BORA

Art Rutkin Elementary

TIGARD, OR

Connecting Students,
Community, and Place
through Design



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Art Rutkin Elementary School is organized around a simple idea: learning is strengthened through connection—between students and teachers, school and community, and people and place.

As the first new school in the Tigard-Tualatin School District in nearly two decades, the project serves a rapidly growing neighborhood at the edge of Tigard, Oregon. Named after Art Rutkin—a beloved educator known for his passion for literacy and relationship-based teaching—the school draws inspiration from his belief that meaningful learning begins with curiosity, visibility, and human connection.

The **library and commons form the heart of the school**, anchoring daily life through reading, gathering, and shared experience. Around this central hub, learning neighborhoods extend outward, connected through transparent boundaries, flexible breakout spaces, and continuous access to daylight and landscape.

Now in its third year of occupancy, the school has fostered stronger relationships, increased student engagement, and a deep sense of belonging—demonstrating how design can meaningfully support both learning and community.



SCOPE + BUDGET

Owner
Tigard-Tualatin School District

Design Start Date
Jul 01, 2018

Substantial Completion Date
May 25, 2023

Site Area
10 acres

Gross Square Footage
80,000

Total Construction Cost
$38,000,000

Grades Served
PK-5

Targeted Student Capacity
640



Learning Environment

Community Connection

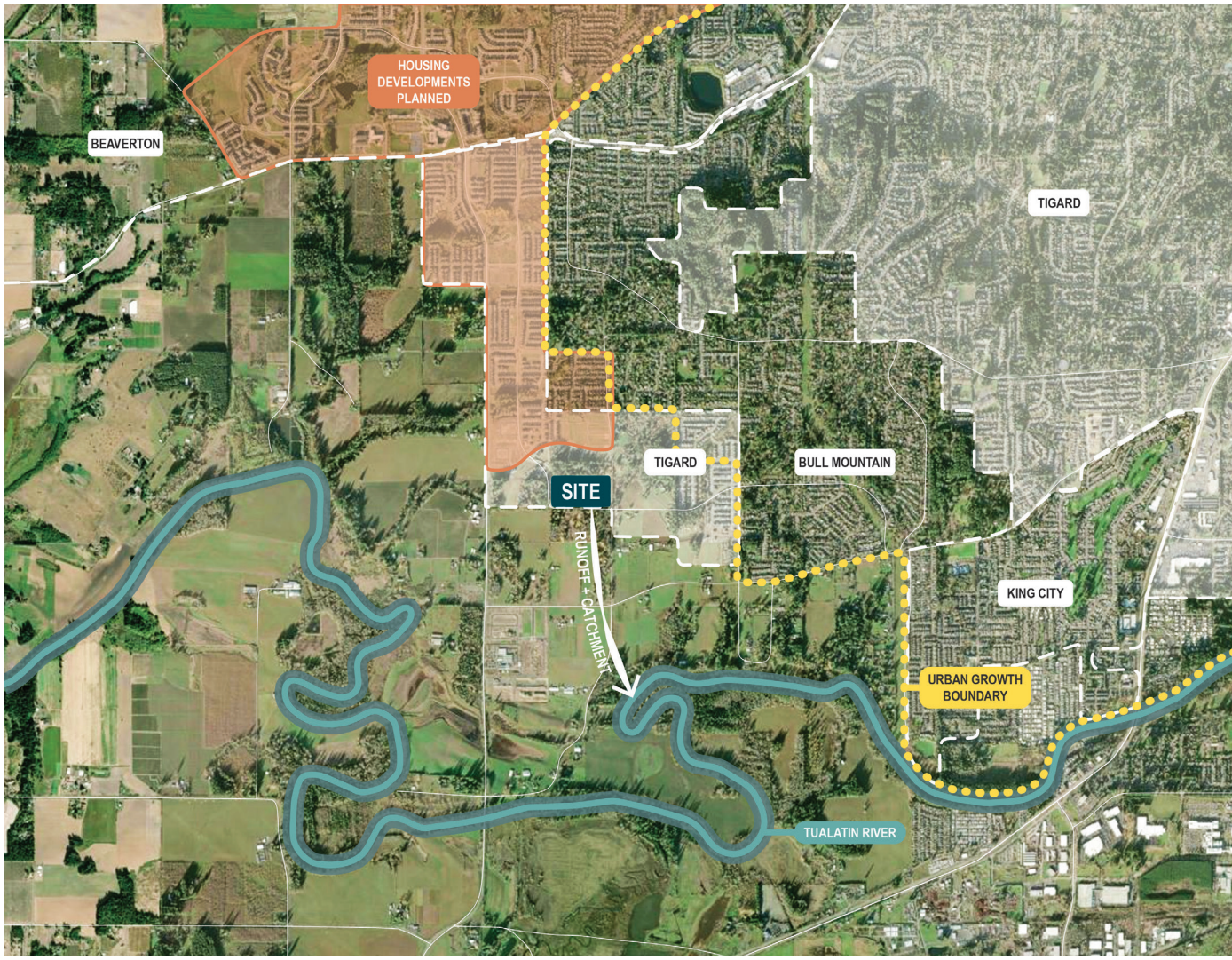
A Growing Community without a Center

Art Rutkin Elementary serves a rapidly expanding residential area at the edge of Tigard's urban growth boundary. As one of the first civic investments in the emerging River Terrace neighborhood, the school plays a critical role in shaping a sense of identity and place for a community still in formation.

At the time of design, the surrounding area lacked established infrastructure, gathering spaces, and shared civic identity. Families moving into the neighborhood brought diverse expectations and needs, but few opportunities existed for connection beyond the home.

The school was therefore envisioned as more than an educational facility—it was designed to serve as a community anchor, providing a central place where relationships could form, shared experiences could occur, and a new neighborhood could begin to define itself for families new to the area.





Above: Located within Tigard's rapidly expanding River Terrace neighborhood, the school serves as one of the area's first major civic anchors, connecting new residential development to the Tualatin River landscape.

Disconnection as a Design Challenge

The project began with two fundamental challenges: **social disconnection and physical separation**

The district's previous schools reflected outdated educational models, often characterized by isolated classrooms and limited opportunities for collaboration or visibility. These environments constrained both teaching flexibility and student interaction.

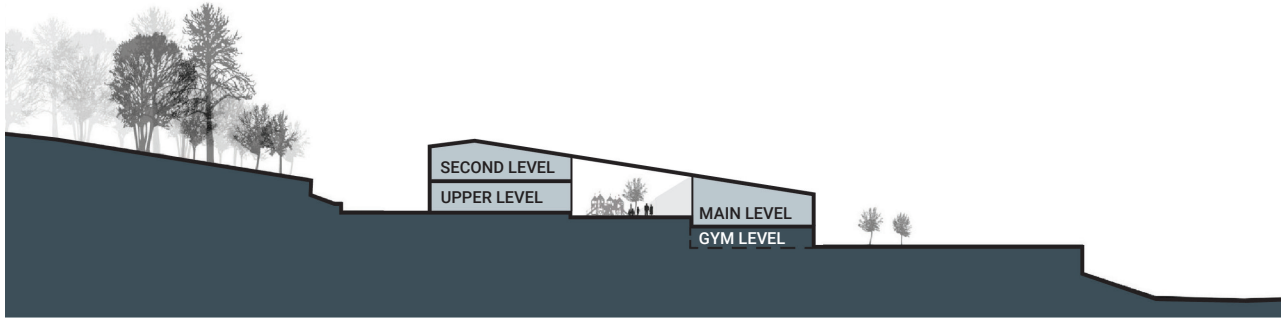
At the same time, the site presented significant physical constraints. Located on a sloping hillside near the Tualatin River, the land required careful environmental stewardship, stormwater management, and thoughtful integration into the surrounding landscape.

Together, these conditions demanded a new approach—one that would break down barriers between spaces, connect people to one another, and establish meaningful relationships between the building and its environment.

Below: Previous classroom conditions.

Right: Located within Tigard's rapidly expanding River Terrace neighborhood, the school serves as one of the area's first major civic anchors, connecting new residential development to the Tualatin River landscape.





NORTH | SOUTH SECTION



Key Challenges

Disconnected Learning Environments
Traditional classroom models limited visibility, collaboration, and adaptability

Lack of Community Infrastructure
The surrounding neighborhood lacked civic spaces to support gathering and shared identity.

Complex Site Conditions
A sloping site, environmental constraints, and proximity to sensitive natural systems required careful planning.

Evolving Client Expectations
The district's initial focus on cost efficiency required demonstrating the long-term value of flexible, high-performing learning environments.

These challenges became opportunities to rethink how a school could foster **connection at every scale.**





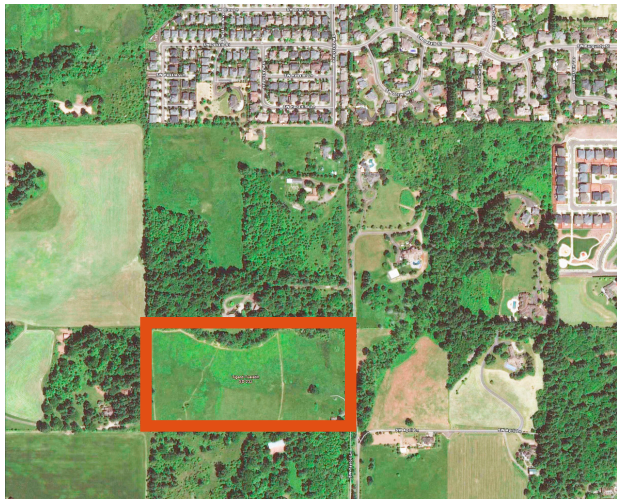










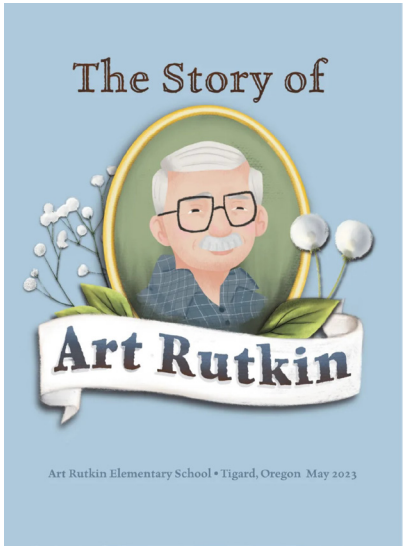


Engagement: Building a Shared Vision

With a largely unestablished community, the design process became an essential tool for building connection before the school even opened.

An inclusive engagement effort brought together district leaders, educators, community members, and the Rutkin family to define a shared vision. These conversations emphasized the importance of creating a welcoming environment, supporting diverse learning needs, and establishing the school as a central gathering place

The involvement of Art Rutkin's family—particularly his daughter, an educator—helped ground the project in values of literacy, curiosity, and human connection. Through this collaborative process, the project evolved from a baseline facility into a **forward-looking model for education**, shaped by a shared commitment to connection, belonging, and long-term community impact.







From Input to Connection

The design transforms site, educational, and community priorities into a connected learning environment organized around a shared center and continuous relationships to the landscape.

Views → Landscape Connection
Expansive glazing and shared learning spaces frame views across the meadow, wetlands, and surrounding river valley—maintaining continuous visual connection to the landscape.

Community → Accessible Shared Space
The meadow serves as an accessible gathering and play space for students, families, and the broader community beyond school hours.

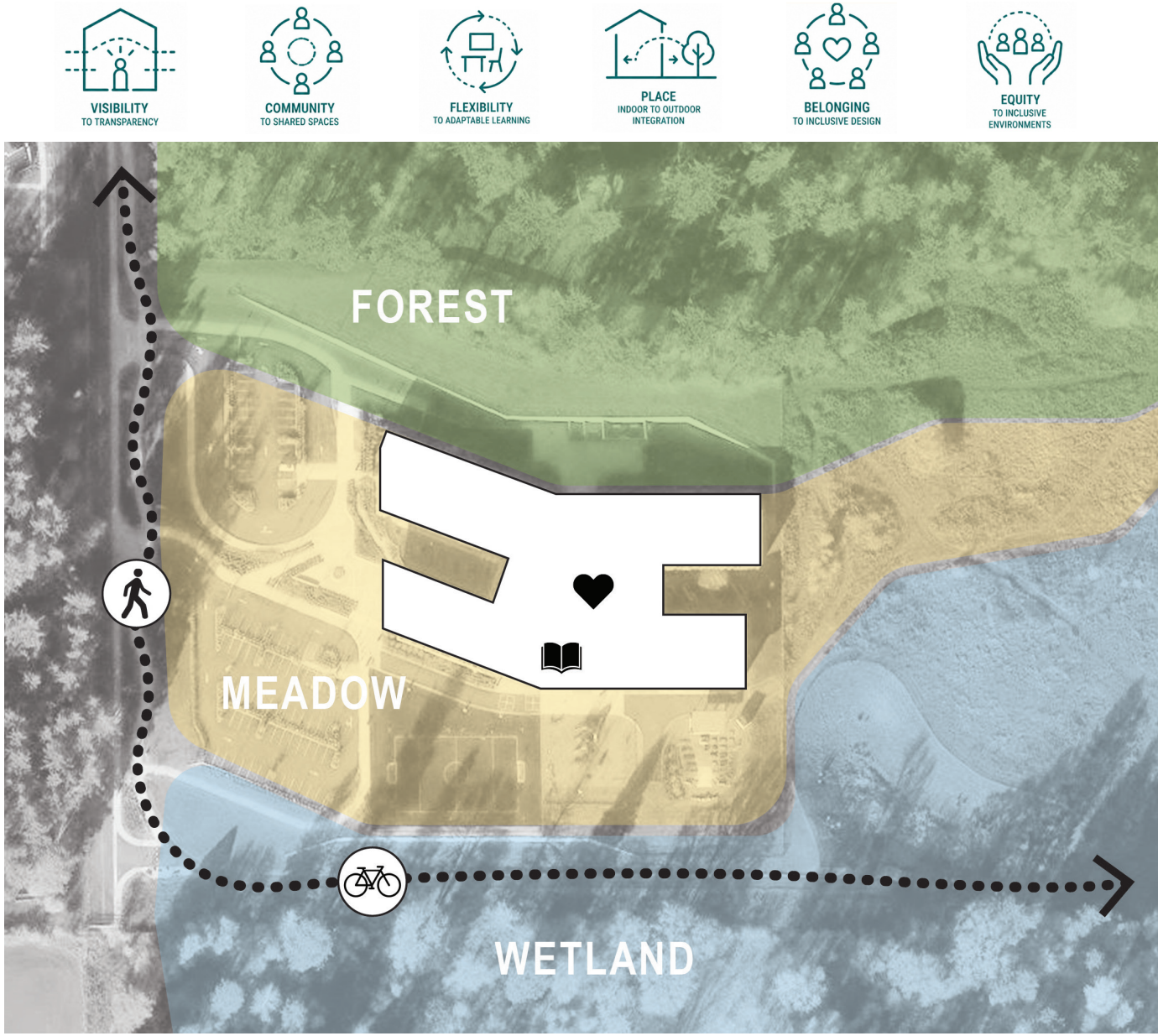
Flexibility → Adaptable Learning
Learning neighborhoods are designed to support a variety of grade configurations over time, allowing the school to adapt as educational needs evolve.

Commons and Library → Shared Heart
At the center of the building, the Commons and Library anchor both academic and social life—supporting gathering, literacy, collaboration, and belonging.

Visibility → Connected Learning
Interior transparency and shared breakout spaces maintain visual relationships between classrooms, circulation, and collaboration zones.

Inclusion → Supportive Environment
Integrated support spaces and flexible learning settings ensure all students remain connected to shared experiences and resources.

Together, these strategies create a cohesive environment where learning is defined by connection.



Above: The building organizes learning environments between forest, meadow, and wetland ecologies, reinforcing continuous connection to the surrounding landscape. The Commons and Library anchor both academic and social life.

A Framework for Connection

The physical environment at Art Rutkin Elementary is designed to support learning through relationships—linking students, teachers, community, and landscape through overlapping systems of interaction.
At the center is the student experience, supported by four interconnected frameworks:

Social — collaboration between students and teachers.

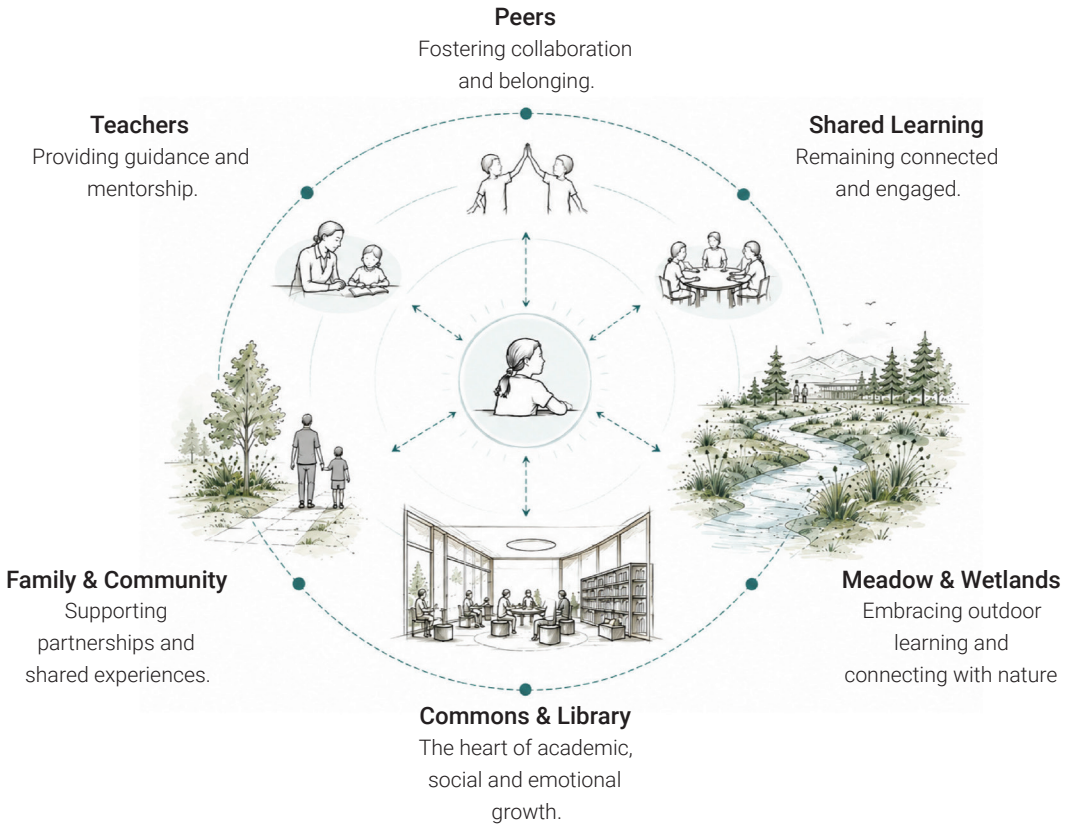
Spatial — visual and physical continuity across learning environments.

Community — shared spaces that extend beyond the school day.

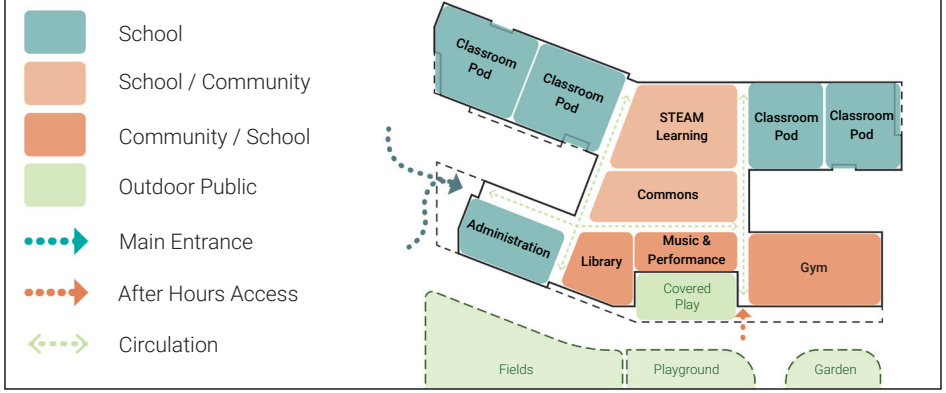
Environmental — access to daylight, views, and outdoor learning.

Rather than separating functions, the design layers these systems together to create an environment where learning remains visible, collaborative, and connected to place.

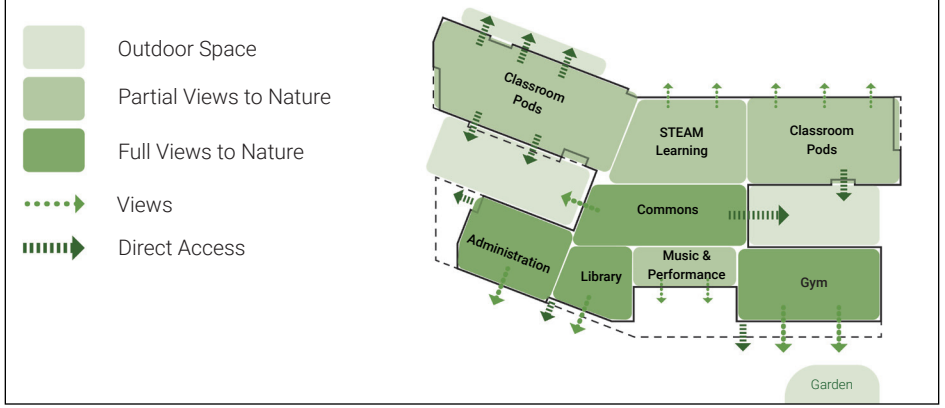
The result is a school that operates not as a collection of classrooms, but as a **cohesive learning ecosystem** shaped by interaction and shared experience.



Connection to Community



Connection to Nature



DESIGN RESPONSE - PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Organization Around a Shared Core

The building is organized around a central commons and library—forming a shared core that anchors daily life and reinforces connection across the school.

Two classroom wings extend from this hub, stepping with the hillside to reduce scale and maintain strong visual relationships to the landscape. Within each wing, classrooms are grouped into **learning neighborhoods**, supported by shared breakout and collaboration spaces.

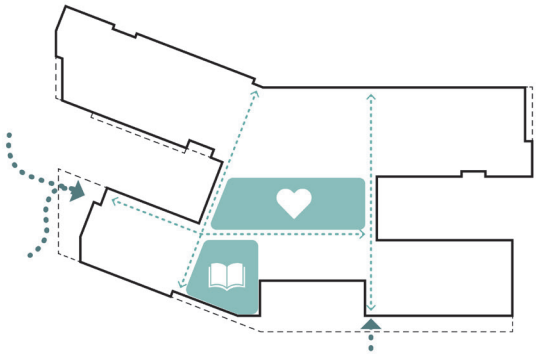
This organization creates a balance between:

Community and Focus

Openness and Structure

Individual and Shared Learning

The result is a clear, legible plan where movement naturally leads through shared spaces, encouraging interaction and reinforcing the idea that learning is not confined to a single room—but occurs throughout the building.



Above: The Commons and Library form the organizational heart of the school, linking learning neighborhoods, circulation, and shared community spaces.









Transparency and Visibility

Transparency is a primary strategy for reinforcing connection throughout the school. Interior glazing, open sightlines, and carefully positioned shared spaces maintain visual relationships across classrooms, corridors, and collaboration areas—transforming traditionally enclosed environments into open learning landscapes.

Visibility supports:

Safety through passive supervision

Collaboration between classrooms and groups

A culture of shared learning, where activity is seen and valued

Transparency is a primary strategy for reinforcing connection throughout the school. Interior glazing, open sightlines, and carefully positioned shared spaces maintain visual relationships across classrooms, corridors, and collaboration areas—transforming traditionally enclosed environments into open learning landscapes.







Interior glazing and open sightlines support passive supervision while placing learning visibly on display.

Indoor-Outdoor Connection

The building and site are conceived as an integrated system, where orientation, organization, and landscape work together to reinforce daylight, visibility, and access to nature.

Expansive windows, courtyards, and outdoor learning areas extend education beyond the classroom, while the stepped form maximizes views and solar access across the sloping site. Adjacent pathways and bike connections link the school to the broader neighborhood and surrounding landscape.

These strategies:

Improve student well-being and focus

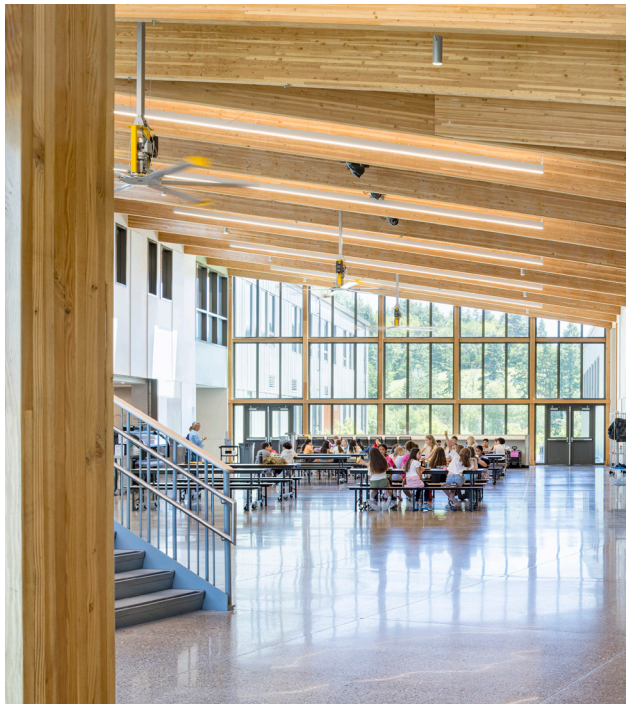
Encourage exploration and movement

Strengthen awareness of place

The result is a seamless relationship between indoor and outdoor environments, where the landscape becomes part of the learning experience.







Above + Left: Natural materials and continuous visual access to the outdoors reinforce connection between learning and landscape.



DESIGN RESPONSE - PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The Commons and Library: The Heart of Connection

At the heart of the school, the Commons and library form a shared center for learning, gathering, and community life.

Inspired by Art Rutkin's passion for literacy and belief in relationship-based education, the library is intentionally integrated into this central hub—ensuring that reading, curiosity, and shared experience are visible and accessible to all. Together, these spaces support meals, assemblies, informal learning, and community events, functioning as both the social and intellectual core of the school.

Daylight from skylights and expansive glazing, combined with the warmth of exposed Douglas fir structure, creates an environment that is both welcoming and inspiring. Connections to adjacent courtyards extend this space outward, reinforcing continuity between learning, community, and place.

> **"The commons and library are where everything comes together — you see kids interacting across grades, reading, collaborating. It really feels like the heart of the school.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal



Above: Art Rutkin reads to a classroom of students.



An Education Vision Rooted in Connection

Art Rutkin Elementary is designed to support a shift toward **collaborative, student-centered learning**, where connection is fundamental to how students engage with each other, their teachers, and their environment.

Inspired by Art Rutkin's belief in relationship-based education and the power of literacy, the school positions learning as both an individual and shared experience. The integration of the library within the central commons reinforces this idea—placing reading, discovery, and gathering at the heart of daily life.

Rather than isolating instruction within classrooms, the design supports a broader learning ecosystem—one that encourages interaction, visibility, and adaptability. Every space is considered part of the learning environment, reinforcing the idea that **education happens through connection, not separation**.









Flexible Learning Ecosystem

Learning environments are organized into neighborhoods that extend beyond the classroom to support a wide range of teaching and learning styles.

Each cluster includes:

Classrooms

Shared breakout spaces

Collaboration zones

These interconnected environments allow students to move fluidly between individual focus, small group work, and larger collaborative activities. Teachers are supported in adapting instruction throughout the day, using adjacent spaces to expand or contract learning environments as needed.

Transparency between these areas ensures continuity, allowing students to remain visually connected even as they work in different settings.

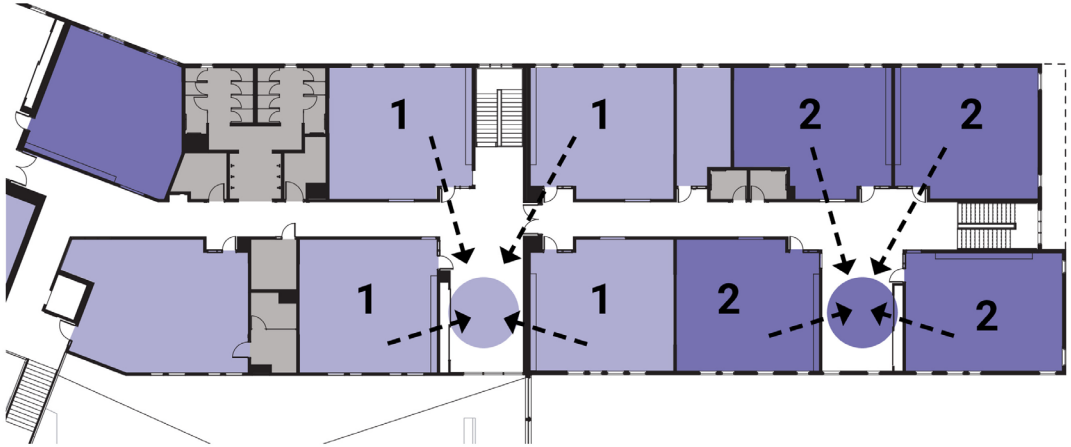
This flexibility transforms the school into a dynamic learning ecosystem, where space supports evolving educational needs rather than constraining them.

The building's organization also supports long-term adaptability, allowing learning neighborhoods to evolve alongside enrollment and educational needs.











Learning in Motion

Movement is an essential component of the learning experience, and the building is designed to support **continuous interaction through circulation**. Corridors, stairs, and transitional spaces are intentionally activated as extensions of the classroom, incorporating seating, work surfaces, and opportunities for informal gathering. The central stair and primary circulation paths create moments of pause and interaction, encouraging students to engage with one another throughout the day.

Rather than serving as purely functional space, circulation becomes a network of **learning pathways**, where chance encounters, observation, and collaboration occur naturally.

> **Students don't just move through the building—they stop, interact, and learn along the way. Those in-between spaces are constantly in use.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal







Sensory and Environmental Connection: Learning Embedded in Place

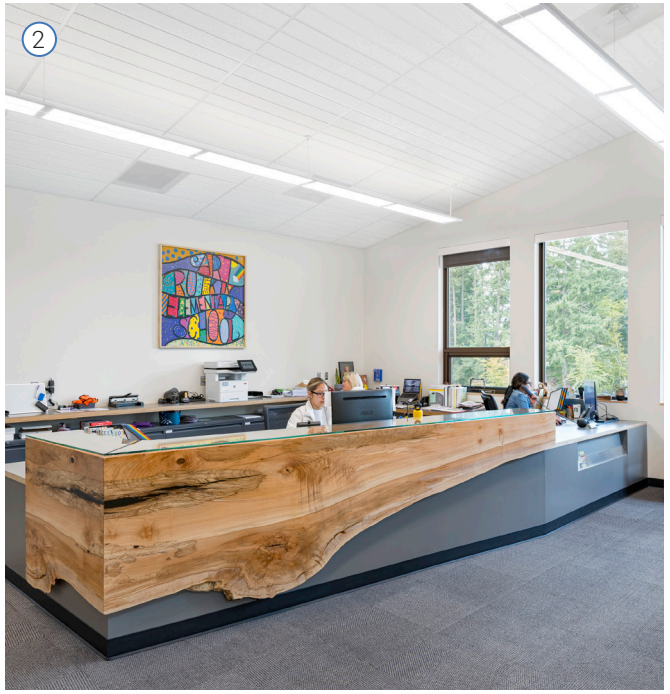
The design engages the senses to support comfort, focus, and curiosity—creating an environment where students feel connected to both their surroundings and their learning. Daylight, views, and materiality are carefully integrated throughout the building:

Expansive windows provide continuous visual access to the landscape. Natural materials, including exposed Douglas fir, introduce warmth and texture. Acoustical strategies ensure clarity and reduce distraction.

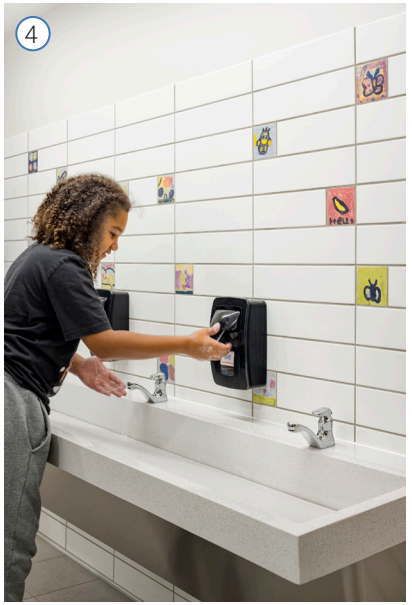
Throughout the building, small-scale design elements create opportunities for discovery—reinforcing the idea that learning is embedded in the environment itself. These moments invite curiosity, connecting students to concepts in mathematics, biology, and regional history through direct experience.

These layered sensory experiences create an environment that is both calming and stimulating—supporting well-being while encouraging exploration and engagement.









Embedded Learning Moments

1. A granite boulder discovered on site—believed to be a glacial erratic from the Missoula Floods—anchors the garden, connecting students to the deep geological history that shaped the Willamette Valley.

2. A live-edge wood slab at the reception desk reveals the natural growth patterns of a tree, connecting students to biological processes and the material origins of the built environment.

3. A custom tile installation, developed in collaboration with a high school intern, visualizes the Fibonacci sequence—transforming a circulation space into an everyday lesson in mathematics and pattern

4. Hand painted tiles by elementary school students inspired by the local natural habitat and stories about the building's namesake, Art Rutkin.

Designing for Belonging and Inclusion

Art Rutkin Elementary is designed to ensure that every student feels welcome, supported, and able to participate fully in school life.

Transparency and visibility help staff maintain strong relationships with students throughout the day, while integrated support spaces provide access to resources within the learning environment itself.Flexible spaces accommodate a range of learning styles, sensory needs, and modes of engagement, allowing students to participate in ways that best support their learning and well-being.

The design intentionally supports diversity, equity, and inclusion by reducing barriers to participation and ensuring equitable access to shared learning experiences across the school community.

> **There's a real sense that every student belongs here. Kids feel comfortable, they feel known, and that changes how they show up every day.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal











RESULTS

Student Experience:
Engagement through Connection

Since opening, the school has demonstrated measurable improvements in student engagement, driven by visibility, flexibility, and access to shared learning environments

Students move fluidly between classrooms, breakout spaces, and commons areas—choosing how and where to learn based on activity and need. This autonomy fosters a greater sense of ownership and participation, while the building's openness encourages interaction across classrooms and grade levels.

Learning is no longer confined to a single room, but distributed across a network of connected spaces that support exploration, collaboration, and independence.

> **"Students take pride in the building — it feels like it belongs to them, and they treat it that way.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal



Outdoor learning environments encourage stewardship, exploration, and hands-on engagement with the landscape.

User Experience: A Relational Environment

The design has fundamentally shifted how staff and students interact, creating a more relational and responsive learning environment.

Transparency and shared spaces enable continuous visibility, allowing teachers and staff to engage with students beyond the classroom. Informal interactions—once limited by traditional layouts—now occur naturally throughout the building, strengthening relationships and reinforcing a sense of community.

These daily moments of connection contribute to a more supportive and engaged school culture.

> **"You'll see staff connecting with students in ways that just wouldn't happen in an more traditional layout—it's much more relational.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal





Community Impact: A True Civic Hub

Art Rutkin Elementary has become a vital center for the surrounding neighborhood, fulfilling its role as both a school and a community anchor.

Designed for shared use, the building supports after-hours events, gatherings, and informal use by families and residents—addressing a critical lack of civic infrastructure in the developing area. The commons, library, and outdoor spaces extend beyond the school day, creating opportunities for connection across generations.

This dual function strengthens the relationship between school and community, reinforcing a shared sense of identity and ownership.

> **“This building is used constantly—families, events, community gatherings. It’s really become the center of the neighborhood.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal





Right Bottom: The Commons regularly hosts performances, gatherings, and after-hours events, reinforcing the school’s role as a civic hub.

Environmental Performance: Learning from the Building

Environmental performance serves both operational and educational goals. The building achieved net-zero energy performance in its first year, with an EUI of 11 and an 85% reduction in energy use. Southern orientation supports rooftop photovoltaic production, while a high-performance envelope and heat recovery ventilation system improve efficiency and indoor comfort.

Energy dashboards located in the commons allow students and staff to observe real-time building performance, reinforcing environmental stewardship through everyday interaction with the building itself.

Air quality in the classrooms was measured (see photo below) and confirmed our design intent of healthy air that advances learning.

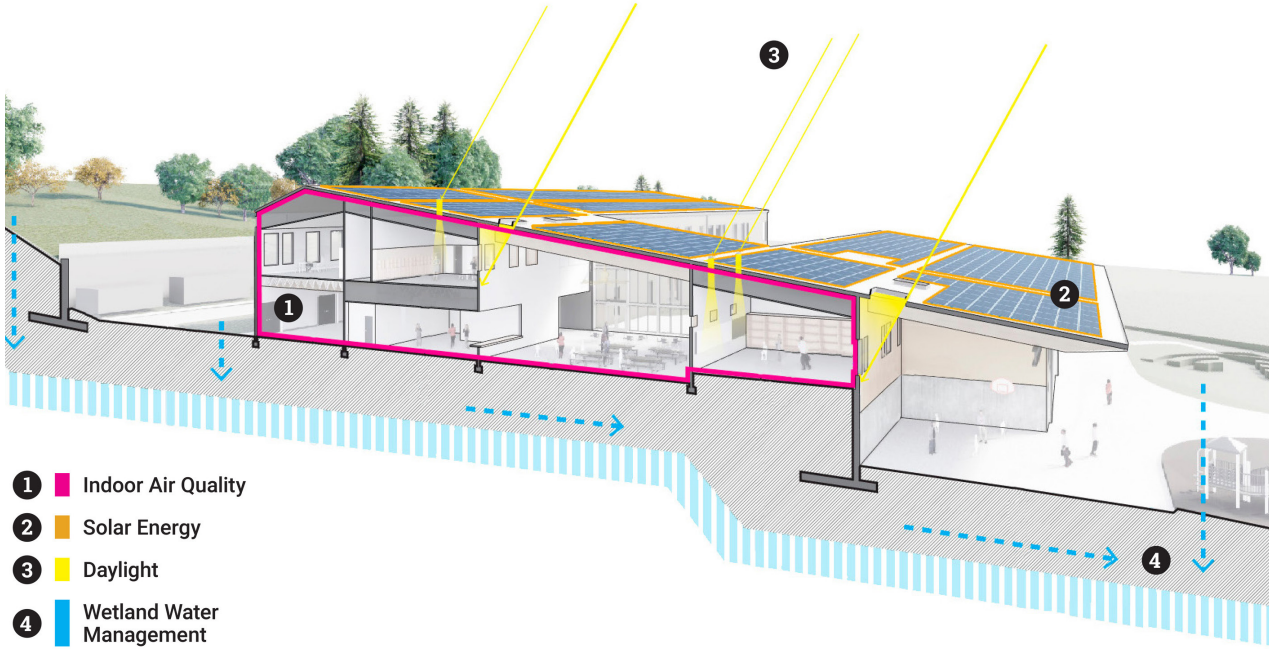
Predicted Net EUI — 11

> **The natural light and connection to the outdoors make a huge difference—you can feel it in how students and staff experience the space.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal









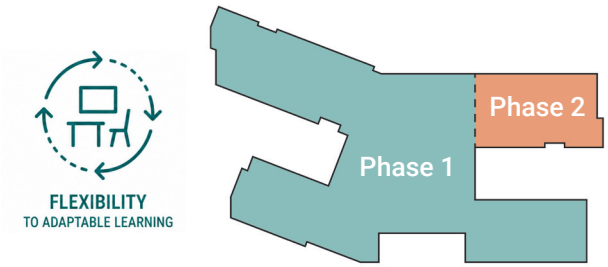
Value and Efficiency: Doing more with Less

The project demonstrates that high-performing, flexible learning environments can be achieved within a cost-conscious framework.

Efficient planning minimizes wasted space while maximizing usability, allowing learning environments to adapt over time. A simple, durable material palette reduces maintenance needs and supports long-term performance, while strategic investments—such as daylighting and flexible spaces—deliver multiple benefits across educational, environmental, and operational goals.

The result is a building that is both economically responsible and highly adaptable, providing lasting value to the district and community.

The school was designed to accommodate phased growth from the outset. One classroom wing was initially planned as an additive alternate, allowing the district to expand capacity if construction costs aligned favorably. When bids came in below projections, **the district was able to construct both phases simultaneously**—delivering additional learning space without compromising the overall design vision.









Health Wellness, Materials and Craft

Art Rutkin Elementary supports well-being through comfort, material quality, and connection to place. A high-performance envelope, heat recovery ventilation system, operable windows, and low-toxicity materials contribute to exceptional indoor environmental quality, while acoustic design supports focus and clarity across learning environments.

Regionally sourced Douglas fir, natural finishes, and durable materials create warm, tactile spaces rooted in the character of the Pacific Northwest and reflective of Art Rutkin's appreciation for nature and place.

Integrated learning elements and natural materials connect students to biology, ecology, and the surrounding landscape through direct experience.

> **"The air quality, the acoustics, the comfort—it all supports learning in ways that aren't always visible but are absolutely felt.**
>
> Jamie Kingery, Principal

EQUITY
TO INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS





A Connected Community of Learning

Art Rutkin Elementary School reflects the belief that learning is shaped by relationships—to people, place, and community.

By organizing the school around a shared commons and library, opening classrooms to collaborative spaces, and extending learning into the landscape, the design creates a continuous network of interaction and discovery.

Named in honor of an educator who believed deeply in literacy, curiosity, and human connection, the school carries forward that legacy through an environment where every student is supported, every voice is valued, and learning happens together.



Above: Members of the school and community gather in front of a tree planted in Art Rutkin's memory.

BELONGING
TO INCLUSIVE DESIGN


Sounds of water