

In what was conceived as a surgical rebuilding of middle school in Boyle Heights neighborhood of East Los Angeles, the design team looked to the community for inspiration. Neighborhood scale and character was overlaid with the institutional scale to provide an accessible campus with diverse opportunities for students to find their spot. Ultimately, a holistic approach to the campus vision allowed for a unified campus community around a new garden in a densely populated part of the city.



### **OVERALL GOALS**

### Porches & Plazas

The front porch is a social fixture in community residences. The school uses transitional porches to help acclimate learners to different areas of the campus. Transitional spaces help acclimate learners to different areas.

Porches embody layers of social interaction in physical space, supporting the in-between space of the school, providing an extension of civic life on campus.

Plazas create community. Diverse scales of gathering are offered to address the needs of all students.

Large, rich social promenade with buildings lining the perimeter creating a safe haven on campus.

### Reflecting the Multifaceted, Multi-generational, Multilingual Community

- Celebrating a school community where many students have parents and grandparents who attended the school.
- Supporting community culture with architecture that supports a mariachi program, a community garden, after school programs, community recreation, and more.
- Murals and graphics done in partnership with students in community workshops.
- Multilingual messages in the landscape encourage students and promote belonging.

## Making the Most of the Middle School Moment

- The plaza courtyard is contained and safe, allowing students to roam autonomously and develop agency.
- Diverse social options support many scales of gathering.
- The introverts and the extroverts belong.

#### **OUTCOMES**

- Re-imagined a historic middle school as a vibrant, community-rooted campus that reflects the cultural and linguistic richness of East LA.
- Created transitional, socially active spaces—"porches and plazas"—to embody layers of belonging, drawing inspiration from local homes and public life.
- Prioritized student identity and agency during a formative life stage through spatial exuberance, flexible programming, and civic engagement.
- Executed a streamlined design and construction process that delivered the project ahead of schedule, without interim trailers, maximizing access and minimizing disruption.
- Elevated standard metrics with design innovation, balancing joyful, highperforming spaces with cost-efficiency and environmental stewardship.

The project scope included demolishing 19 permanent and modular buildings, seismic retrofit of a 1924 masonry auditorium, and replacing the campus utility infrastructure and fire access. The re-imagined campus included six new buildings, including an Administration, Laboratory/ Classroom Building, a Food Services Building, Gymnasium Building, Library/Music/Choral Building and Maintenance and Operations support buildings as well as all new hardscape and landscape.

### **KEY CHALLENGES**

- Outdated infrastructure
- Busy surrounding streets
- Lack of visibility
- Outdoor space that is difficult to use
- Lack of shade
- Lack of accessibility
- Unused space due to visibility, safety, and age
- Construction on an active campus

#### **RESPONSES TO CHALLENGES**

- Comprehensive campus redevelopment emphasizing safety, equity, and enduring community benefit.
- Landscape and site strategies significantly increased shaded outdoor space and reduced travel distances across campus.
- Designed and phased for operational continuity;
   students transitioned into the new campus
   without the use of temporary classrooms.
- Achieved efficiency through a compact, centralized layout that improves supervision, circulation, and outdoor engagement.
- Strategic allocation of funds allowed the project to exceed baseline district expectations while remaining financially responsible.



**Design Capacity:** 1,000 students **Total Building Area:** 174,511 SF **Construction Cost:** \$149 Million Award of Design Build Contract: Spring, 2019
Phase 1 (South Campus): Opened Summer, 2023
Phase 2 (North Campus): Opened Winter, 2024



### **DESCRIBE THE COMMUNITY**

The existing Belvedere Middle School is situated in a single-family residential neighborhood in an unincorporated area of East Los Angeles and Boyle Heights.

### **NEIGHBORHOOD ATMOSPHERE**

The Belvedere neighborhood is diverse, vibrant, and active. It has a unique character and visual culture. Dating to the early part of the last century, the buildings are modest and straightforward, but colorful. Signage is often hand-painted and bold. Murals and tile mosaics make use of flat walls to tell stories to the next generation. The residents are visible; they walk the neighborhood, they sit on their front porches, and they activate the public realm.

### **DEEP, INTERGENERATIONAL ROOTS**

Geographic mobility in the East Los Angeles area is near 40% of mobility in broader Los Angeles and 35% of mobility in California. This community stability has led to cohesive, developed neighborhoods. Many of the Belvedere families have been in this community for generations, with Belvedere students having parents and even grandparents who are Belvedere alumni.

#### **STAKEHOLDERS**

- Immediate neighborhood
- Parents
- Teachers
- Administrators
- Community Based Organizations (CBOs).
- Elementary feeder schools that lead to Belvedere

#### **CHALLENGES**

- Visibility was critical due to the challenging age of students.
- Fostering identity, confidence, and expectations in students
- Age ranges and diverse maturity levels in middle schoolers

#### **AVAILABLE ASSETS**

- Rich community culture
- Diverse community
- Engaged stakeholders
- Ample public art in neighborhood
- Deep history

SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

### **VISIONING PROCESS**

The outreach and visioning process started early. Before the scope was fully identified, the District engaged the community and worked closely with Joanne Carrillo, a Principal who dedicated her career to middle school students. Principal Carrillo discussed the importance of supporting children during this challenging age, making sure they have a space to learn that supports their identity, confidence, and ability to meet expectations.

During a site planning phase, three design schemes were shared with the stakeholder group for input. Feedback gathered informed the creation of a strategy for scoping documents to issue to design-build teams. The Principal was involved in the selection of an architect – contractor team that would carry the project forward through design and construction.

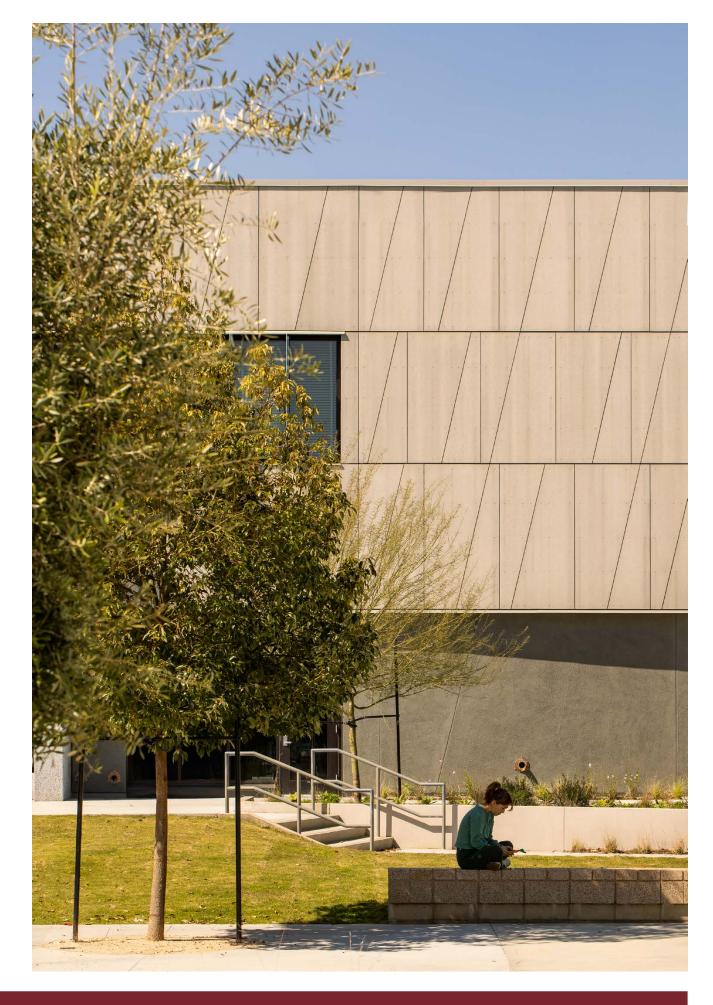
During the design process, outreach continued and expanded despite the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic. The design team engaged a group of students in a graphic design workshop conducted virtually. The student work contributed to environmental and identity graphics throughout the campus in murals, signage, and wayfinding. Student contributions emerged in both shapes and stories contributing to student pride in the new environment.

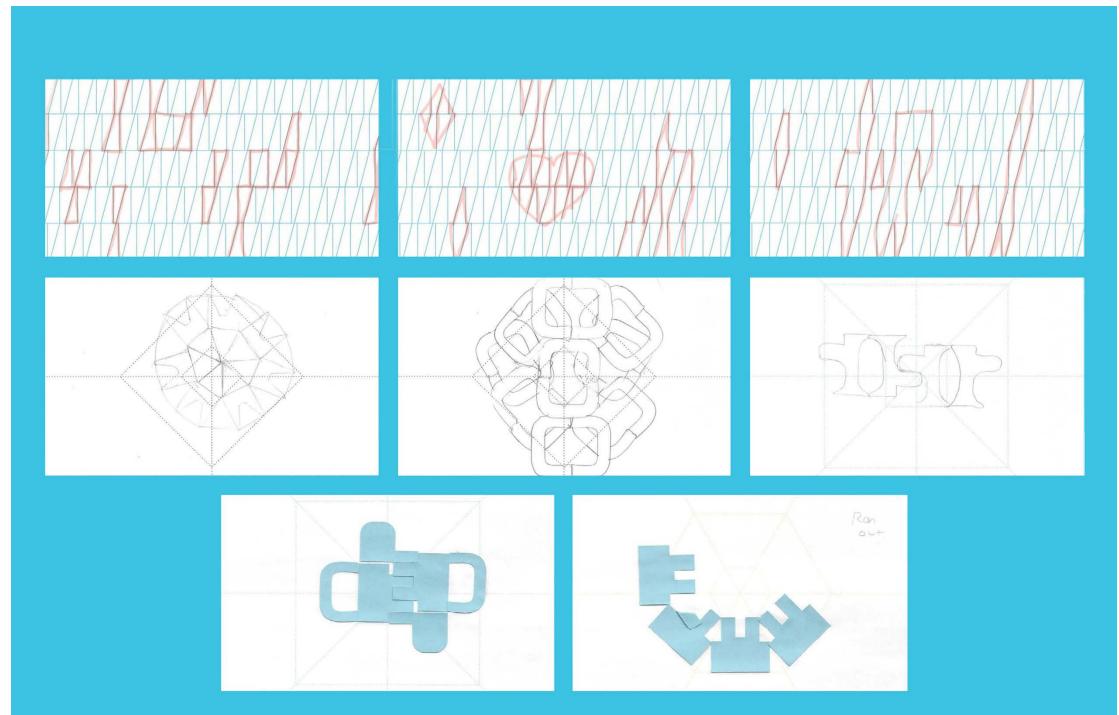
## VALUE OF PROCESS AND PROJECT TO THE COMMUNITY

- Principal Carrillo discussed the importance of supporting children during this challenging age, making sure they have a space to learn that supports their identity, confidence, and ability to meet expectations.
- Lower enrollment of 6th graders led the push for an elevated middle school environment with lots of specialized learning spaces.
- Pride of student contributions of both shapes and stories to the graphics.

# HOW OUTREACH FOSTERED DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

- All meetings were dual language.
- Outreach efforts were conducted virtually at multiple times to engage as much of community as possible.
- LAUSD worked with the school site and community-based organizations to make sure diverse groups were represented.
- Students were included in the outreach, making them a part of the process.



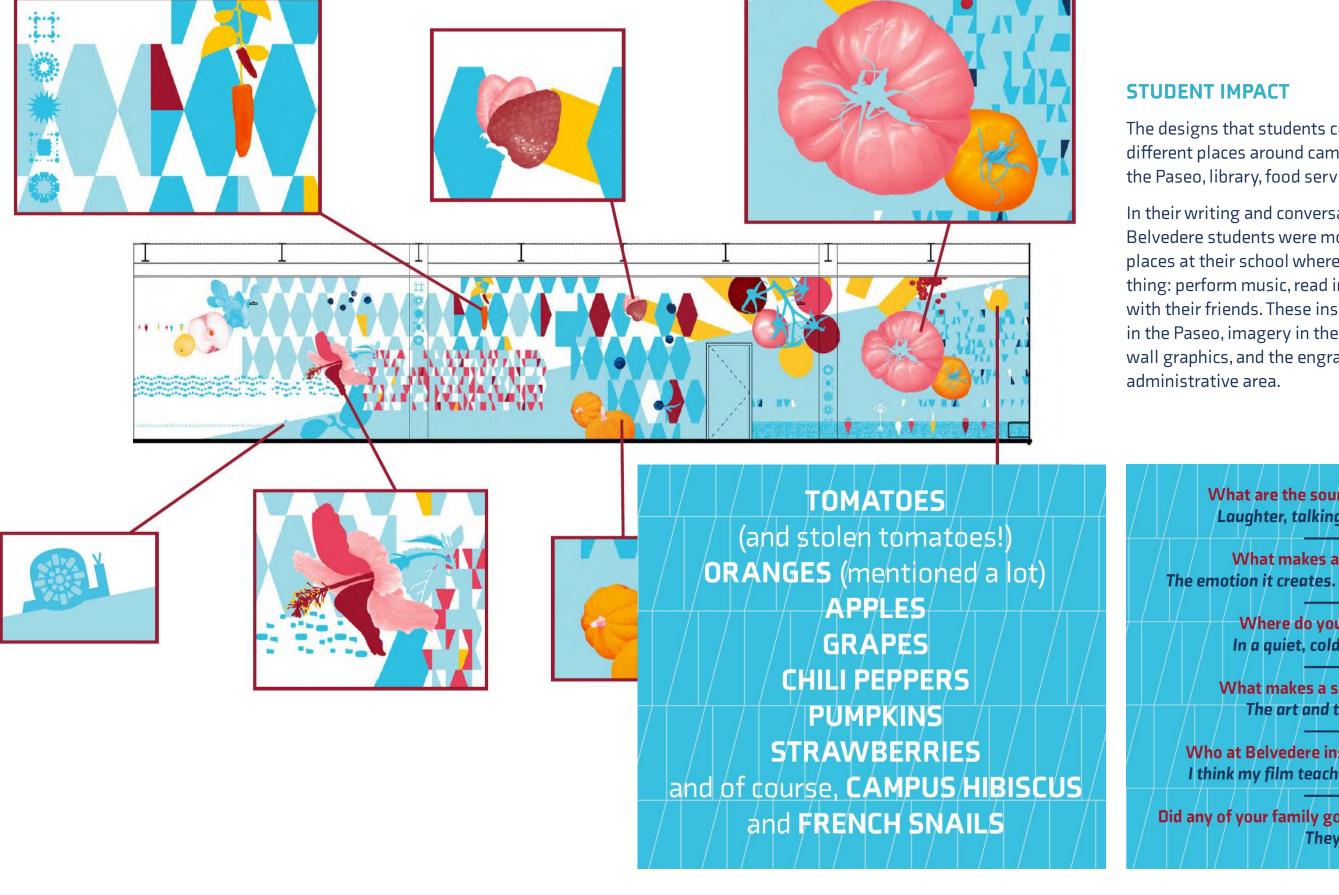






### **STUDENT OUTREACH**

- A student workshop of Belvedere students helped create the graphic direction for the project.
- Held at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the design team curated creative care packages for the students including all necessary supplies to facilitate participation.
- The students learned about graphic design and created design and content for different areas on campus.
- Students shared stories about their culture, their school, and their foods.



The designs that students created were used in different places around campus including the facade, the Paseo, library, food service, and student porches.

In their writing and conversation during the workshop, Belvedere students were most excited about the new places at their school where they could do their favorite thing: perform music, read in the shade, and connect with their friends. These inspired sandblasted graphics in the Paseo, imagery in the student dining and library wall graphics, and the engraved wood graphics in the

> What are the sounds of Belvedere? Laughter, talking, bells and more

What makes a place special? The emotion it creates. The fun, the happiness.

> Where do you like to read? In a quiet, cold, windy space.

What makes a school beautiful? The art and the students!

Who at Belvedere inspires you the most? I think my film teacher inspires me most.

Did any of your family go to school at Belvedere? They did.



### PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- Site with a lot of outdoor space
- Accessibility challenges on site with grading issues and with challenging entrances to existing buildings
- Decentralized, disjointed campus layout, no "heart" of campus defined
- Existing auditorium with a lot of character, but a challenging condition due to age

### **HOW THE CAMPUS FITS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY**

- The immediate neighborhood is residential, but resides along Cesar E. Chavez, which serves as a main traffic artery for East LA and DTLA
- Views of mountains to north, arranged to provide views
- Narrow residential streets along two sides of campus
- No street access on one side of campus
- Neighborhood boasts a lot of color in the forms of single family homes and vibrant public art such as murals, mosaics, and hand-painted signage



INNOVATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

• Campus reoriented with buildings on the perimeter to create a secure and activated Paseo at the heart

 Specialized learning areas that allow students to follow their interests and engage in many ways of learning



### **PORCHES AND PLAZAS**

The concept of Porches and Plazas emerges from observations of the community as well as our own team members who grew up in this neighborhood. This is a concept that is absolutely relevant to an essential way of using the site, enhancing student learning, and connecting students and faculty.

- Different scales of outdoor areas were created so that students introverts and extroverts alike can enjoy different scales of outdoor space
- Student Garden
- Shady Reading Garden
- Student Dining Area
- Shade bench areas
- Two large plazas defined as main outdoor areas along the Paseo

#### **Arts Plaza**

- Features Mariachi Stage for musicians to perform outside, drawing upon cultural music in the area
- Place to gather before and after auditorium performances

### **Academic Plaza**

• Features outdoor classroom adjacent to Maker's Space





### **FRONT PORCHES**

These areas create a transition space from the street to the campus and serve as celebratory gathering spaces for games, performances, and school events







## FOSTERING SUSTAINABILITY AND WELLNESS

- Lots of special areas to learn, socialize, and rest outside
- Increased shade through canopies and trees
- Special court coatings reduce heat island effect, making the space more comfortable for play and more sustainability overall
- Maximized daylighting and views to the outdoors in indoor areas, including looking out at the San Gabriel mountains
- Special areas for students to interact with nature, including a student garden with raised planting beds





### **HOW THE PROJECT INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES**

- Colors pulled from the community and used to create joy and a sense of welcoming
- Creating a sense of security and visibility in all spaces to put students at ease
- Environmental graphics engage students as authors of their own experience, actions, and environment







# FOSTERING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

- Emphasis on central, safe, outdoor area with lots of spatial variety for introverts and extroverts alike
- Indoor areas create the same layering of scale, making use of lots of transitional areas that help students acclimate to different types of learning environments
- Accessibility for all: the campus was graded and made more accessible throughout, removing challenging stairs and inaccessible entry points.
- Multiple languages used in environmental graphics and on CHPS Signage to engage the wider community and bilingual students

Middle school is a time of discovery. We used an engaging written voice to appeal directly to students' opportunities to act. This verb map of the campus, running across the entire Paseo and prompting activities at special areas in the school, is predominantly in English and Spanish (the most popular languages currently used in the community). Japanese, Hebrew, and Chinese words were also included to connect to historical demographics in the area.

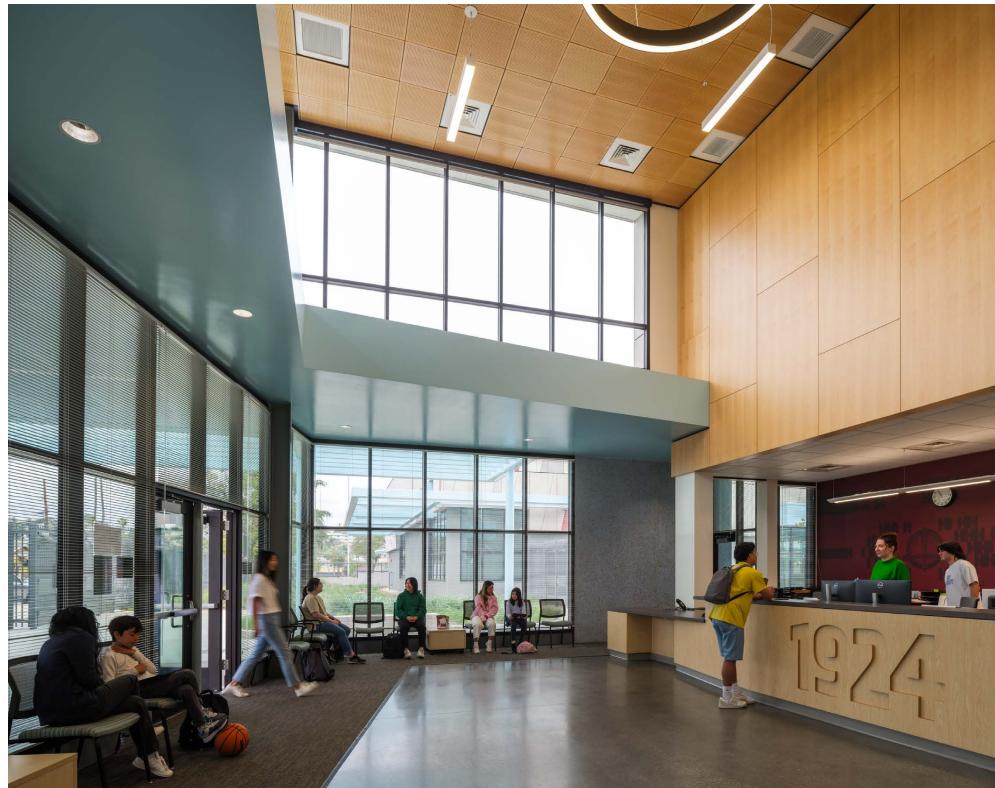
BELVEDERE MIDDLE SCHOOL // A4LE DOSSIER

**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT** 

### **COMFORTABLE TRANSITIONS**

Transitional spaces guide school community members from the public to the private, the large to the small, the quiet to the active.







Original school with inaccessible entrance

### **REGRADING FOR ACCESSIBILITY**

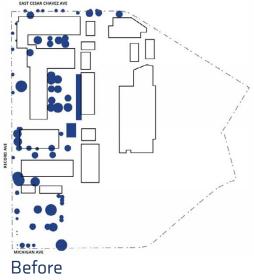


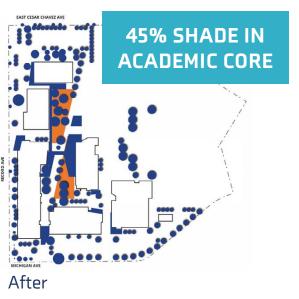


### **RECONNECT SCHOOL & COMMUNITY**



### **INCREASING CAMPUS SHADE** FROM 9% TO 24%





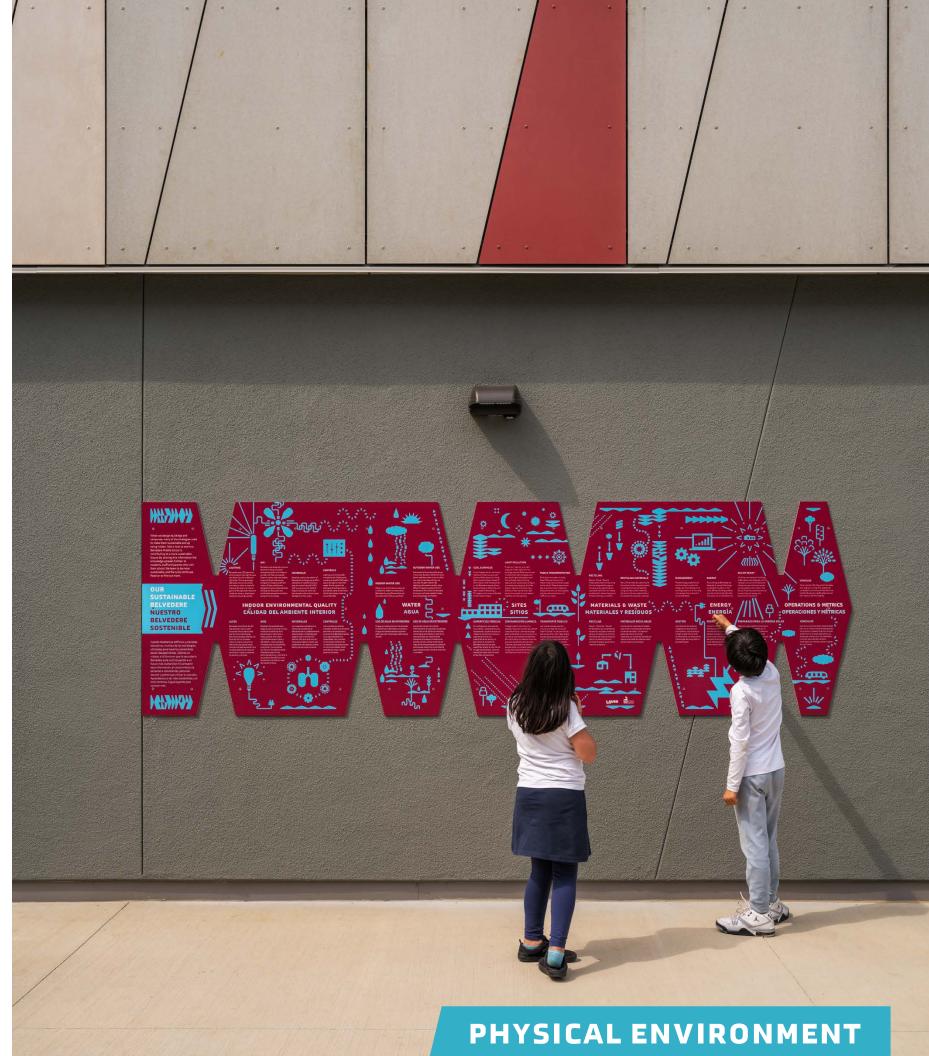
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



### **SUSTAINABILITY**

- Bilingual CHPS Sign describing sustainability features of the school
- Low water planting
- Heat-reflective coatings on courts
- Series of inlays to mark special locations for students, including one showing where rainwater is guided to water campus plants
- Student garden so students can learn about vegetation hands-on







## ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS A VARIETY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

Inside the classroom layouts support maximal use and flexibility for students and teachers. The classroom unit supports multiple teaching positions encouraging students to claim their voice. With the deemphasis of a classroom 'front,' the learning environment is democratized. Coupled with spaces at different scales the project anticipates and accommodates different types of learners. With the buildings at the perimeter, the school is able to rely on a 'safe middle,' where students can find increased independence. As a result, Belvedere Middle School is able to curate an elevated environment that demonstrates clear growth from a typical Elementary School program.

Finally, it is worth noting that Special Education has a significant presence on the campus. Care was taken to design classrooms that could function for several purposes in the future. Today, however, the program is integrated throughout the campus sharing in all facilities.

- Future-ready learning environment.
- Learning on display in classrooms and connected outdoor learning areas.
- Latest in classroom technology.
- Classrooms designed to integrate flexible furniture.

### **ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS CURRICULUM**

Belvedere Middle School is a unique school among the 500-plus schools in the LAUSD. It exists in a very specific cultural setting with a strong surrounding community. Students from Belvedere Middle School go on to Garfield High School which was the site that started the 1968 East Los Angeles Walkouts, where students protested unequal educational programs.

At Belvedere, highly specialized classrooms celebrate the autonomy and self-direction of middle school students. Specialized classrooms like science, art, music, performance, making, and library claim opportunities to put learning on display. Outdoor classrooms enable students to work independently outside the classroom where other students can observe. These specialized areas allow students to dive deep into their interests, excel, and increase personal confidence.



## ENVIRONMENT ADAPTABILITY AND FLEXIBILITY

Belvedere is one of the first schools for LAUSD programmed shared collaborative spaces. The standard program for the large district has evolved to create more resources for students to work together, independently and for teachers to support them as they push themselves. In this project, the array of learning environments is further diversified with special programs driving new classroom types and creating classrooms that can evolve as education continues to change.

Visibility in, out, and across the campus is critical. Students are able to maneuver through the campus experiencing the full educational potential of the school. The environment is tied to the visual, spatial, and cultural context of the neighborhood, which supports belonging, mental health, and positive sense of identity.



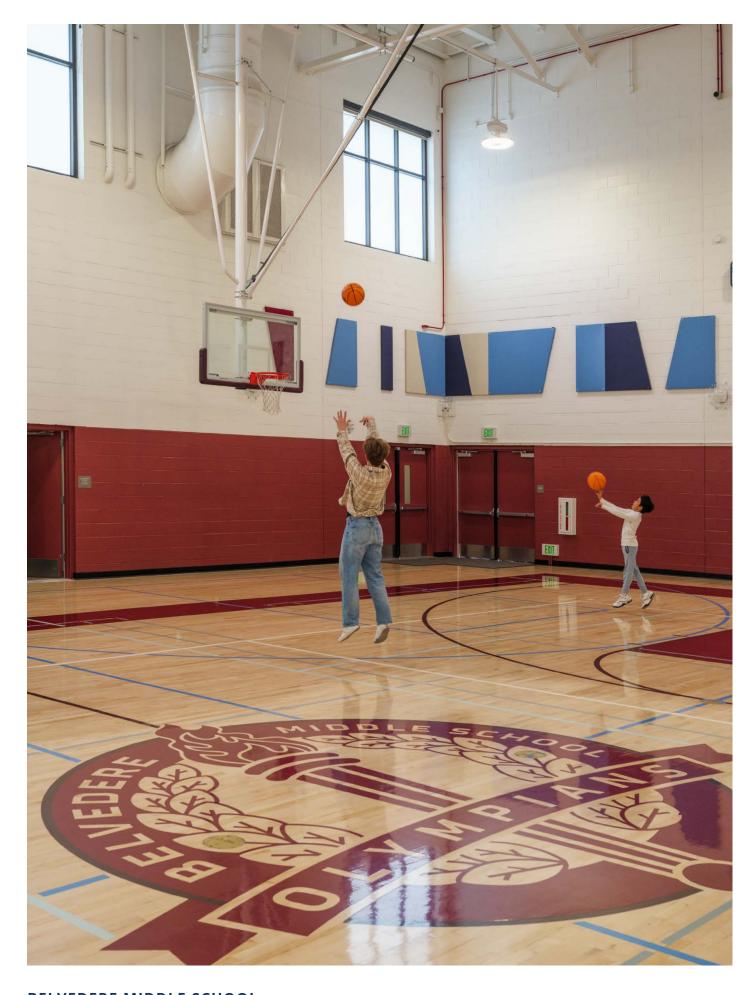
# CELEBRATING CREATIVITY AND PERFORMANCE

- Indoor and outdoor performance areas
- Outdoor stage designed with mariachi performances in mind, connecting to neighborhood culture and promoting middle school mariachi that continues into high school programs















### WELLNESS AT EVERY SCALE

- Abundant opportunities for physical movement
- Comfortable outdoor spaces
- Maximized daylighting indoors
- Different sizes of social interaction

55%

ARE MORE EXCITED TO COME TO COLORFUL AND

ADAPTABLE CLASSROOMS

MORE EXCITED

LESS EXCITED

SAME LEVEL OF EXCITEMENT

How do you feel about the new colorful and adaptable furniture in your classroom? Does it make you more excited to come to class?

86%

OF STUDENTS ARE MORE
COMFORTABLE AND FOCUSED
WITH THEIR FLEXIBLE SEATING



Do you feel more comfortable and focused during lessons with the new flexible seating?



### **RELATING TO EDUCATIONAL GOALS**

- Facilities in core facilities to current district standards.
- The library is a successful example for use as a safe haven.
- Music program, specifically mariachi, supports high school program, and has new and improved spaces for practice and performance.
- Engineering program has improved facilities, which supports students and helps students progress into the high school programs.
- Students responded well to the flexible and colorful classrooms. Most reported that they were more excited to go to class than before.

### **RELATING TO SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS**

- Helped LAUSD create new standards that improve campuses based on physical need
- Embraced specific goals set by LAUSD:
  - Increasing safety and security
  - Aligning with educational vision
  - Creating reliable systems to fix infrastructure
- Removed seismic concerns
- Removed temporary, portable classrooms
- Improved entries

## GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

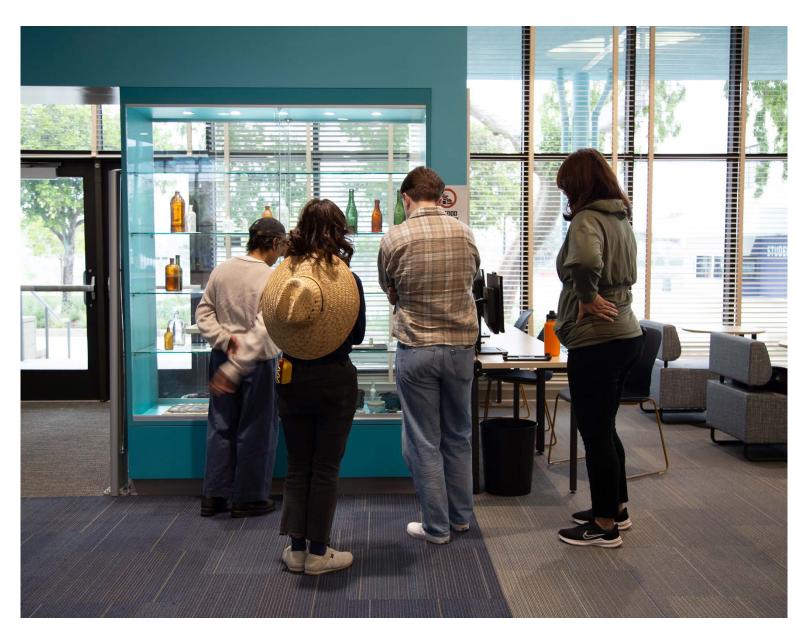
- No wasted space
- Reliable systems to reduce M&O costs

### SUSTAINABILITY + WELLNESS OUTCOMES

Sustainability is embedded in the planning.

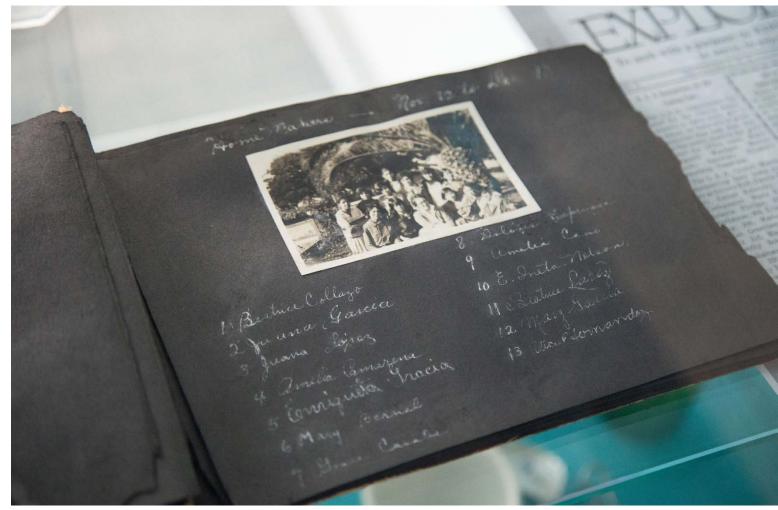
- CHPS
- High ventilation rates
- Low emitting materials
- Strong standards on daylighting and views and the impact on the learning environment
- Low water planting
- More outdoor learning, access to green space, permeability. Multiple types of places for outdoor learners.
- Environmental quality, air, light have strong impact on student learning. Increasing ventilation improves asthma rates.

- Physical Education is engaging a readily available increases student health rates.
- Indoor/outdoor dining connection and Café LA enforcing healthy eating and wellness
- District standards meet many of the WELL Building credits
- All of the goals are student-centered
- Bilingual sustainability signage to engage students



### **HISTORY ON DISPLAY**

Belvedere's librarian used the library's display case to curate a collection of historic objects and materials from the local community.



### **RELATING TO COMMUNITY GOALS**

It was important to celebrate the neighborhood's identity and the continuity of the school over time. Historic moments like the school's crest and founding date are proud in the visitor and administrative entry and the center of the gym.

### **UNINTENDED RESULTS**

- Joy with use of colors and graphics. The community and the school saw the value.
- Involving students in environmental design workshop during COVID
- Belvedere's librarian enriches display cases with exhibition about local history