



# A4LE Transformation Award Submission

**Project Location:** Portland, Oregon  
**Category:** Transformation



## 1. Executive Summary

The Athletic Center transforms a mid-century gymnasium into a dynamic and inclusive hub for physical wellness, social connection, and educational integration. Designed in close collaboration with students and staff, the facility reimagines traditional athletics through a lens of equity, adaptability, and connection to place. The project replaces outdated locker rooms with flexible team rooms that support a wide range of comfort levels and gender identities. It extends beyond athletics to become a central community space, promoting resilience with seismic readiness and high-performance sustainability standards. Nestled against a forested hillside and serving as a connective thread between lower, middle, and upper school campuses, the center embraces its natural setting while maximizing daylight, multipurpose interior environments. This transformation establishes an inclusive, student-centered athletic environment that supports learning, wellness, and community for all students.

## 2. Scope of Work and Budget

- **Total Square Footage:** 42,000 SF (22,000 SF renovation + 20,000 SF new addition)
- **Project Cost:** \$13.86 million (\$338/SF)
- **Timeline:** July 2018 – July 2021
- **Sustainability:** Net Zero Ready (Energy Trust of Oregon – Path to Net Zero)





## Program Highlights:

**Team Rooms** – Gender-inclusive, flexible spaces for meeting, preparation, and team-building

**Indoor Gym Spaces** – Designed for both daily PE use and competitive varsity sports

**Social Spaces** – Integrated into circulation routes to encourage informal interaction and learning

**Forest-Facing Collaboration Zones** – Areas for group work, quiet study, and reflection with strong visual connection to nature

**Seismically Resilient Structure** – Engineered to serve as a safe haven in emergencies

**Mass Timber Construction** – Provides structural warmth, reduced embodied carbon, and biophilic design

**Passive Cooling Strategy** – Eliminates mechanical AC while maintaining thermal comfort - paired with a high-performance air filtration system for wildfire smoke and removal of pathogens

**All-User Restrooms/Changing Rooms** – Designed for inclusivity, safety, and long-term adaptability

**Flexible Space Use** – Layouts support athletics, academics, assemblies, and community events

**Integrated Daylighting** – Abundant natural light reduces energy use and supports well-being

**Campus Connectivity** – The building connects lower, middle, and upper school divisions

**All Electric Building** – Fossil fuel free





### 3. School & Community Research and Engagement

#### a. Context

- **Community Description:**

This co-educational PreK–12 campus serves approximately 880 students and is grounded in a philosophy of “learning by doing.” The school values community engagement, student voice, and individualized learning paths. It cultivates a safe, inclusive, and exploratory environment that encourages every student to reach their potential across academic, social, and physical domains.

- **Stakeholders:**

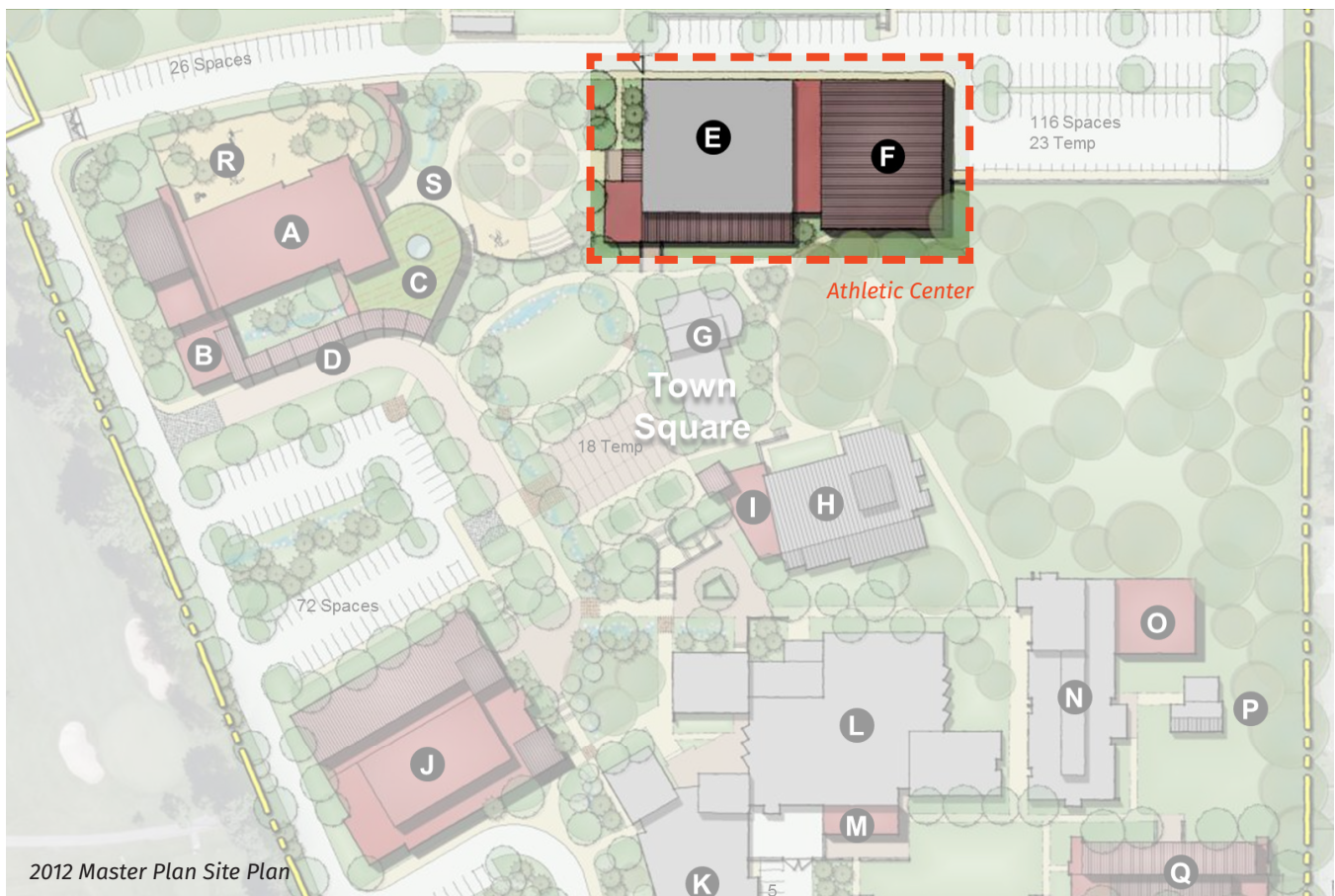
- » Director of Athletics
- » Heads of Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools
- » Facilities Director
- » Head of School
- » Students

- **Challenges:**

The original facility presented several challenges that limited its effectiveness and inclusivity. It lacked transparency—both in terms of physical openness and access—and was inefficient in its use of space. Support areas such as locker rooms were underutilized and often perceived as intimidating, particularly by students not engaged in traditional athletics. There were no designated areas for informal gathering or social interaction, which contributed to a sense of exclusion. Most significantly, the layout and culture of the facility conflicted with the school’s “No Cut” athletics policy, which emphasizes broad participation and inclusivity over competition and selectivity.

- **Available Assets:**

When we started the project there was a 2012 Master Plan that identified the need to expand athletics.







Existing gym had no windows facing forest



Trophies stored in unused showers



Campus aerial pre-renovation



## b. Process

### Visioning:

The visioning process was framed around three core experiential lenses—educational, campus, and community—each of which shaped the design priorities. Stakeholder discussions asked: How can the building foster wellness and rejuvenation? How can it better connect to the landscape and create a sense of belonging? What does it mean to be a “gateway” or “front porch” for the campus community? These prompts allowed faculty, students, and parents to articulate specific values that translated into design goals, including transparency, access, comfort, and identity.

Priorities surfaced during engagement included the desire for spaces that are socially dynamic and technology-rich, especially for students not engaged in traditional sports. This insight shaped the creation of the Student Hub—a flexible area adjacent to team spaces and event courts—and helped reinforce the building’s role as a place for everyone, not just athletes. Additionally, the forest-facing “porch” and flexible corridors were a direct response to student and faculty feedback about connection to nature and the need for welcoming places to hang out, wait for rides, or host visitors.

The team also considered multiple planning schemes to test different values: maximizing green space and bridging open spaces. These early studies were shared with stakeholders to encourage feedback and build consensus around a final approach that prioritized inclusivity, flexibility, and a unified athletic experience.

Collaborative workshops with faculty, students, and administrators revealed a need for inclusive, flexible spaces that reflect contemporary student needs and values. This input directly informed

### Community Experience:

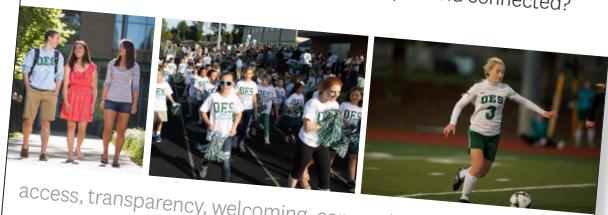
What is the role of this place for the OES community? visitor?



gateway, front porch, haven, hub

### Campus Experience:

How can the Athletic Center be more open and connected?



access, transparency, welcoming, connection to nature

### Educational Experience:

How does the Athletic Center contribute to the whole child?



health, wellness, rejuvenation, OES identity

the reimagining of traditional locker rooms. In their place, the design team introduced “unlocker” rooms—gender-inclusive team rooms for pre-, during, and post-activity gathering, paired with single-user restrooms that doubled as changing rooms for privacy, dignity, and personal comfort. Lockers and open showers were eliminated, and functions such as gear storage and socializing were decoupled and distributed throughout the building.



- **Value of the Process and Project to the Community:**

The resulting facility has become a vibrant community hub that goes well beyond athletics. Its warm interiors, flexible furniture, and welcoming social spaces are designed for all body types and comfort levels. Students of all identities feel encouraged to gather, study, and connect. Strategically located near the school's pick-up area, it serves as a warm, comfortable place where students often wait or gather informally at the end of the school day. The building also hosts large events and assemblies, filling a crucial gap on campus where interior gathering spaces of this scale were previously lacking.

Much of this value stems directly from how the community shaped the project from the beginning. Through workshops and interviews, students and faculty expressed a desire for a building that felt open, social, and reflective of the

school's values. These conversations informed design moves like the creation of forest-facing porches, multipurpose team rooms, and the student hub—a shared commons for studying, waiting, or gathering that is not tied to athletic participation. The facility now serves as a “front porch” for campus life, offering a first impression to visitors and a trusted space of belonging for students.

Additionally, its versatility supports a variety of community uses—from all-school assemblies and guest events to informal gatherings and emergency sheltering—further reinforcing its role as both a day-to-day and mission-critical resource. The integration of seismic resilience, passive comfort systems, and biophilic materials ensures that the building serves not only as a backdrop to campus life, but as an active contributor to student wellness and long-term sustainability.





- **How Engagement Fostered Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:**

This project redefines how students engage with physical education and wellness spaces by replacing outdated, exclusionary models with inclusive, student-centered design. Athletic facilities are often perceived as spaces reserved for competitive athletes, but this facility flips that narrative. Centrally located and filled with natural materials and soft, welcoming finishes, it invites participation from all students, regardless of athletic ability or identity.

One of the most impactful shifts was the reimagining of traditional locker rooms. Informed by student input, the design team learned that showers are rarely used and that many students prefer private changing options. In response, the project introduced “unlocker” rooms—flexible team spaces for pre- and post-activity gathering—

paired with expanded, single-user restrooms that ensure privacy, dignity, and comfort.

Other inclusive strategies include a variety of seating areas designed for different physical needs and social preferences, and the use of mass timber and biophilic materials that reinforce connection to nature and promote a strong sense of belonging.





## 4. Physical Environment

### a. Context

- **Environment & Site:**  
A 20,000 SF addition paired with a 22,000 SF renovation integrates into a wooded hillside. A south-facing corridor and multipurpose balcony connect users to nature and provide elevated views of the gym and landscape. Located at the heart of campus, the facility welcomes all students and redefines athletic spaces as inclusive environments for everyone.
- **Larger Context of the Community:**  
The facility plays a vital role in encouraging interaction and connection across school divisions, serving as a shared space where students of all ages naturally intersect. As the largest interior gathering space on campus, it hosts a wide range of events and assemblies. Its proximity to the school's pick-up area makes it a popular and

practical spot for students to wait at the end of the day—offering a warm, comfortable, and inviting environment that reinforces its role as a central community hub. Structurally designed as an essential facility, it supports the broader neighborhood community in the event of a natural disaster.





## b. Response

- **Inspiration & Motivation**

The design draws inspiration from the surrounding forest, using warm materials and expansive views to create a space that feels both inviting and grounded in nature. These qualities help transform the facility into a welcoming environment for all students, not just athletes. Strategically located gathering areas support a range of interactions, from casual conversations to team huddles, promoting community and connection throughout the day.

- **Innovation**

The project redefines traditional athletic support spaces with a suite of innovative solutions. “Unlocker” rooms replace conventional locker rooms with larger toilet stalls for private changing and eliminates lockers entirely in favor of flexible, co-ed team gathering spaces. Movable walls between team rooms create the possibility for all-gender configurations, reflecting a commitment to evolving student needs. The building also embraces natural light through extensive glazing and employs mass timber construction with a passive cooling strategy, allowing for exceptional comfort without the use of mechanical air conditioning.

- **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

The facility challenges exclusionary norms often found in sports environments. It removes barriers to participation by creating spaces that are adaptable and welcoming to all, regardless of gender or athletic ability. Team rooms are designed to serve mixed-gender groups and varying levels of athletic engagement, emphasizing collaboration and inclusivity over hierarchy or tradition.



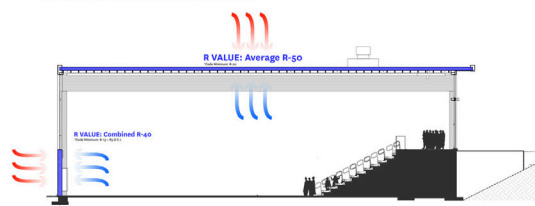




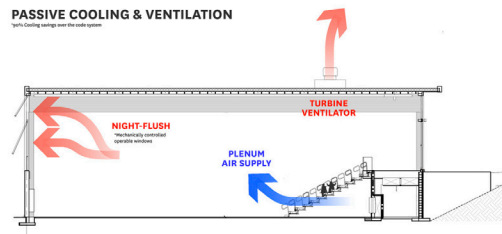
- Sustainability & Wellness**

Sustainability is embedded throughout the design. The mass timber structure not only enhances aesthetics and biophilic comfort but also reduces embodied carbon. The building utilizes passive cooling strategies and highly insulated exterior, eliminating the need for air conditioning while maintaining thermal comfort. The mechanical system also provides high performance filtration in the event of wildfire or outbreaks for pathogens. Clad in regionally sourced cedar, the exterior is both beautiful and renewable. The facility is fossil fuel free, achieves an 82% reduction in energy use compared to the national average for similar buildings and is certified Net Zero Ready, making it a model for energy-conscious school design, with measurable savings and performance verified by Net Zero Ready certification and alignment with the Architecture 2030 Challenge.

#### HIGH-PERFORMANCE ENVELOPE



#### PASSIVE COOLING & VENTILATION



#### DAYLIGHT & LED LIGHTING





## 5. Educational Environment

### a. Context

- **Educational Vision and Goals of the School**

The school's educational vision is centered on holistic, inquiry-based, experiential learning—supporting physical, emotional, and intellectual development for every student.

### b. Response

- **Curriculum Support**

The facility enhances the physical education curriculum through improved circulation and easy access to gym spaces, making movement and activity a more integral part of the school day. Team rooms serve as flexible environments that support not only athletics, but also coaching, leadership development, and collaborative group work.

- **A Variety of Teaching & Learning Styles**

Designed with versatility in mind, the building accommodates a wide range of activities from small group huddles and individual study sessions to large-scale school assemblies. This adaptability allows the space to serve multiple educational and social functions throughout the day.

- **Adaptability and Flexibility**

The layout includes reconfigurable team rooms and gathering areas that can evolve with the school's changing needs. Whether for formal instruction, informal gathering, or athletic preparation, the spaces are designed for long-term flexibility.

- **Innovation in the Educational Environment**

Rooted in the school's inquiry-based approach to learning—where educators provide tools and guidance while students bring their whole selves into the process—the building redefines

the athletics center as a social and educational hub. It supports a culture where curiosity, identity, and lived experience shape how students move through space and community. Thoughtfully designed gathering areas encourage inclusive use by all students, extending the role of the facility beyond athletics into daily campus life. The success of the all-user restrooms exemplifies this philosophy in action, leading to a campus-wide initiative to retrofit all restrooms to better reflect the values of inclusivity, dignity, and adaptability.





## 6. Results

- **Educational Goals and Objectives Achieved**

The project creates an inclusive environment where all students—regardless of ability, identity, or athletic interest—can engage in physical activity and wellness. By prioritizing comfort, access, and flexibility, the facility supports the school’s broader educational mission.

- **School District Goals Achieved**

This is an independent school and therefore, not in a district.

- **Community Goals Achieved**

Beyond serving student needs, the facility is designed for community-wide use. Its seismic resilience and multi-

purpose layout ensure it is a safe and functional gathering space throughout the day, promoting leadership, wellness, and equity across age groups and activities.

- **Unintended Results and Achievements**

The project unexpectedly became a social anchor on campus, especially for students not traditionally involved in athletics. Its inclusive approach to restrooms also served as a model for similar upgrades across the entire campus, setting new standards for accessibility and comfort and serving as a replicable model for inclusive design across educational environments.

- **Good Stewardship of Financial Resources**

The facility demonstrates exceptional financial and environmental stewardship through a combination of thoughtful design decisions and strategic resource management. By reusing the existing gymnasium structure, the project minimized demolition and construction waste while preserving embodied energy. The primary structure is composed of mass timber—a material choice that is both economical and environmentally responsible—while conventional wood framing was used for the remaining structure to balance cost and performance. The building envelope features regionally sourced stained cedar, selected for its sustainability, durability, and affordability, and fiberglass windows that enhance thermal performance without inflating costs. These choices reflect a deliberate effort to achieve lasting value through simplicity and efficiency. Paired with passive design strategies and a high-performance envelope, these materials contribute to significantly reduced operational costs over the building’s lifetime, proving that financial responsibility can align seamlessly with architectural quality and environmental performance.



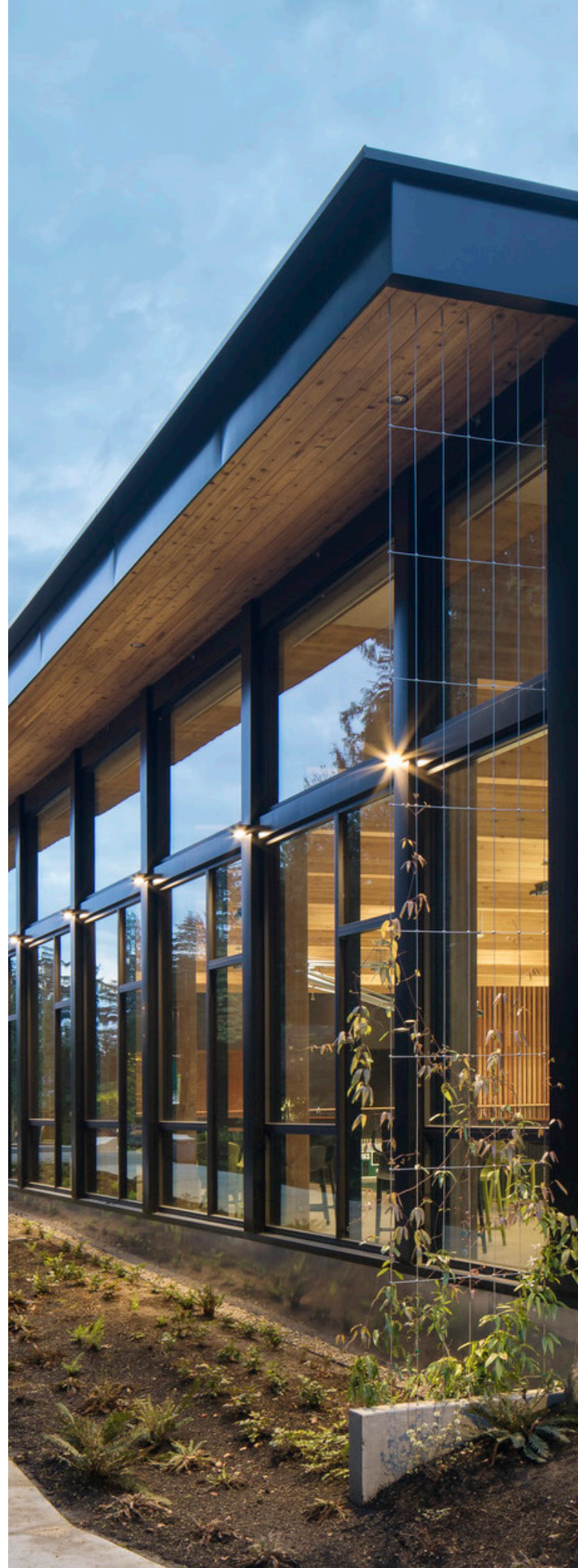


- **Sustainability and Wellness Outcomes**

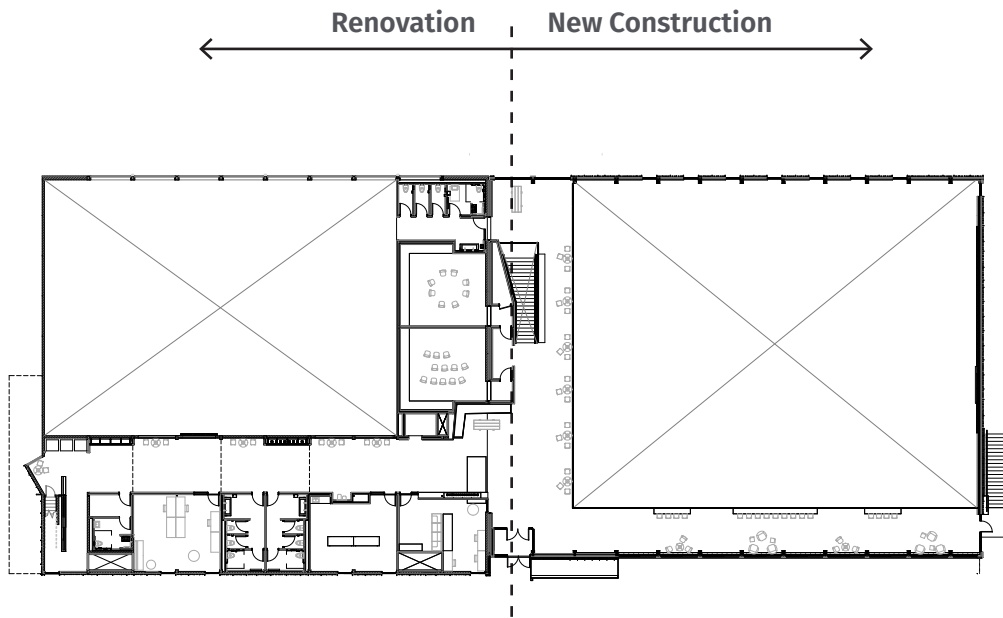
The building achieves an impressive 82% reduction in energy use compared to national averages for similar facilities, with a modeled Energy Use Intensity (EUI) of just 15 kBtu/SF/Year. This performance translates into an estimated annual energy cost savings of \$264,000. The project surpasses the Architecture 2030 Challenge and is certified as Net Zero Ready through the Energy Trust of Oregon. With a highly efficient envelope, passive cooling strategy, and minimal mechanical conditioning, the building prioritizes high performance while minimizing environmental impact. A high-performance air filtration system removes pathogens and cleans the air in case of wildfire smoke.

While part of its focus serves as home to varsity sports and physical education classes, the facility also functions as a hub for all-school gatherings, informal activities, and community events. Designed for resiliency, the Athletic Center was engineered to meet stringent seismic criteria, ensuring it can provide shelter and support for both the school and surrounding neighborhood in the event of a major earthquake.

In addition to its environmental and emergency-readiness credentials, the building promotes holistic wellness. It houses spaces for fitness, yoga, and health-focused programming, and is designed with student well-being at its core. Ample natural daylight, views to nature, and warm biophilic materials—such as mass timber—create a calming, restorative atmosphere. Inclusive design strategies, including all-user restrooms and non-gendered team rooms, support psychological comfort and belonging. In this way, the building goes beyond sustainability to foster a culture of safety, inclusion, and lifelong wellness.



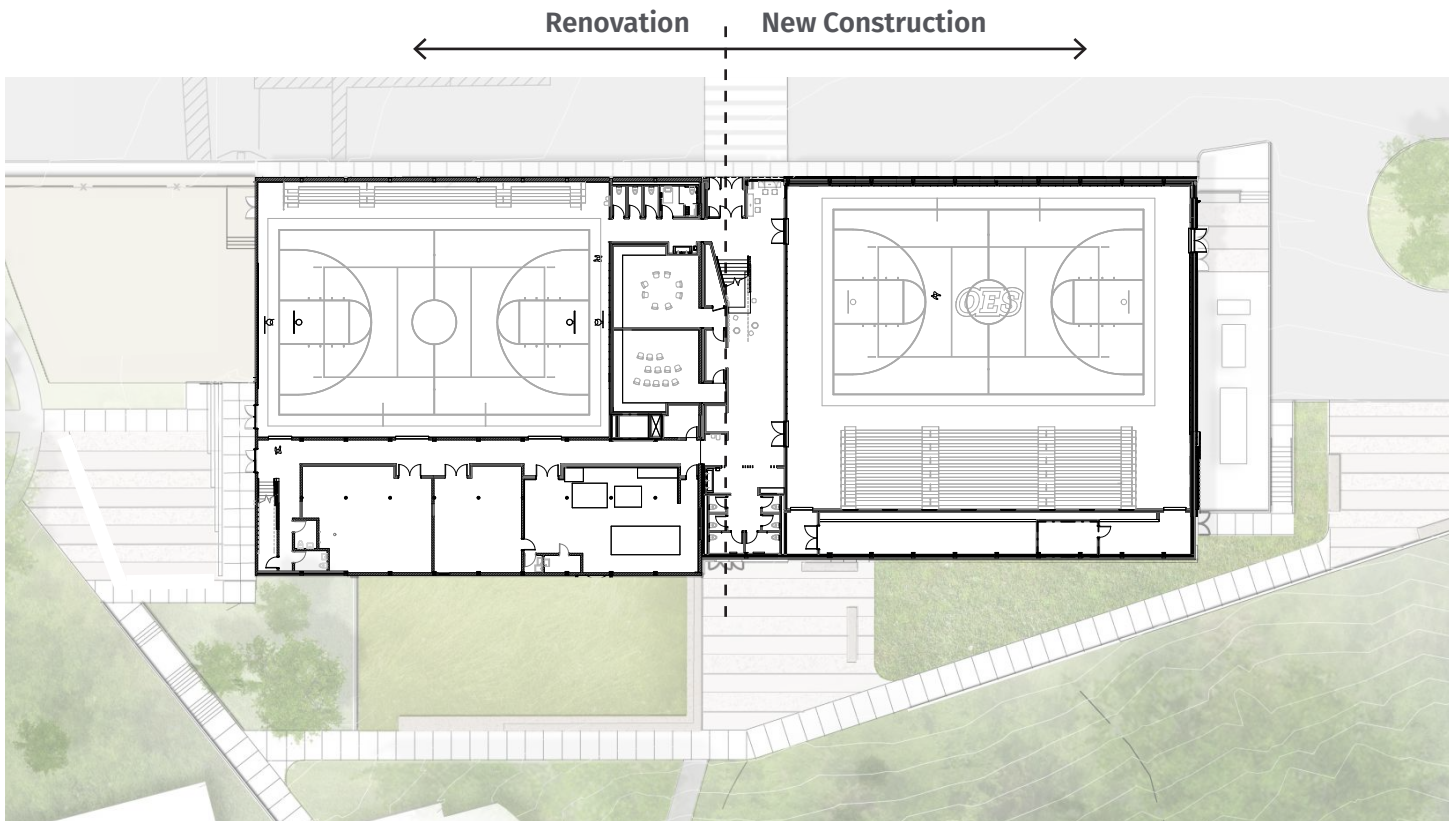




*Upper Level*







Lower Level

