# A Journey of Learning

**The Blanche A. Ames Elementary School**

Easton, Massachusetts

A4LE 2025 James D. MacConnell Awards

# Learning for All, Inspired by One

This project began as a study to address the aging infrastructure of the Center Elementary School, one of three very small PK–2 neighborhood schools in Easton, and a desire for equity among the town's youngest learners. What emerged was a consolidated, innovative, and inclusive school for all PK–2 students on a campus shared by grades 3–12, forming a true community hub.

The thoughtfully scaled, developmentally responsive design maintains a small school feel while fostering creativity, community engagement, and student well-being. Guided by principles of universal design and informed by research in early childhood development, the school embodies inclusivity, flexibility, and sustainability. At the heart of the design is a central ramp, replacing traditional stairs, which serves as both a circulation and educational element—supporting mobility for people of all ages and abilities. This ramp exemplifies the school's emphasis on shared experience and access for all.

The school celebrates its namesake, Blanche Ames—a prominent local artist, activist, and suffragette—by embedding her legacy into both the architecture and curriculum. As part of the inclusive design process, high school seniors partnered with educators and the design team to explore meaningful ways to teach and commemorate her life. This was just one of many collaborations with stakeholders in the project's robust community engagement efforts.

Designed to nurture creativity and exploration, the school supports a holistic learning journey through outdoor classrooms, nature-based play, and age-specific spaces that engage the senses. It reflects Easton's community values by emphasizing universal access, environmental connection, and educational excellence—inside and out.

The Blanche Ames Elementary School was constructed on the site of the former Parkview School, which remained operational during the initial construction phase. Once the new building was ready, Parkview students transitioned mid-year, allowing for the safe demolition of the old structure and completion of the surrounding landscape, parking, and playfields. Students from the Center School and Moreau Hall joined them at the start of the following school year, unifying all PK–2 students in a single, purpose-built facility.

**DESIGN ENROLLMENT**
880 students.
Grades PreK–2

**SITE AND BUILDING AREA**
6.5-acre site;
148,400 gross square feet

**CONSTRUCTION COST**
$75 million

**TOTAL PROJECT BUDGET**
$95 million

**CONSTRUCTION DELIVERY METHOD**
Design/Bid/Build
(Massachusetts Chapter 149)

**COMPLETION**
January 2023

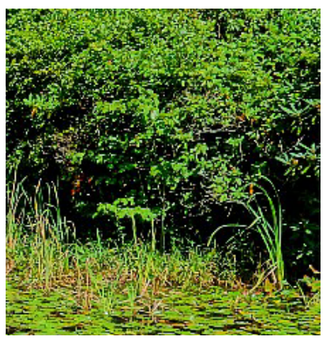
**INITIAL POST-OCCUPANCY EVALUATION**
Spring 2024

# Consensus Building

Combining three small, neighborhood Pre-K to 2nd-grade schools into one larger facility presented several unique challenges, both from a design and process standpoint. The design would need to maintain a warm, welcoming and safe small school feel despite the large size and create an easy-to-navigate environment for these very little learners. The process would need to navigate diverse community interests, including would-be supporters concerned with losing neighborhood schools, cultural identity, changes to traffic and transportation, safety and supervision challenges or increased tax burden, particularly for those on fixed incomes or without school-age children.

**Available Assets** included a highly engaged population, high regard for the teachers and educational leadership, historical inspiration from Blanche Ames, and the opportunity to create a comprehensive PK–12 campus. The new site leverages existing infrastructure and creates strong connections to community assets across all schools, playfields and outdoor learning.

**Process:** Community engagement was central to the school's development. The demographics across most every community, if not diverse in race, ethnicity and/or socio-economic means, has diversity of individuals at different stages of life, different lifestyles, friend/family structures, belief systems, different abilities, mobilities and availability, different preferences for how they might engage and/or want to be informed. Recognizing this, the process was charted early with ample time, space and structure given to ensure that it could reach as many community members as possible to get early participation in the goals and values, to learn and respond together helping to build consensus and knowledge. The engagement included a diverse range of gathering types, locations and scales.




## The Town of Easton

Located 30 miles south of Boston, Easton is a vibrant and historically rich community. Deeply rooted in its industrial past, Easton was profoundly shaped by the Ames family, whose contributions to education, architecture, and civic life continue to define the town's character. Easton residents take pride in preserving the town's architectural heritage while embracing thoughtful innovation. Education remains a cornerstone of the community's identity, shaped by values of inclusivity, creativity, and resilience.

# Consensus Building

**Educational Leadership Team:** 9 members including the Superintendent, curriculum leaders and support specialists. The group was formed on day 1 and met 7 times over the first few months, to help form and focus the Visioning Workshops. They played a critical role in articulating the current educational programs and objectives moving forward, allowing the visioning to start from where they are in their plans.

**Visioning Workshops:** 3 workshops were held over a 6-week period. The 35 participants were selected, representing a diverse cross-section from the community, deliberately including some individuals who have spoken out with concerns and not necessarily supporting the project. This is something we see as important for the sake of integrity, inclusivity and to ensure a complete dialogue.

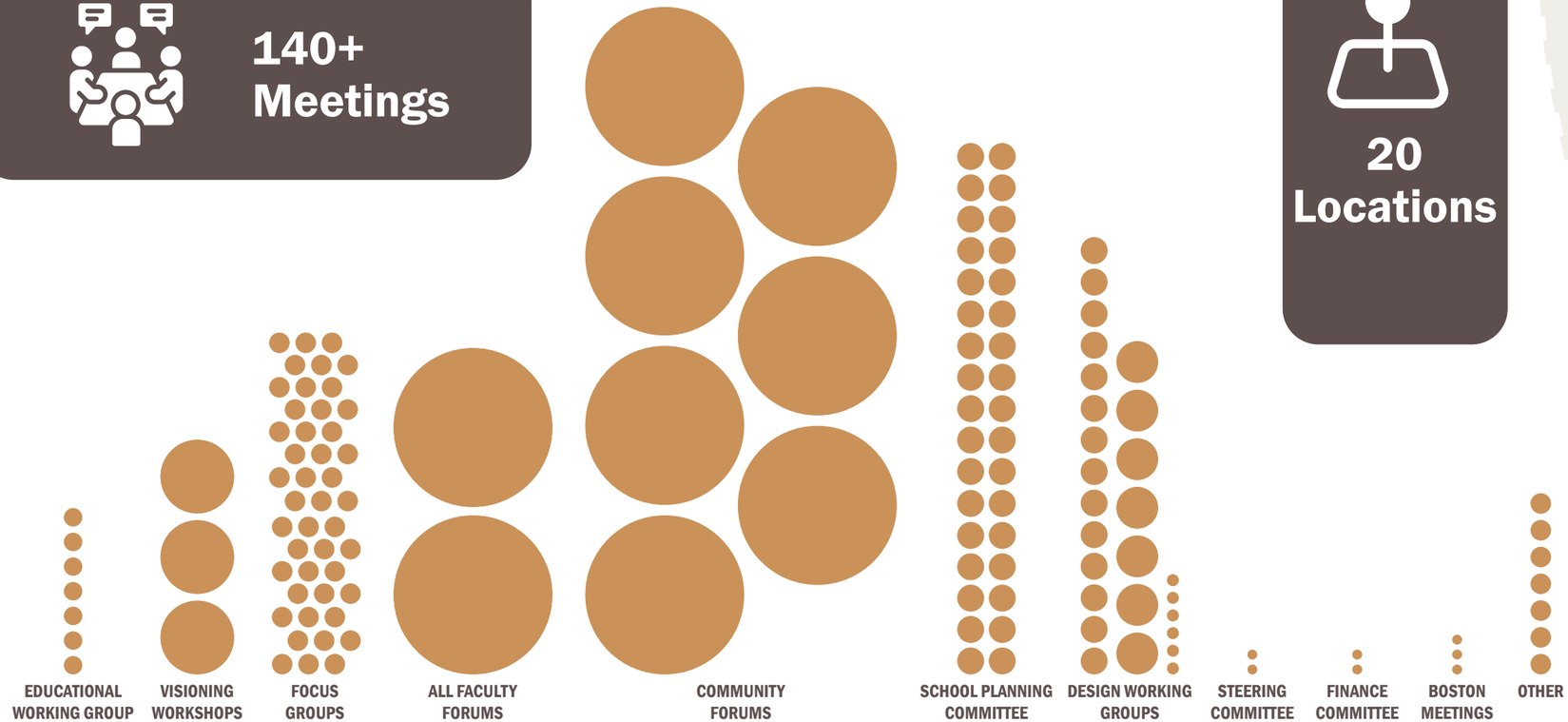
**Faculty Focus Groups:** 15 groups representing subjects or programs, including student support, health & wellness, food service and maintenance met in 3 separate rounds of meetings to dive into operations and best practices.

**Full Faculty Forums:** 75+ staff from all three schools were invited to hear from each other and engage in the combined school project. These occurred on 2 occasions and were deliberate to supplement the Focus Groups and expand the teachers' voices.

**Full Community Forums:** 7+ large public meetings were held to solicit thoughts, priorities and concerns, while collectively sharing and educating each other. The forums included presentation material, interactive elements, such as live polling and Q/A. The dialogue was made available to those that could not attend or view via a curated on-line information.

**140+ Meetings**

**20 Locations**




*size of circles represent the number of individuals involved in each meeting


Full Community Forum


Local Fair Table Talks


Visioning Workshop

**14 Different Formats**

## SCHOOL & COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

**School Planning Committee (SPC):** 13 members, 34+ meetings during the design phases. This was the primary steering committee and decision-making body for the project. The public was invited and encouraged to attend. Meetings were also broadcast or recorded

**Outreach to Town Boards:** Finance Committee, School Committee, Board of Selectmen

**Online Communications:** Website updates, video tours, distributed handouts/flyers

**Other Public Events:** Presence at Harvest Fairs, Senior Center meetings, Easton Disability Commission, Abutters meetings on-site & school tours.

**Design Working Groups:** Because building design has become increasingly complex with more performance data available and increased requirements to promote healthy materials, energy efficiency, reduced carbon, systems controls, safety/security, and evidence-based design for teaching and learning, multiple targeted working groups were formed to delve deeper and advise on specifics.

The Visioning Sessions took the form of three 4-hour workshops over 5 weeks. The visioning working group included 35 school and community representatives, including educational leadership, teachers, specialists, parents, neighbors, municipal and business leaders.

The first workshop explored 21c Learning practices, the existing programs via SCOG analysis, and priority goals for the new ES. WS-2 looked at connecting goals to design patterns and developed guiding principles for the design. Sustainability and safety/security were also specific topics and had separate workshops dedicated to each topic during later phases. The third WS started with blue sky ideas and included bubble and adjacency diagramming. Time in the session was also devoted to broader community communication through the development of talking points.



> “Collaboration allows us to know more than we are capable of knowing by ourselves”
>
> – PAUL SOLARZ

## 12 Design Working Groups

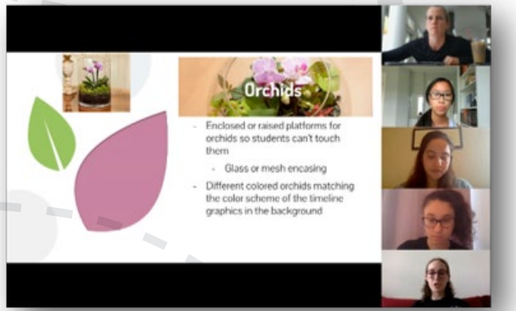
- SITE/LANDSCAPE
- BIKE PATH
- SYSTEMS
- WASTEWATER
- PLAYGROUND
- EXTERIOR
- SUSTAINABILITY
- COVID DESIGN
- CAMPUS/ATHLETICS
- INTERIOR
- SAFETY/SECURITY
- B. AMES LEGACY

# Student Engagement

In response to the request to include student voices in the design process, educational leadership connected the design team with six Oliver Ames High School students interested in architecture and the legacy of Blanche Ames. After an initial meeting outlining project goals, the students independently researched Blanche Ames and presented a creative, thesis-level proposal to the team.

Their ideas influenced key design elements, including waterjet-cut floor patterns, interactive features, and colorful wayfinding tools tailored to young learners. Invited to present to the full School Planning Committee, the students continued to collaborate with the experiential graphics team, particularly on large-scale installations honoring Blanche Ames at the main ramp. Ongoing meetings provided space for iterative feedback and design refinement. Their contributions were formally recognized at the groundbreaking and celebrated again at the ribbon cutting, where their concepts—now realized in the built environment—are proudly showcased to the Easton community.

High school students participated in the design process, contributing historical research, visual content, and creative ideas to honor Blanche Ames. This collaborative process fostered community ownership and highlighted diversity and inclusion. The final design reflects values shared by the district and community—accessibility, equity, creativity, and historical relevance—through interactive features and spaces that promote inclusiveness and belonging for all students.

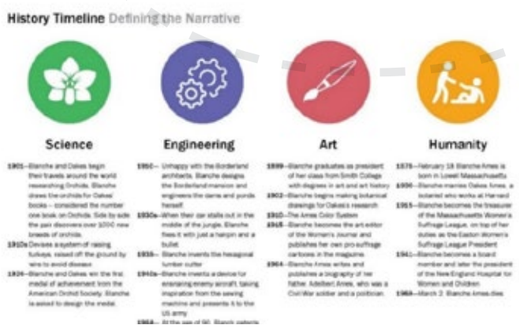



July 9 2020

Blanche Ames Timeline

- Timeline with simple sentences on the ramp floor and more detailed descriptions on the wall
- Lines can connect corresponding flaps on the ramp wall to the dates on the ramp floor
- Modern color scheme w/black and white historical photos (under the flaps)


April 15 2021




July 15 2020


March 30 2021

May 20 2021

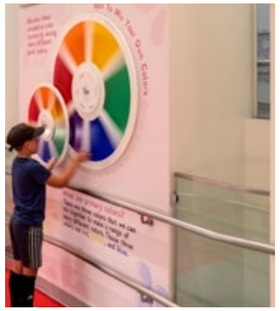
DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

CONSTRUCTION DOCUMENTS

CONSTRUCTION




| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **COGNITIVE** | • BEGIN ABSTRACT THOUGHT<br>• RECOGNIZE COLORS/SHAPES<br>• CONCEPT OF RIGHT/WRONG<br>• 4-5 WORD SENTENCES | • CAN THINK USING SYMBOLS<br>• LEARN SPATIAL RELATIONS<br>• IDENTIFY RULES (NOT LOGIC)<br>• LEARN THROUGH INQUIRY | • SEPARATE FANTASY/REALITY<br>• DEV. SPATIAL UNDERSTANDING<br>• SEE OTHER'S PERSPECTIVES<br>• DISTINGUISH LEFT v. RIGHT |
| **SOCIAL- EMOTIONAL** | • FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS<br>• ALL OR NOTHING EMOTIONS<br>• PLAY IN CLUSTERS<br>• RELY ON THEIR SENSES | • WANT TO GET ALONG<br>• LOVES FAIRY-TALES/HEROES<br>• GROUP PLAY IMPORTANT<br>• BEGIN LIKES/DISLIKES | • EARLY CLOSE PEER RELATIONS<br>• ENJOY ROLE PLAY<br>• OTHERS OPINIONS IMPORTANT<br>• DEV. IDENTITY/AUTONOMY |
| **PHYSICAL/MOTOR** | • ACTIVE/EAGER LEANERS<br>• EXPLORING/MANIPULATING<br>• CLIMB/DANCE/PUSH/PULL | • POSSESS A LOT OF ENERGY<br>• CONTINUE GROSS MOTOR<br>• CATCH/ALTERNATE/BALANCE | • BEGIN SMALL MOTOR<br>• SAFETY OF SELF IMPORTANT<br>• DRESSES SELF/CUTS FOOD |



Learning through play

Learning through inquiry and discovery

Learning reached through senses

Learning through quiet breaks

Learning through developing spatial understanding



# Connecting Mission + Vision to Research

Easton's early education community embraces differentiated instruction and learning, recognizing that each child follows an individual developmental path. Emphasis is placed on hands-on exploration, creative expression, and flexible environments to support both academic growth and social-emotional development. Across the PreK-2 population, instruction is designed to foster both academic growth and social-emotional development, ensuring that each child feels safe, seen, and supported within a nurturing educational journey.

**Educational Research:** Early childhood research strongly informed the planning process. Children in Pre-K through Grade 2 learn best through active, hands-on experiences that stimulate exploration, discovery, and imaginative play. By age five, nearly 80% of the brain is developed, establishing the foundation for intellectual, social, and emotional growth. The design of the school supports this critical period with environments that encourage movement, creativity, sensory engagement, and peer interaction.

Child-scaled elements, flexible learning zones, biophilic features, and seamless indoor-outdoor connections create a developmentally appropriate setting. These features support not only academic development but also emotional regulation, physical coordination, and social connection. Easton's early education community emphasizes differentiated instruction and flexible environments, meeting each student at their developmental level to ensure they feel safe, seen, and supported

**Stakeholders:** The Blanche A. Ames Elementary School project was shaped by an exceptionally engaged group of stakeholders, reflecting Easton's strong tradition of community involvement. Key participants included district leadership, school administrators, and educators from the existing three PK-2 schools, who helped define the educational vision and program needs. Parents and guardians played a critical role, advocating for an environment that would nurture differentiated learning and support the developmental needs of young children. Students themselves—both current elementary learners and high school students—actively contributed ideas, with the latter working alongside the design team to research, propose, and integrate elements honoring Blanche Ames' legacy. Broader community voices, including neighbors, civic leaders, senior citizens, and local business representatives, were engaged through extensive forums, focus groups, and interactive events, ensuring that the new school would serve as a welcoming hub for all residents. Public safety officials, recreation department staff, and facilities teams were also deeply involved, helping shape a campus that is accessible, safe, and future-ready.

# The Resulting Vision

Easton, Massachusetts was profoundly shaped by the Ames family as philanthropists and influential industrialists, who founded Ames Shovel Works. The family funded architectural landmarks like the Ames Free Library and the North Easton Railroad Station, both designed by H.H. Richardson. They championed public education, establishing Oliver Ames High School and helping introduce public kindergarten. The new school is named after Blanche A. Ames, whose influential life as an artist, political activist, inventor, writer, and suffragette still endures in the community. Her creativity, wisdom, and compassion are on display throughout the school and are reinforced by curriculum and architecture that supports student learning.

## Small Learning Communities

The scale and approach to the school and spaces within recognize this age group is coming from a small and highly familiar world. Warm materials, colors and biophilic elements help bridge the interior and landscape while instilling calming qualities. The windowsills are lowered to a child's scale and double as bench seating. The academic wings are organized into small neighborhoods of learning, each themed and specific to their age group. Each wing has two neighborhoods that share an outdoor learning porch and connections to a central sensory garden.

## A Campus of Learning

The vision for the new school focused heavily on making community and indoor/out connections. The selected site was deliberate in that it is centrally located, family walkable and would result in all students PK-12 being on the same campus. A network of pathways leads into the campus from the surrounding neighborhoods and connect all grades. These connections help foster community interaction and facilitate inter-grade collaboration, like reading buddies, shared use of spaces and outdoor learning and help with familiarity to ease transitions.

## Age/Developmentally Specific

The research on early childhood brain development and how young children learn best was utilized to inform decisions. Children of all ages learn best by doing and at these early ages, through exploration, discovery and play—play is the occupation of a child. The building design supports Easton's youngest learners as they Create, Care, Discover, and Invent each day along their educational journey, always learning through play.

## Blanche Ames Legacy

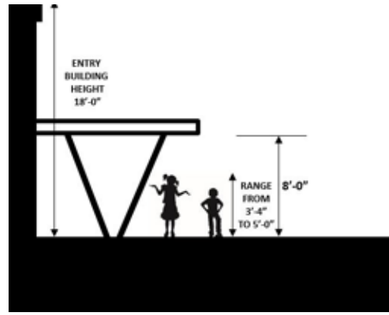
## Sustainability + Wellness

Outdoor gardens, positioned for school or community stewardship, and connect to a small cafeteria space and teaching kitchen. The small space is used during the day for students that may have heightened sensory sensitivities and prefer not to eat in the larger cafeteria but is also set up for teaching/learning and demonstration.

## Universal Design Concept

As a true community school, being designed to support activities beyond the school day and academic year, the focus was on a design-for-all, all ages, all learners, all abilities. UD is an approach that seeks to eliminate all barriers (physical, cognitive & sensory), while creating an equitable/ shared experience by all. The design features many unique and innovative concepts, like the main ramp, split-scale cafeteria, sensory garden and dyslexia font for signage.

## Community Values

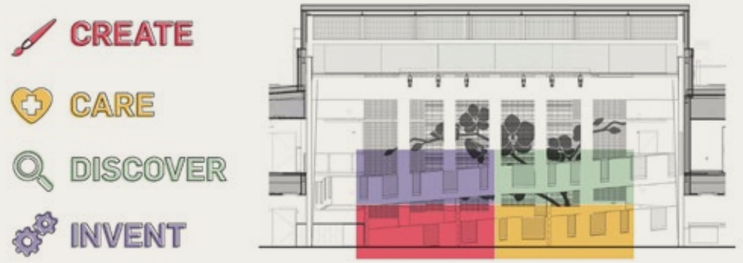




> “For her to have an idea was to act”
>
> – DAUGHTER OF BLANCHE AMES

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

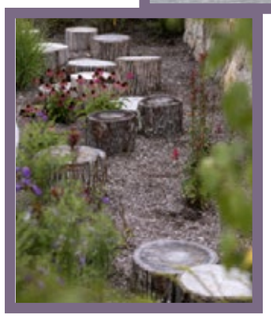
# Context and Design Response

Blanche A. Ames Elementary School is more than a building—it’s a launchpad for curiosity, connection, and community. Thoughtfully nestled within a vibrant PK–12 campus, this PreK–2 facility brings Easton’s youngest learners together in a setting that celebrates inclusivity, discovery, and a deep connection to place.







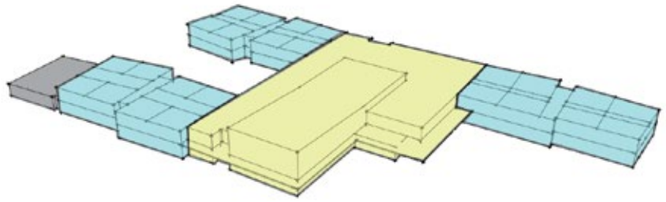




PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

# A Campus of Learning

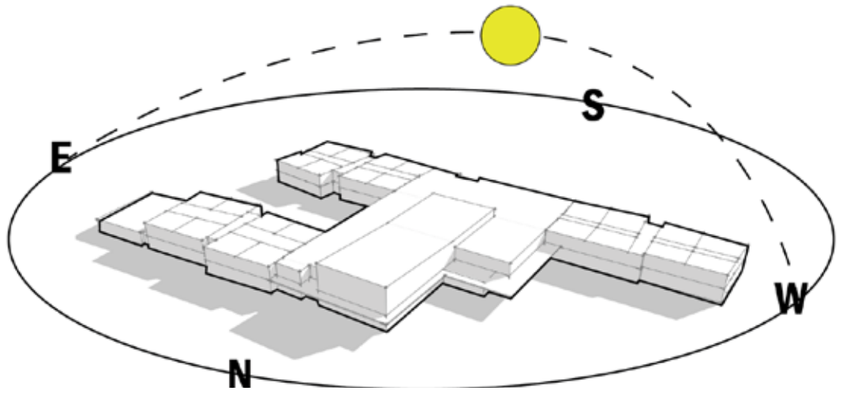
Blanche A. Ames Elementary School is a consolidated PreK–2 facility designed to unify Easton's youngest learners on a vibrant, centrally located campus shared with the town's intermediate, middle, and high schools. The 6.5-acre site was strategically chosen for its walkability, accessibility, and potential to create a full PK–12 educational continuum. A network of pedestrian pathways weaves through surrounding neighborhoods into the heart of the campus, reinforcing the school's role as a community anchor and promoting connections between students of all ages. These connections between schools on campus encourage interactions across grade levels, such as outdoor learning activities, reading buddies, and shared use of play fields and gardens—turning the campus into a true learning ecosystem.

# Physical Environment



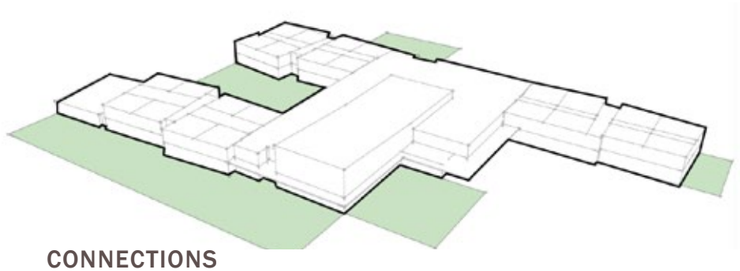
## ORGANIZATION

Community and shared program spaces (yellow) are central to the plan, with Academic neighborhoods (blue) anchored on three wings. Security and building lock-off are prioritized in early planning for natural access control.




## ORIENTATION

An east-west orientation with north-south facing classrooms allows consistently harnessed daylight and glare control along the long faces of the building and minimizes glare in learning environments.



## CONNECTIONS

Visual and physical connections to outdoor learning and play spaces contribute to better mental health and happiness. Creating outdoor environments fosters many outdoor experiences, which leads to higher student engagement, test scores, and notably fewer violent incidents.

17. BLANCHE A. AMES RAMP
18. MEDIA CENTER & MAKERSPACE
19. DISCOVERY TERRACE
20. MECHANICAL ROOM
21. GRADE 1 & 2 CLASSROOM
22. SMALL GROUP ROOM
23. SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM
24. FLEXIBLE LEARNING BREAKOUT AREA
25. ART CLASSROOM
26. OFFICES


**Second Floor Plan**

1. MAIN ENTRY
2. ADMIN & NURSE
3. MAIN CAFETERIA
4. PLATFORM
5. GYMNASIUM
6. KITCHEN & SERVERY
7. CUSTODIAL & RECEIVING
8. SECONDARY CAFETERIA
9. COMMUNITY ROOM
10. MUSIC CLASSROOM
11. PRE-K & K CLASSROOM
12. SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSROOM
13. OFFICES
14. CENTRAL ADMIN OFFICES
15. SENSORY GARDEN
16. COMMUNITY GARDEN

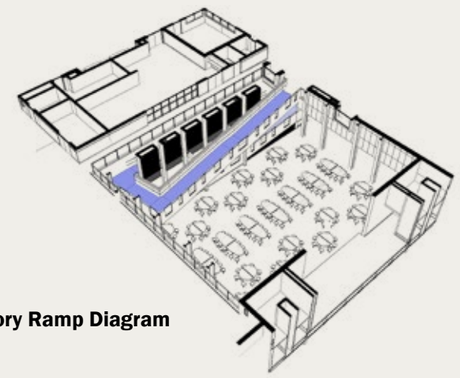

**First Floor Plan**

# Universal Design Concept

A defining element of the design is the central full-story ramp that replaces traditional stairways. More than a means of circulation, this ramp is a universal design feature that invites all students—regardless of age or ability—to ascend together. It becomes an educational and narrative spine, incorporating interactive elements that tell the story of the school's namesake, Blanche Ames. Along this path, students spin color wheels, trace animal tracks, and engage with tactile panels, transforming movement into discovery. This feature exemplifies how the building itself functions as a teaching tool.

7 PRINCIPLES OF
**UNIVERSAL DESIGN**

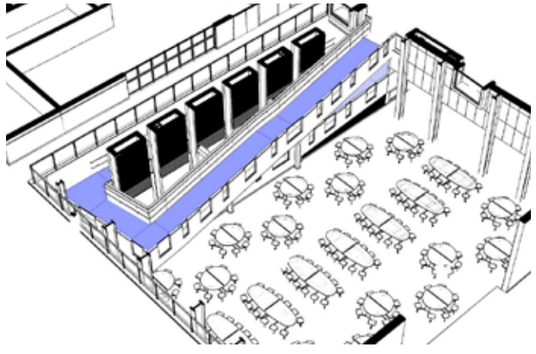
1. Equitable Use
2. Flexibility in Use
3. Simple + Intuitive to Use
4. Perceptible Information
5. Tolerance for Error
6. Low Physical Effort
7. Size + Space for Approach + Use



**Two-Story Ramp Diagram**

# Community Values

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are core drivers of the physical design. The building follows Universal Design principles throughout ensuring all users, regardless of age, ability, or neurodiversity, can navigate and engage with the space with dignity and ease. Dyslexia-friendly signage, flexible dining and performance spaces, quiet alcoves, and sensory-responsive classrooms all contribute to a shared environment where every student feels safe, seen, and supported. Material choices reinforce health and well-being with low-VOC, Red List–free finishes, and child-safe surfaces selected for durability, sustainability, and comfort.



1 EQUITABLE USE

2 FLEXIBILITY IN USE

3 SIMPLE & INTUITIVE TO USE


4 PERCEPTIVE INFORMATION

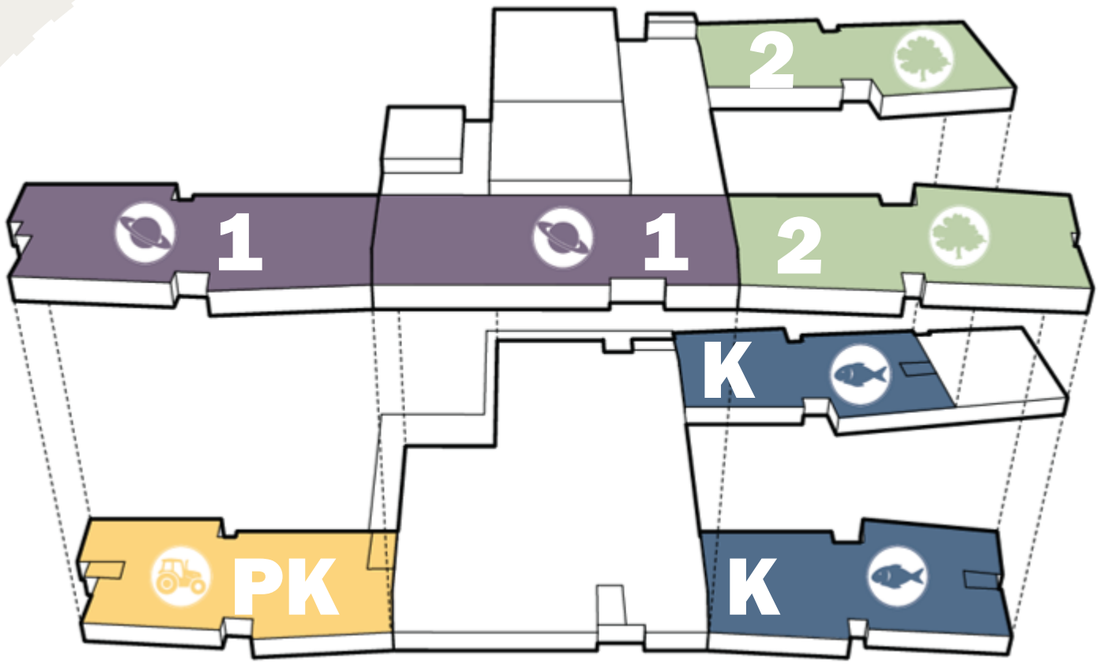
5 TOLERANCE FOR ERROR

6 LOW PHYSICAL EFFORT

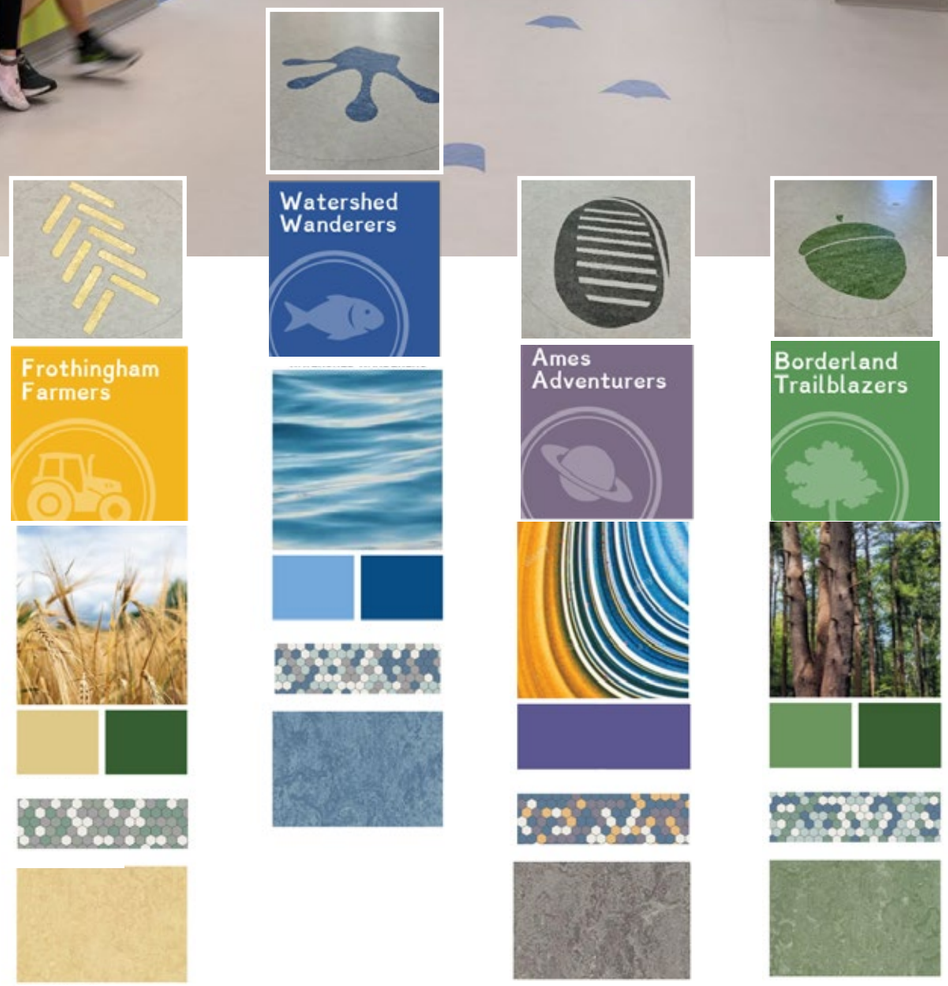

7 SIZE AND SPACE FOR APPROACH + USE

# Small Learning Communities

The building's physical form is designed to reflect the developmental needs of early learners while responding to the broader civic context. Though large in scale, the school is broken into smaller, themed learning neighborhoods tailored to specific age groups. Each neighborhood features a distinct identity drawn from Easton's heritage and landscape—color, imagery, and form are used to create intuitive wayfinding and reinforce a child's sense of place and belonging. These clusters are scaled and composed to support comfort, familiarity, and community within a larger whole.

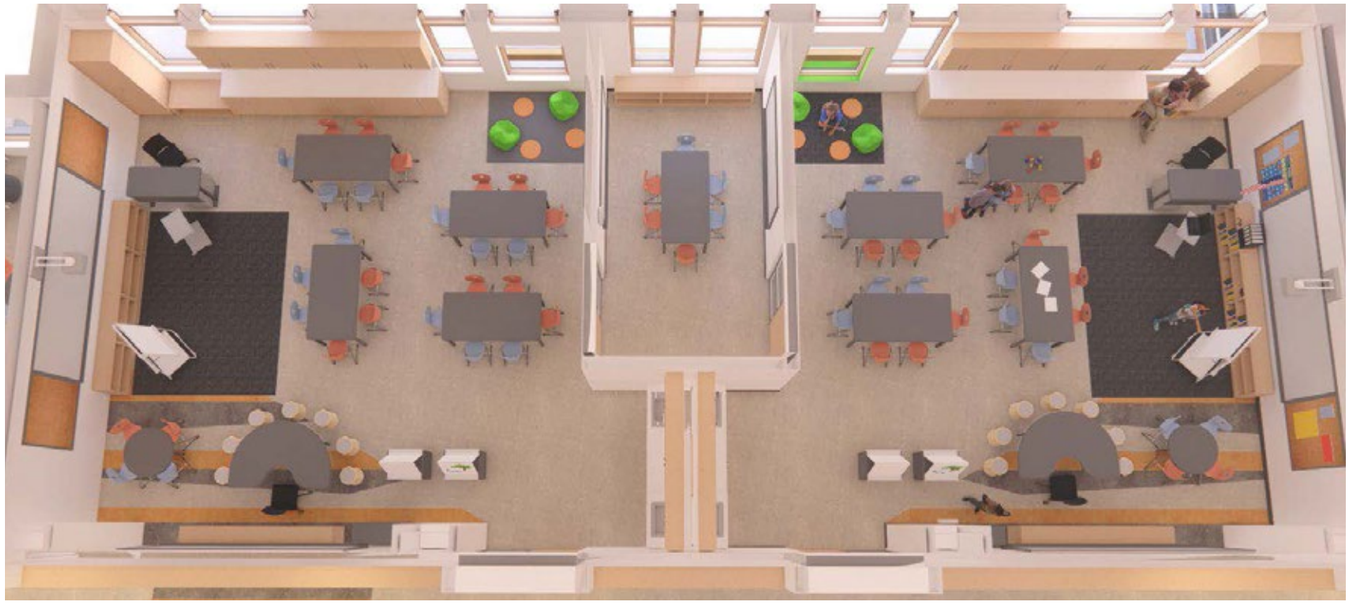



Themed Learning Zones



# Small Learning Communities

8 Room Wings + Porch Pull-Out
4 Room Neighborhoods
2 Room Pairings



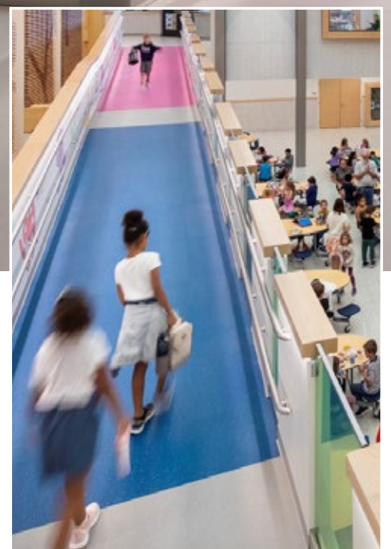
Typical Grade 1 + 2 Rooms

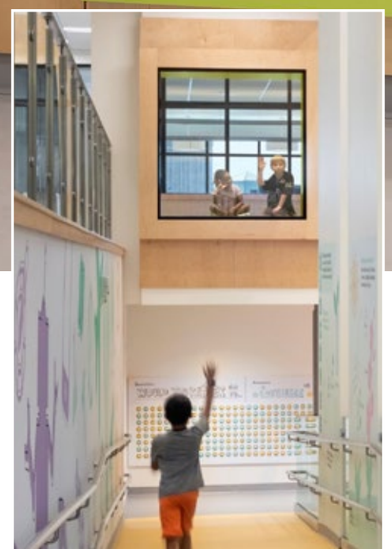
Typical PreK + K Rooms

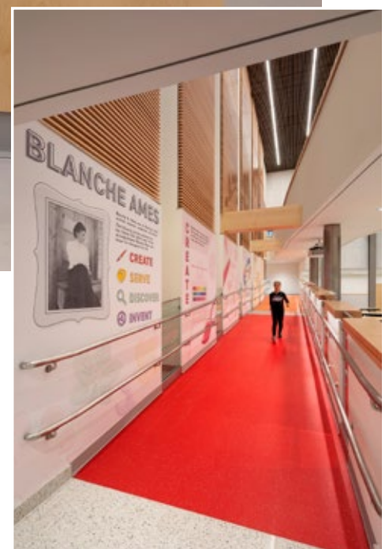
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

# A Central Journey

Research tell us that students aged 4-7 learn best through play and hands on learning. The entire design of this building promotes a “Journey of Learning” that invokes curiosity, encourages discovery, and facilitates play. The Blanche A Ames ramp illustrates this through interactive exhibits at key moments along the journey.

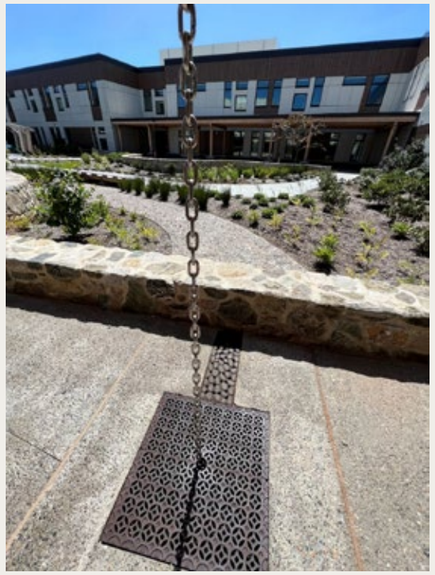


# Age/Developmentally Specific

Innovation extends beyond circulation. The school integrates indoor and outdoor learning through covered porches, sensory gardens, and varied play spaces that reflect Easton's natural setting. Music walkways, butterfly meadows, rain-fed water features, and a food garden paired with a teaching kitchen create an immersive, multi-sensory landscape for exploration and applied learning. These spaces are fully accessible, inclusive, and serve students with a range of learning styles and sensory needs.



**More than just a beautiful way to manage rainwater, this rain chain guides water into a lush rain garden that students walk through and explore—engaging their senses while offering a powerful, hands-on lesson in the water cycle, sustainability, and the beauty of nature-based design.**


## Engaging the Senses

Sensory experiences are engaged through:

smell: native plantings - some flowering

hearing: rain chains, outdoor musical instruments

touch: variation of tactile features along the educational path

taste: herb and vegetable gardens

sight: calming curves, butterfly meadows, outdoor art

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

# Context and Design Response

At its core, Blanche A. Ames Elementary is designed around a single educational belief: that children learn best through play, discovery, and meaningful relationships with their environment. This philosophy—deeply rooted in early childhood development research—shaped every aspect of the school's instructional spaces, from the layout of learning neighborhoods to the integration of movement, sensory experiences, and natural light.

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

# Nurturing Curiosity

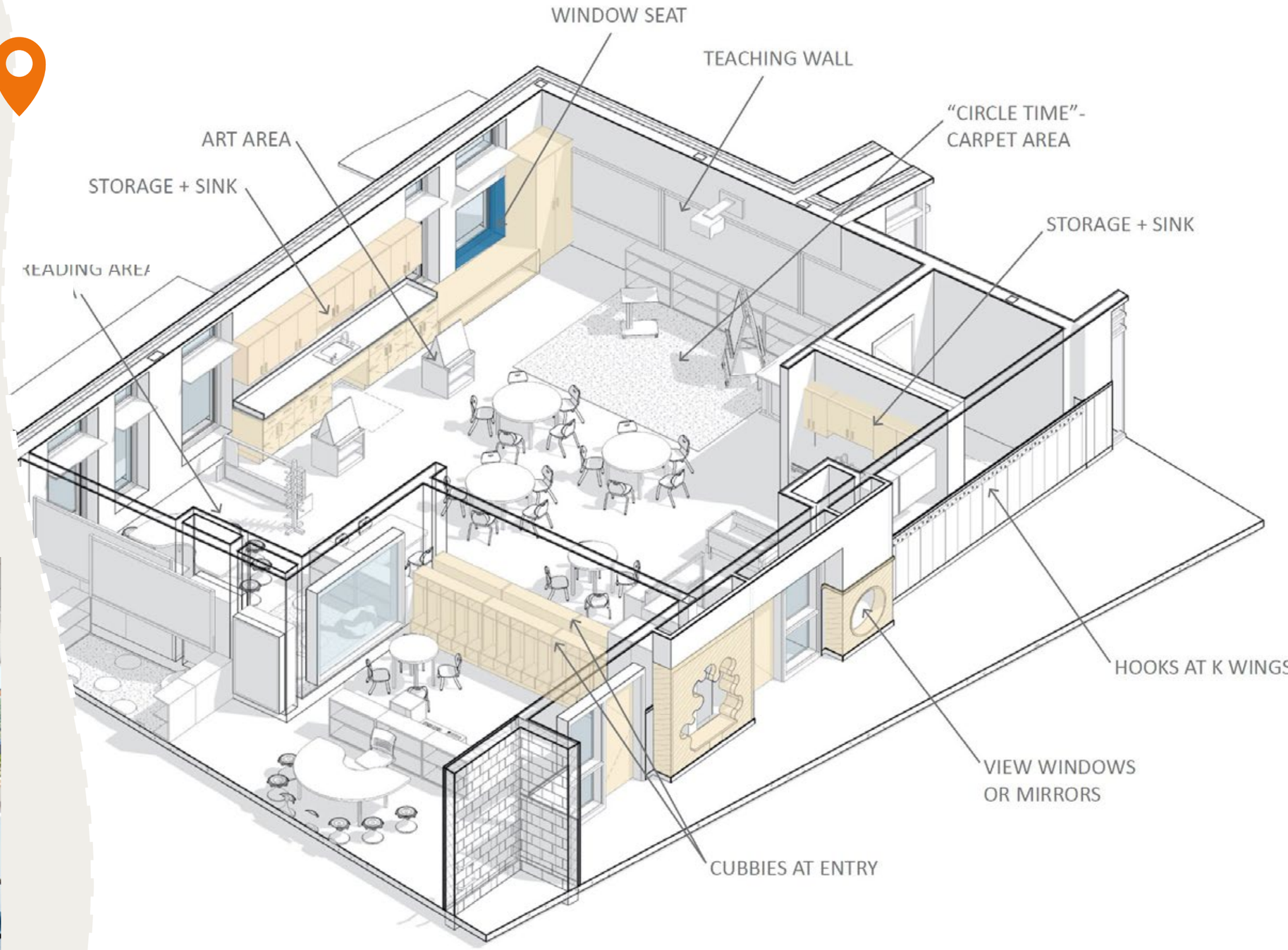
The educational environment of Blanche A. Ames Elementary supports the district's commitment to whole-child learning, equity, and creativity. It recognizes that the journey of learning begins with joy, safety, and curiosity—and that the physical space plays a foundational role in nurturing these experiences. At Blanche Ames, every path, porch, and portal is designed to help students Create, Care, Discover, and Invent—laying the groundwork for a lifelong love of learning.

# Small Learning Communities

The educational program serves PreK through Grade 2, a population whose developmental needs are distinctly different from older students. To support this, the school is organized into smaller clusters of three to four classrooms, each centered around flexible breakout zones. These clusters provide a “small neighborhood of learning” experience, enabling differentiated instruction, social-emotional learning, and fluid collaboration. Each neighborhood is infused with theme-based storytelling, connecting students to the place they live and the community they’re part of.

Classrooms are not confined silos—they open directly into the wider educational landscape of the school. Hallways are extensions of the learning environment, outfitted with pegboards, whiteboards, interactive displays, and manipulatives that invite spontaneous play and reinforcement of academic concepts. These features turn every movement through the building into an opportunity for curiosity and learning.

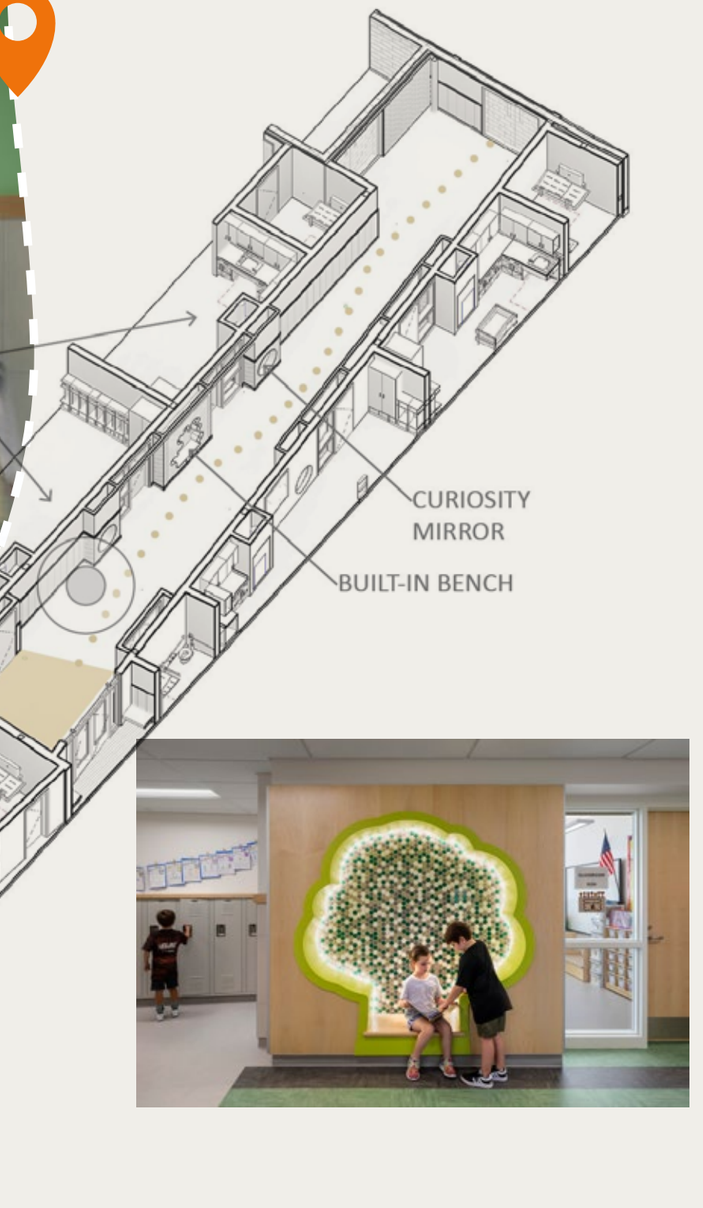
**Typical Kindergarten**



Borderland Trailblazers

# Themed Learning Corridors

Each grade represents a theme connected to the History of Easton and creates identifiable wings within the building for these young learners. Each corridor design incorporates themed built-in elements and age appropriate activities for learning.

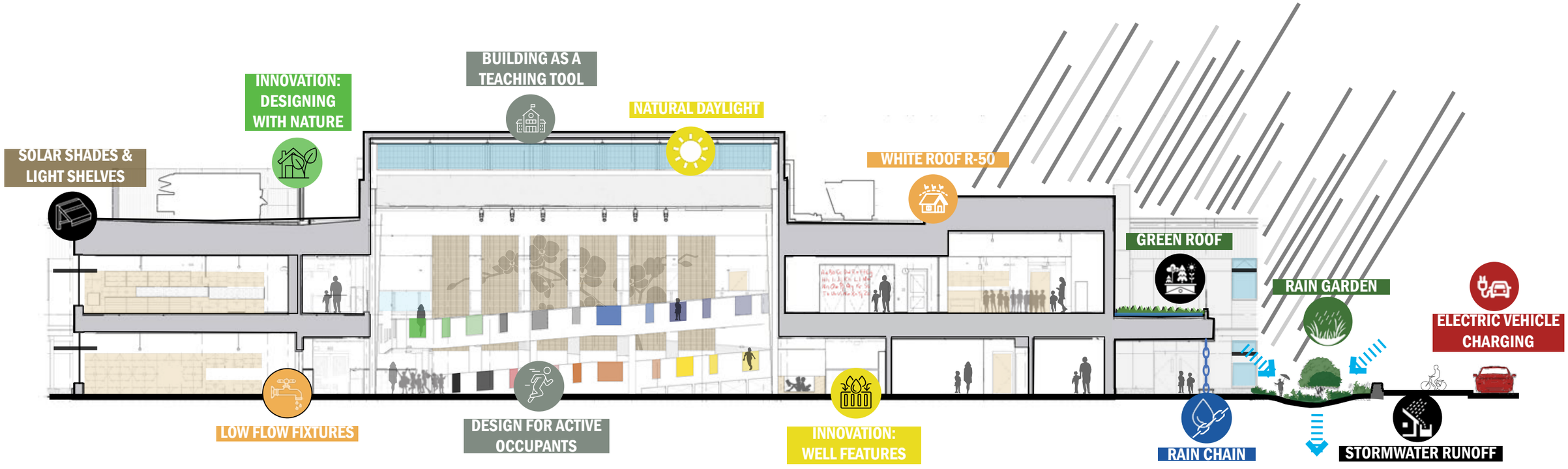


EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

# Sustainability + Wellness

Outdoor learning is equally central to the educational approach. Covered porches function as transitional and instructional spaces, allowing teachers to take lessons outside with ease. Sensory gardens, rainwater systems, music walks, and a food-growing garden linked to a teaching kitchen offer hands-on STEM, health, and environmental education in real-world settings. These spaces align with curriculum goals while fostering student agency, collaboration, and ecological literacy.


**The PK-K dining looks out to the school garden**




## SUSTAINABILITY + WELLNESS

Ongoing research is illuminating the impacts of unhealthy materials at both a macro and micro level at all ages, particularly with the youngest ages. As a PK -2 facility, the team set a goal to achieve and exceed the LEED standards under the Materials and Resources and IEQ sections. Every effort was made to eliminate VOCs fully, select Red List-free materials, and avoid the six classes of materials well known to affect the built environment negatively. Special attention was given to materials within reach of young learners, including flooring including carpet tile with non-PVC backing and linoleum tile, terrazzo and wood, all using low water-based coatings and adhesives, formaldehyde-free casework, solid surfacing countertops and stainless-steel sinks and fixtures. Materials were chosen not only to provide long-term durability and low maintenance but also for the attributes of simple, sustainable, and healthy products. Additionally, as a building designed during COVID-19, strategies for true isolation of space within the building and adding UVC emitters within the packaged roof-top equipment to cleanse the air further return to the indoor environment.

Finally, the project pursued Innovation & Pilot credits that center around the quality of the spaces within the building. These strategies included designing for active occupants, non-mercury-containing lighting, Beauty and Design under the WELL program, design with nature, and a building broad green education program.

Together, these strategies support both environmental performance and human-centered design, creating a learning environment that promotes health, creativity, and academic success. The Blanche A. Ames Elementary School stands as a model for sustainable and wellness-forward education.

## Post-Occupancy Evaluation (POE):

The POE confirms that the school's environmental design contributes meaningfully to student wellness and performance. Data collected in spring 2024 revealed:

- A **40% reduction** in average CO levels, improving cognitive function and focus
- **72% of teachers** reported satisfaction with thermal comfort in classrooms
- Daylight quality improved, with a **19% increase** in classrooms with optimal illumination, and **82% of teachers reporting satisfaction** with daylight conditions
- Average background noise measured at **39 dBA**, compliant with LEED v4 requirements; over 90% of teachers were satisfied with acoustic comfort
- **97% of teachers and 82% of staff/ administrators** agreed the new facility better supports teaching and learning

# Age/ Developmentally Specific

Flexibility is built into every learning space. Classrooms are equipped to support diverse teaching methodologies and evolving technologies. Furniture, display surfaces, and storage solutions are adaptable, enabling teachers to personalize their environment to meet both group and individual needs. Shared instructional spaces—like the media center, art rooms, and small-group intervention areas—are located at key junctions to support co-teaching and collaborative projects.

Inclusivity is not just a value—it's embedded into the learning environment. The design supports neurodiverse learners with calming spaces, varied sensory input, and alternative environments for participation. From quiet observation niches overlooking active spaces to small breakout zones with acoustic separation, students are empowered to choose the settings in which they learn best.

Small cafeteria with platform stage

**The small cafeteria, designed for sensory sensitivity and multifunctional use, features a teaching kitchen, a connection to the garden, and a platform stage for informal performances—creating a calm, flexible environment for smaller gatherings.**

**In contrast, the large cafeteria accommodates the full school community and includes a full-scale stage that opens to the gym, supporting assemblies, performances, and larger events.**

The gymnasium opens to the cafetorium through the stage


Main central cafetorium

**“I’m so grateful I got to work with these professionals… in the back of my mind I thought ‘oh, sure, you want to hear from us’ but they ACTUALLY DID LISTEN and valued the things we had to say.”**

ANNA GALER
Oliver Ames High School Senior,
WBZ Radio Interview

RESULTS

# Learning, Legacy, Value

A student-centered campus delivering impact beyond expectations.

## EDUCATIONAL GOALS

The design of Blanche Ames Elementary School supports educational goals by fostering active engagement, accommodating differentiated instruction, and minimizing sensory stressors. Key elements—such as abundant natural daylight, optimized acoustics, high indoor air quality, and thermal comfort—contribute to a setting that aligns physical space with students’ cognitive and developmental needs. The building facilitates foundational learning through opportunities for exploration, sensory-based experiences, and integrated curriculum delivery. Early observations indicate increased student engagement, smoother transitions between activities, and enhanced peer collaboration.

## SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS

The project delivers a unified and equitable educational environment, enhances operational efficiency, and reduces maintenance costs while supporting the district’s goals for inclusion and student-centered learning.

## COMMUNITY GOALS

The campus fosters lifelong learning, strengthens intergenerational connections, and offers a civic asset through after-hours use and community programming. By consolidating three neighborhood schools into one facility on a central campus, the project strengthens community bonds and establishes a sense of shared identity. High school student involvement in the design process reinforced intergenerational collaboration and civic pride.

## UNINTENDED RESULTS

Unexpected outcomes include increased student and community pride, heightened interest in sustainability and wellness, and a stronger appreciation for Blanche Ames’ legacy. The integration of student voices into design created deeper connections between the building and its users. The introduction of a main ramp in lieu of a main stair was unprecedented and drew the attention of the state funding authority, which afforded the opportunity to make the case and expand the conversation on Universal Design

## VALUE AND FINANCIAL STEWARDSHIP

The building is designed for current and future educational needs, is adaptable/expandable, employs passive CPTED safety/security concepts and has durable, low-maintenance materials and plantings and exceeds energy code requirements. Submetering, passive solar orientation, and sustainable materials contribute to long-term cost savings. Shared campus infrastructure reduces redundancy and maximizes district resources. The project itself was delivered well under budget, allowing funds to be distributed to additional needs and returned to the Town.