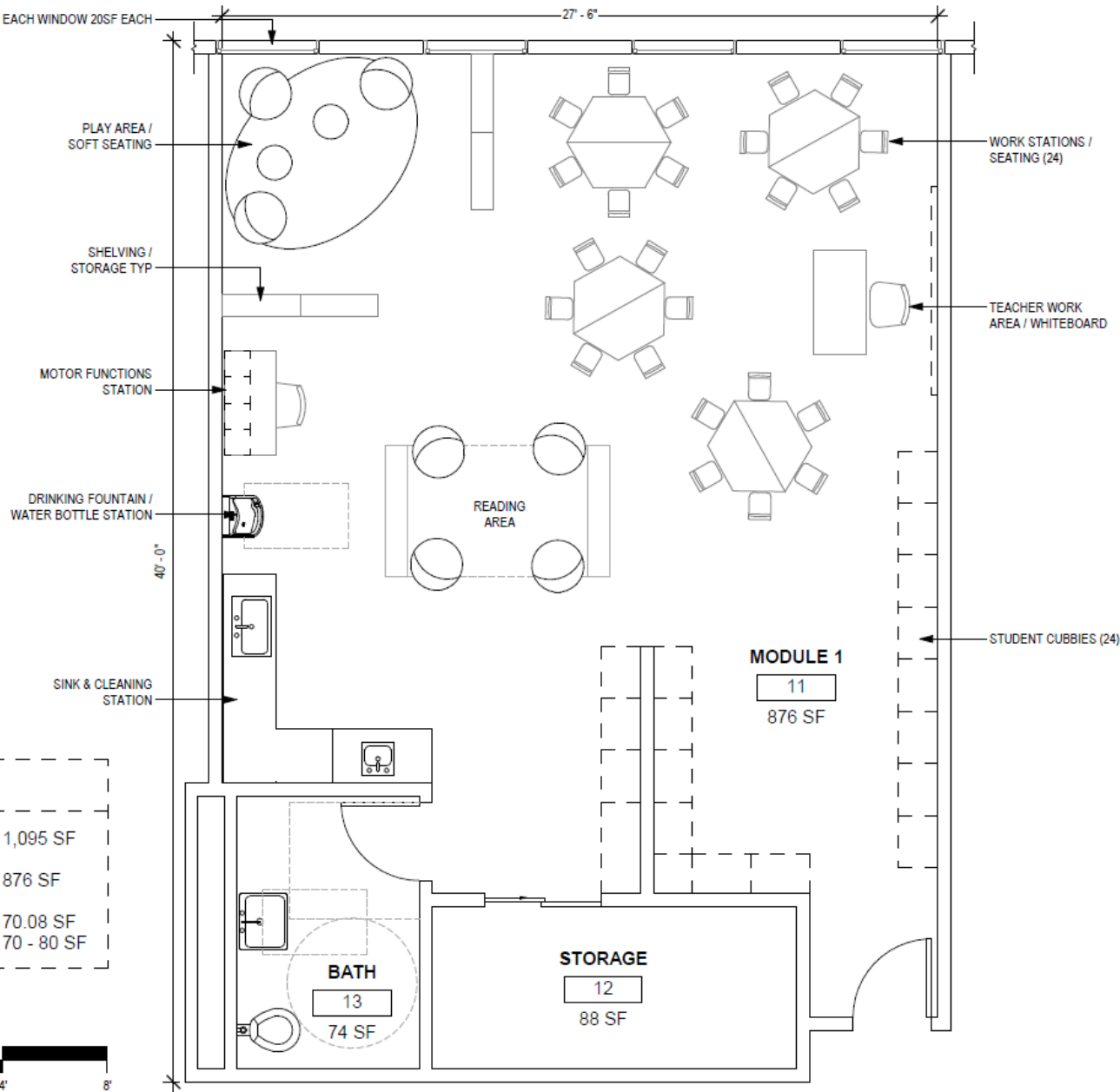
Chicago Public Schools had identified three potential sites as the home for the new Barbara Vick Center: a grocery store, a bank building, and a commercial space. The architect visited each potential site with the client to assess their suitability.

As dedicated Pre-K facilities were new for the district, the architect worked hand-in-hand to develop a classroom module with all the elements necessary for a successful early education learning environment. This module would be the basis to determine if the proper space could be allocated in the selected buildings.

Along with considerations for appropriately sized classrooms, the architect considered factors such as student drop off, security, and building condition / renovation requirements before making a recommendation.

MODULE 1	
GROSS SF:	1,095 SF
NET SF:	876 SF
NATURAL LIGHT REQ'D:	70.08 SF
NATURAL LIGHT ACTUAL:	70 - 80 SF

CLASSROOM - MODULE 1



Test Fit Sites



SITE A: 11424 S. WESTERN

- **Available Space:** 17,100 sf on Floor 1
- **Year Built:** 2002
- 7-8 Classrooms
- Student drop off zone in parking lot
- 4 schools within 2 miles
- 9 parks within 1 mile



SITE B: 8658 S. SACRAMENTO

- **Available Space:** 24,561 sf
- **Year Built:** 2000
- 7 - 12 Classrooms
- Student drop off zone in parking lot
- Opportunity for indoor / outdoor playspace
- 1 school within 1 miles
- 2 parks within 1 miles



SITE C: 9901 S. WESTERN

- **Available Space:** 25,000 sf (2 story + Basement)
- **Year Built:** 1990
- 6-14 Classrooms
- Student drop off zone in parking lot
- Opportunity for covered outdoor playspace
- Additional Space for Network Administrative Offices
- 2 schools within 2 miles
- 1 parks within 1 miles

Ultimately, this site located at 99th and Western was selected. Its ample size would provide plentiful space for additional classrooms as the program continued to grow.

During the test fit process, Chicago Public Schools identified a need to create additional Network Administrative Offices. This site could provide the necessary office, training, and break areas for the district accessible via a separate entrance, a requirement for student safety.

The building's unique shape and features offered many benefits for an early education facility. Daylighting from the large storefront windows and atrium would become a wellbeing asset for students and teachers alike. The drive-through teller area could be converted into a covered playspace for outdoor exploration rain-or-shine.

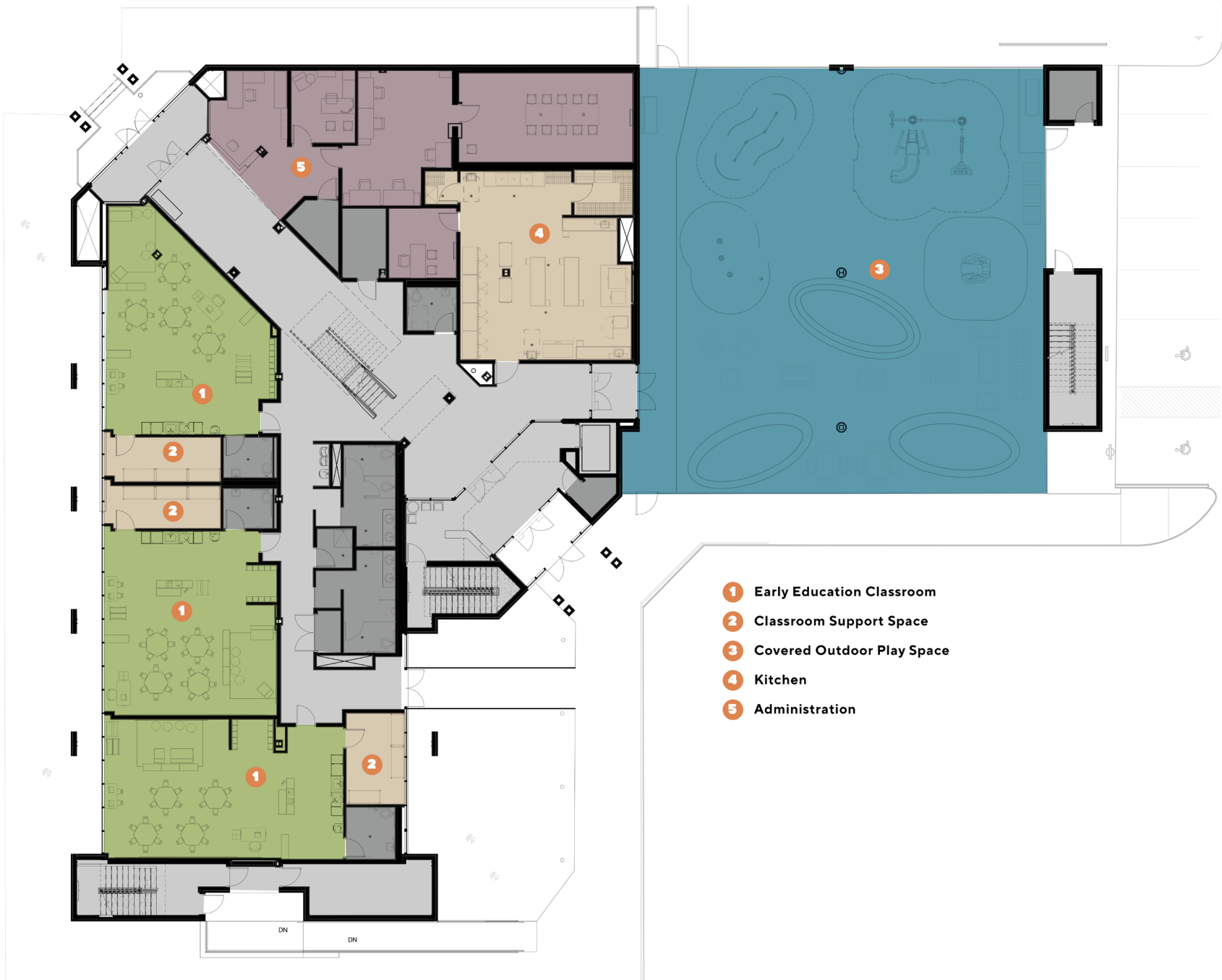


BEFORE

The selected site for the Barbara Vick Western Branch featured key architectural elements including the bright atrium which would offer plentiful day light into the space and the drive-through teller for a covered outdoor play place. However the existing interiors felt dated and corporate, requiring an complete interior renovation.







- 1 Early Education Classroom
- 2 Classroom Support Space
- 3 Covered Outdoor Play Space
- 4 Kitchen
- 5 Administration

1 FIRST FLOOR FURNITURE PLAN - NEW WORK
1/8" = 1'-0"



- ① Early Education Classroom
- ② Classroom Support Space
- ③ Multi-Purpose Classroom
- ④ Lounge
- ⑤ Principal's Office
- ⑥ Network Administration Offices

① **SECOND FLOOR FURNITURE PLAN - NEW WORK**
 1/8" = 1'-0"





VALUE OF PROCESS AND PROJECT TO COMMUNITY AT LARGE

Early education programs were in high demand in Chicago's south side. "We have been bursting at the seams for years," Principal Amy O'Connor told the Beverly Review, a local news outlet. "Any space we have, we've turned over into classrooms. We've built walls to separate rooms to build more classrooms. We did a third shift for a long time, where we had kids in the building until 6 p.m." Before this project began, Barbara Vick was serving over 350 students. The creation of this new facility at 99th and Western as well as an addition to the original facility brings capacity to 600 students total.

Being at the heart of Beverly's commercial hub offered many benefits beyond its central location and ability to meet the program needs: it provided resources for outdoor play, ample parking, and efficient pick-up / drop-off areas for both parents and buses without disrupting traffic. While the commercial interiors needed to be completely transformed, the re-use of this existing building eliminated new construction, taking advantage of the building's existing embodied carbon.

ENGAGEMENT FOSTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

To ensure the new school would provide opportunity for students who need it most, the test fit process considered the distance of each site from existing schools and parks, which often have early education programming. By selecting a site furthest from existing parks and school, the new facility could provide a more convenient option than existing programs.



BEFORE

Physical Environment

RESPONSE

HOW THE PROJECT INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES

Energetic colors in dynamic shapes on the walls create unexpected patterns, enlivening the space for a more delightful experience. The design emphasizes the building's large, original windows and atrium to maximize daylight views, connecting students and staff with the outdoors and catalyzing curiosity about the world beyond. The new, open, central stair creates a social space on all levels: under the stair, a bench allows students to wait or participate in quiet tasks; on the stair, movement is encouraged with steps wide enough for students and staff to climb side by side, providing an opportunity to talk to one another; and at the top, the landing is open, allowing students and staff to see what is happening on the levels below.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Every aspect of the design reflects the school's value of creating a positive sense of belonging, encouraging flexible interaction.

In both the classrooms and circulation spaces, design details provide spaces for students and staff to find solitude or interact with others. Each classroom includes quiet nooks for children to explore or play individual or small groups. The open stair provides internal circulation within the school while providing a security separation from the network offices. Below the stair, a comfortable bench provides space for students to meet and gather.

By using an existing bank/office facility, designers transformed challenges into unique opportunities. What was previously the drive-through bank teller became a covered outdoor play area, allowing children to play and explore outdoors rain or shine.



FOSTERING SUSTAINABILITY & WELLNESS

By reusing the existing building, the design team transformed the empty space into a vibrant community asset, thus eliminating the need and environmental cost of new construction. All materials selected are red-list free to ensure the health and wellbeing for users of all ages.

The existing atrium is showcased in the new design, providing daylight to the common areas on both floors to connect students, faculty, and staff with the outside environment and improve wellbeing. The prominence of the open stair in the middle of the school encourages its use over an elevator.

Movement and play are further encouraged by the covered outdoor playspace allowing for rain-or-shine activity. On days when going outside is not an option, the second floor boasts a large, multi-purpose room for indoor physical activity options and gatherings.

Each classroom takes advantage of the large windows already a part of the existing building. This brings much-needed natural light into each classroom and brings exterior views in.

New landscaping and added planting and trees on site are mutually beneficial to people and the planet. A new, reflective roof minimizes the building's solar heat gain. All new mechanical systems, efficient plumbing features, and LED lighting further improve the building's environmental impact.

FOSTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION

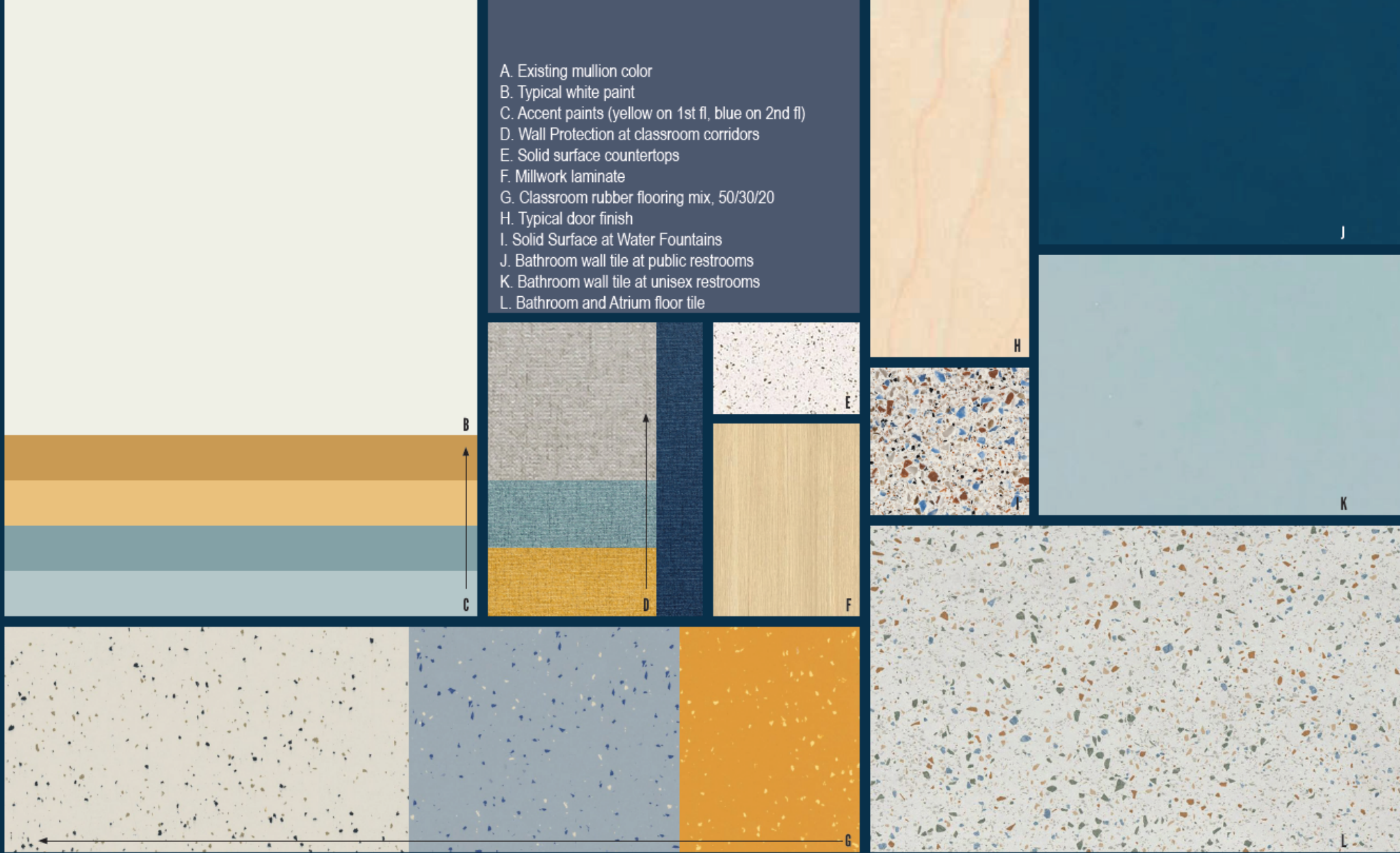
The design of the Barbara Vick Western Branch gave special consideration to accessibility for people of all ages and backgrounds, whether students, staff, or visitors. As part of the building's renovation for adaptive reuse, new accessible routes from the parking lot were established.

For both educators and Network Administration staff, a mothers room, break rooms, multipurpose spaces, and breakout spaces create engaging and diverse spaces whether an individual is seeking solitude for prayer and reflection or community for collaboration and inspiration.





- A. Existing mullion color
- B. Typical white paint
- C. Accent paints (yellow on 1st fl, blue on 2nd fl)
- D. Wall Protection at classroom corridors
- E. Solid surface countertops
- F. Millwork laminate
- G. Classroom rubber flooring mix, 50/30/20
- H. Typical door finish
- I. Solid Surface at Water Fountains
- J. Bathroom wall tile at public restrooms
- K. Bathroom wall tile at unisex restrooms
- L. Bathroom and Atrium floor tile



FOSTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (CONTINUED)

To create moments of joy, wonder, and delight within the client's standards set to ensure equity amongst their 646 schools, the design firm incorporated best practices and research developed by the firm's internal Environmental Stewardship and PreK-12 education group. Led by a WELL accredited designer, the Environmental Stewardship group focuses on ways to create spaces mindful of people, places, and the planet, considering both sustainability and wellbeing.

The design firm confirmed the school's standards matched the best practices developed by our internal team by adhering to Red List-free building materials. These finishes and materials were then used in unexpected ways within the building to transform the once-cold commercial environment into a bright, joyful, and ultimately, welcoming school.

Educational Environment

CONTEXT

EDUCATIONAL VISION AND GOALS OF THE SCHOOL

Part of the Chicago Public Schools system, the Barbara Vick Early Childhood and Family Center embraces a play-based, Reggio-Emilia inspired curriculum addressing all aspects of the children's development with the support of highly qualified Early Childhood Educators. By nurturing curiosity, engagement and joy, children learn to live fully, joyfully, and ultimately, become self-motivated problem solvers with an abiding curiosity about the world. As a Reggio-Emilia inspired school, the Barbara Vick Western Branch strives to build a sense of community, encourage exploration, and develop collaboration skills among its young learners. In the carefully-designed learning environment, students should feel comfortable expressing themselves as they construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world around them.

As one of the first PreK programs in the Chicago Public Schools system, the district sought to expand the program's success with a new location in need of early education programs.



Educational Environment

RESPONSE

SUPPORTING THE CURRICULUM

The Barbara Vick Western Branch embraces the Reggio-Emilia inspired curriculum of its parent school, where the environment is seen as an instructor just as important as the teachers in the room. The designers prioritized spaces within the school to become catalysts for community, exploration, inquiry, and collaboration.

Bright warm colors zig zag through each learning environment, creating a pleasing, inviting, and stimulating space. Natural wood tones bring a sense of nature indoors. Large, open spaces inside and out allow for flexibility in group sizes, activities, and furniture to encourage exploration and movement.

The classrooms design supports a play-based curriculum with ample room to support multiple activity zones. Nooks for small groups provide opportunities for collaborative learning or quiet time. Large windows bring in ample daylight and minimize the need for artificial lighting, enhancing wellbeing and energy efficiency.



Results

ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The school's design fully supports a Reggio-Emilia inspired curriculum, providing large, inviting spaces for students to explore on their own or collaborate with others as they develop their knowledge about the world around them. The design encourages daily movement, collaboration, and exploration

ACHIEVING SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS

The Barbara Vick Western Branch expands the Chicago Public School's early education offerings in an area where it is in high demand. Prior to the opening of this school, the district's pre-kindergarten programs were limited and the district did not have a prototype for classrooms. During the test fit process, the architect created a new pre-kindergarten classroom template which can be used in the test fit and design of new schools across the city.

Additional Network Administrative offices provide a safe, welcoming, and productive environment for those who keep the district running smoothly every day.



ACHIEVING COMMUNITY GOALS

By building a new early education school in the Beverly Neighborhood, more students can learn close to where they live. The Barbara Vick Western Branch fills an empty storefront, creating a more lively commercial district. And as families incorporate pick up and drop off into their daily commutes, they will be able to easily access the stores and services already in their community.

PROVIDING VALUE AND GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The adaptive reuse of an existing building saved Chicago Public Schools the expense of building a completely new facility. By using the excess building space for network administrative offices, the design adds value for the client, occupants, and community through right-sizing and re-use. The energy efficient systems and lighting, described in more detail below, also provide added savings for the district.

SUSTAINABILITY AND WELLNESS OUTCOMES

New, efficient HVAC systems and lighting conserve energy. In each of the below categories, we see the following improvements from code/baseline:

- Interior Lighting: 56%
- Exterior Lighting: 51%
- Mechanical Heating: 21%
- Mechanical Cooling: 32%
- Boilers: 20%



SUPPORTING A VARIETY OF LEARNING & TEACHING STYLES

Large classrooms each with their own support space give children ample room to play with a variety of zones for different hands-on learning styles, activities and teaching tools depending on their interests and needs.

ADAPTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Connected to each classroom, a support space allows educators a place to prepare for the day ahead.

The second floor hosts a large multi-purpose room. This space allows for large gatherings and indoor play.

The Early Education program is expected to grow in the area. The network administration offices were designed with this expansion in mind to easily be converted into classrooms when needed.

INNOVATIVE ASPECTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The facility's existing features prior to its adaptive reuse inspired many of Barbara Vick Western Branch's innovative aspects as a learning environment. The drive-through teller converted into a covered play area allows students to explore outside in weather that might otherwise send children indoors. The large atrium and windows provide much celebrated daylight in every classroom, so much so that teachers rarely turn on their classrooms' overhead lighting, even on gloomy days.

