



HONORING CULTURE, INSPIRING POSSIBILITY

Cornelius Elementary was envisioned as more than a replacement school—it is a civic anchor designed to reflect, support, and celebrate the richly diverse community it serves.

Shaped through an extensive bilingual engagement process with students, families, educators, the district, community organizations, and city leaders, the new Cornelius Elementary School emerged from a shared commitment to belonging, dignity, and opportunity. The design team prioritized inclusion, academic excellence, and cultural identity, ensuring the building responds to the lived experiences of its students and families.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

The PreK-4 campus supports dual-language learning, co-teaching, small group instruction, and hands-on exploration through adaptable classrooms, activity areas, a maker space, and a flexible library hub. Spaces for gathering extend beyond the school day, including a gym and commons designed to host performances, celebrations, and community events. A dedicated Family Resource Center provides essential services such as food access, laundry, showers, and private support spaces for migrant families and others in need.

ART, CULTURE, AND COMMUNITY

Cultural identity is woven throughout the architecture through a culturally resonant color palette, custom art mural, papel picado-inspired metal screens, and reclaimed wood installations crafted by using memorial trees from the original school. Outdoor spaces support recreation, early learning, and sensory exploration, while a new synthetic turf field strengthens year-round soccer playing and community use.

ENVIRONMENTAL PERFORMANCE

High-performance systems, a tightly detailed envelope, and a 235kW rooftop solar array contribute to an energy model performing 84% below baseline, demonstrating that environmental stewardship and community-centered design can work hand-in-hand.

CORNELIUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL | MAHLUM ARCHITECTS



SCOPE OF
WORK AND
BUDGET



OWNER
Forest Grove
School District

SITE
AREA
6.93 acres

BUILDING
AREA
76,315 SF

GRADES
HOUSED
PreK-4

STUDENT
CAPACITY
540

SQUARE FEET
PER PUPIL
141 SF

OCCUPANCY
DATE
Sept 2025

CONSTRUCTION
COST
\$48.3M

CONSTRUCTION
COST PER
SQUARE FOOT
\$633/SF

A PLACE OF LEARNING, A PLATFORM FOR COMMUNITY

Cornelius Elementary stands at the center of a richly layered community—predominantly Hispanic and woven from many cultures, languages, and lived experiences.

WHERE EDUCATION AND ESSENTIAL CARE MEET

Cornelius Elementary reflects the broader community it serves—diverse in culture, experience, and need. The school's dual language program is a valued resource for families in the community and nearby neighborhoods. Some families are navigating the uncertainty of traveling migrant work up and down the West Coast while others live in multi-generational households, where grandparents or single parents are the primary caregivers. Through it all, Cornelius Elementary has long been more than a place of learning. It is a steady anchor—offering meals, clothing, and connection—supported by the School District and the Migrant Family Liaisons who help families access essential services and stability.

The life of the school also extends beyond its walls. The fields fill with soccer players after hours. Celebrations such as Día de las Madres, Día del Niño, Ballet Folklórico performances, and bilingual movie nights transform the campus into a cultural commons where identity and belonging take center stage.

REBUILDING WITH PURPOSE

The existing conditions of the previous school told a different story. Aging facilities lacked air conditioning and consistency across classrooms. Students with individual development plans were pulled into hallways to work at desks facing walls. A single drinking fountain served the entire school. The library, rich in both English and Spanish collections, had no room left to grow.

But within these challenges lay opportunity. A large site allowed for the new school to rise alongside the existing one, maintaining continuity for students during construction. And through a shared vision with community leaders, a portion of the original building will live on—reimagined as a community center—ensuring the school's legacy as a place of care, connection, and possibility endures.

BELOW: Cornelius Elementary students from Ballet Folklórico Lo Nuestro perform traditional Mexican folk dance for Mother's Day/ Día de las Madres. The Ballet Folklórico tradition lives in many elementary, middle, and high schools in the Forest Grove School District. Through this troupe, students learn the artistry and dedication for folklórico and deepen their connection to Mexican culture.



DESIGNED WITH (NOT FOR)

This project was shaped through sustained, intentional partnership with the Cornelius community—grounded in listening, reflection, and shared authorship.

A diverse Design Advisory Group (DAG) brought together voices from the City of Cornelius, Centro Cultural, the District's Equity and Migrant programs, the public library, school leadership, parents, and board members.

MULTIPLE FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT Engagement was intentional. We created a multi-faceted approach that expanded beyond standard teacher, parent, district, and community voices. DAG meetings became working sessions where ideas were tested, refined, and validated—each conversation beginning with a clear reflection of what had been heard before moving forward. In one session, participants used disposable cameras to capture images of spaces that represented their community, grounding design decisions in authentic, everyday context. Students contributed through workshops and Career Day conversations. Focus groups with staff—from transportation to English language development—expanded the conversation, while additional community events and Back-to-School gatherings ensured broader input.

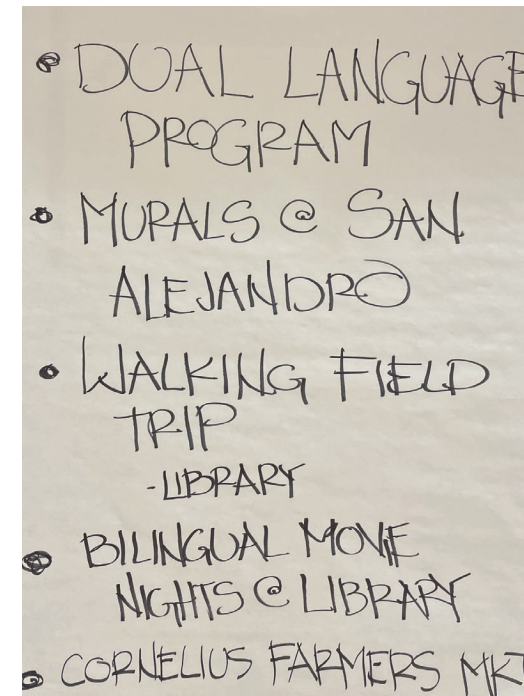
COMMUNITY OUTREACH The team met with families in mobile home communities, visited local food pantries, and engaged programs such as Ballet Folklórico, Aztec dance, Indigenous Education Night, Mother's Day Celebration, STEM groups, and Las Chicas. All materials and events were presented in both Spanish and English, ensuring accessibility and inclusion.

Insights from this process were rigorously documented and analyzed, leading to six core themes that guided the design:

- > Be Comfortable and Safe
- > Celebrate Community Connections
- > Encourage Academic Excellence
- > Invite Play
- > Reflect Cornelius Culture
- > Welcome and Include

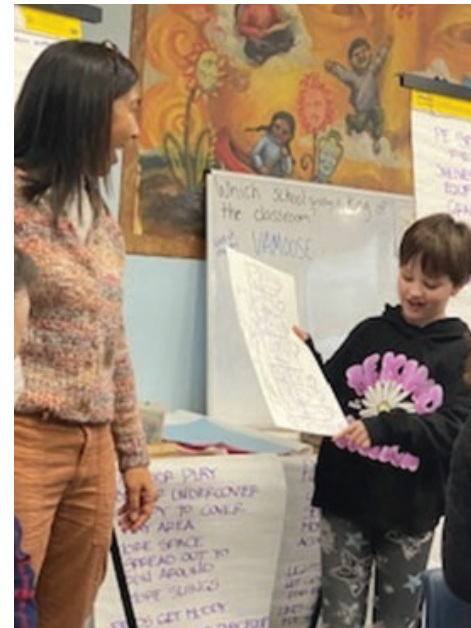
These ideas were not static—they were tested, visualized, and refined in collaboration with the community at every stage.

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"Going to the families instead of having the families always come to us was really important...the two times we went to the mobile home parks that house the majority of our students—going to their community locations and their centers, and then making it really easy for the families to come to us...that definitely contributed to bringing in a lot of voices."

Principal, Cornelius Elementary School



CULTURALLY RESPECTFUL
AND RESPONSIVE

What does it mean to center identity, including race, in the design process?

To truly understand the richness of the conversations and project goals that emerged from the community engagement process, the team needed to illustrate what they heard. **It's one thing to say the school should reflect Cornelius culture, and it's another to show it.**

A Latina design team member created these posters using photos from the Cornelius community to visually communicate the themes that would henceforth guide the design. These statements became the guiding principles for testing design ideas: *"The new Cornelius Elementary School will..."*

The posters not only guided the design team but also demonstrate to students that their cultural background is welcome and celebrated. Centering the lived-experience of these students includes understanding the visual and spatial markers that can support their education, and socio-emotional well-being.

The teachers and students loved the posters so much, they printed and laminated them for display in the previous Cornelius Elementary School during design and construction of the new school.



BE COMFORTABLE AND SAFE
Comfort and choice to find the space that works for each individual.



CELEBRATE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
Families and the Cornelius Community are seen, heard, and supported.



ENCOURAGE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Students are supported to excel academically and achieve their full potential.



INVITE PLAY
Play is a part of learning. Having the ability to be active, play soccer and be joyful youth.



REFLECT CORNELIUS CULTURE
Culture is expressed and celebrated. Community can take pride and feel represented.



WELCOME AND INCLUDE
A school where everyone is welcome, they feel like they belong.

BUILT FROM COMMUNITY INSIGHT

Design criteria emerged from the engagement process—shaped by students, educators, families, and community partners.

These are not abstract concepts—they respond directly to the realities of this community by supporting multi-lingual learning, accommodating multiple family structures, addressing food and resource access, and offering space for both academic and social support.

- PLAN FOR GROWTH**
Design a Pre-K-4 campus with the flexibility to seamlessly expand to 5th grade.
- CENTER EARLY LEARNERS**
Provide Pre-K environments with direct, secure access to dedicated outdoor play.
- RIGHT-SIZE FOR COMMUNITY**
Scale shared spaces and core functions to support a 500-student population.
- DESIGN FOR CO-TEACHING**
Create classrooms that support “partner teachers” and varied group sizes without disruption.

- SUPPORT FLEXIBLE LEARNING**
Integrate distributed spaces for small group instruction, interventions, and testing.
- EXTEND LEARNING OUTDOORS**
Provide dedicated outdoor learning areas beyond the primary playground.
- WELCOME FAMILIES IN**
Include spaces for family engagement with access to technology and resources.
- ENABLE DUAL-LANGUAGE FLOW**
Design intuitive circulation that supports movement between English and Spanish classrooms.

- BUILD IN FLEXIBILITY**
Equip classrooms with adaptable furnishings and integrated technology.
- DESIGN FOR SHARED USE**
Provide secure, accessible storage solutions that support students moving between classrooms.

LEGEND

Classrooms

SPED Classrooms

Activity Areas

Arts/Music/Maker Space

Library

Kitchen

Cafeteria

Gymnasium/Performance

Administration

Family Resource Center

Service

Circulation



FIRST LEVEL FLOOR PLAN



SECOND LEVEL FLOOR PLAN

EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

From adaptable learning environments to spaces that foster belonging and imagination, the design responds directly to how the school operates day-to-day.

LIBRARY: A HUB FOR GATHERING

The library is both a place of quiet discovery and a shared community resource. Students visit for independent reading and group storytelling, supported by a variety of nooks and built-in window benches that offer areas to settle in. The central book collection is housed on movable carts, allowing the space to quickly transform for monthly staff meetings, book fairs, and other school-wide events. With a robust bilingual collection, the library reflects the linguistic diversity of the school while ensuring room to grow and adapt over time.

CLASSROOMS: SUPPORTING VARIED LEARNING NEEDS

Classrooms are designed to support varied teaching styles, co-teaching, and the conditions needed for a dual-language model. Each room includes ample built-in storage—cubbies for student belongings along with shelving and space for personalization. Flexible layouts accommodate Instructional Assistants, whole-group instruction, and small group learning.

Adjoining classroom connections streamline movement between English and Spanish instruction, while break-out activity areas extend learning beyond the classroom. Integrated technology and durable, tackable surfaces further support adaptable, day-to-day teaching needs.

MAKER SPACE: LEARNING THROUGH DOING

In response to a curriculum that integrates exploration across subjects, the maker space provides the environment for hands-on learning. Designed to support after-school STEM and daily curriculum programs, the space accommodates a wide range of activities with mobile furniture and accessible power from above. Rather than a traditional, fixed-use classroom, this space invites experimentation, collaboration, and making—reflecting the school's emphasis on creativity as an essential part of learning.





EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

ACTIVITY AREAS: EXTENDING LEARNING

Located at the heart of each of the four classroom wings, equipped with tables, seating, built-in nooks for quiet focus, and writable wall surfaces, the activity area supports small group instruction.

By integrating this space into a visible, everyday setting, the design removes the stigma of being pulled out of class—making support a natural part of the learning experience.

COLOR AS CULTURAL EXPRESSION

During the public engagement process, the community shared their perspective on the importance of color as an expression of identity and culture. Color throughout the building became essential to ensuring students and families felt seen, represented, and welcomed within the school.

The building’s exterior is primarily brick, with a mixture of textures and colors chosen to recall nearby public and cultural buildings influenced by Latin American architecture. Accents of color are added at window openings with a glazed thin brick that recalls decorative tilework, in hues inspired by natural materials such as turquoise and terra cotta.

The interior is characterized by warm wood wall panels with paints and tiles in accent colors that expand on the exterior colors. On the both levels, each of the six classroom wings was given a unique hue for identity:

FIRST LEVEL	SECOND LEVEL
Pre-K and SPED	First Grade
Kindergarten	Second Grade
	Third Grade
	Fourth Grade



EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER AND MIGRANT SERVICES

Forest Grove School District’s Migrant Services program provides critical continuity for students navigating the uncertainty of migrant work and disruption of frequent moving—removing barriers that can stand in the way of consistent learning. At Cornelius Elementary, this support extends beyond academics.

The Family Resource Center advances this commitment by offering access to essential services with dignity. Located on the first level, the 1,000 SF space has its own entrance, clear visibility from the parking lot, and a welcoming public presence. Two offices are available for private conversations while a main gathering space is provided for larger families, providing room for kids to play while parents fill out paperwork. Additionally, there is a food pantry, shower facilities, toilet room, and washer and dryer for personal laundry.



- FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER
LEGEND**
- 1. Entry
 - 2. Main Gathering Space
 - 3. Flex Office
 - 4. Community Resource Tackboard
 - 5. Food Pantry
 - 6. Clothing Storage
 - 7. Toilet Room with Changing Table
 - 8. Washer and Dryer
 - 9. Shower



A CAMPUS RICH IN AMENITIES AND INSPIRATION

It was important that the building perform as more than just its primary function as a school but also as a resource for the entire community in an area in need of social support services.

PRESERVING PLACE, EXPANDING PURPOSE

The new elementary school was always slated to be built on the same site as the previous elementary school, however during planning, there was interest from the city in retaining a portion of the previous school (the cafeteria, gym, and offices) for community use given its central location and public familiarity.

The design team adjusted the site layout concepts to allow for those spaces to be retained and transferred to the city, helping facilitate a much-needed community support venue as well as significantly reduce the amount of building demolition waste.

Additionally, the project originally included plans for a grass soccer field which, given Oregon's rainy season overlapping with the school year calendar, meant less than ideal operating conditions for school athletics. During the engagement process, the community repeatedly noted how important youth soccer programs were to them and a project goal was set to revise the design to a synthetic turf field to provide better use. Through cost optimization exercises with the contractor, funds were secured within the original project budget to revise to a turf field and add field lighting, greatly improving use for both the students and broader community.

UNINTENDED, POSITIVE OUTCOMES

Through this collaboration, the City of Cornelius has the opportunity to reimagine the remaining building as a new community center and the Forest Grove School District gained their largest multi-purpose turf field right in the heart of Cornelius.



An aerial view highlights a campus shaped for community. Adjacent to the new Cornelius Elementary School is the district's largest turf field which invites after school play, and in the southwest corner, a portion of the original elementary school is preserved and repurposed for community use.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN



PAPEL PICADO

Traditional Mexican papel picado (“pierced paper”)—banners of colorful material with decorative cutout patterns commonly flown during celebrations—served as cultural inspiration. The design team worked with a metal fabricator to create a perforated metal screen that evokes the character of the papel picado—bathing the building in dappled shadows. The metal’s coral color was inspired by the warm earth toned color palette.



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PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

GYM & COMMONS: FRONT DOOR OF COMMUNITY LIFE

Positioned at the front of the school for clear wayfinding and after-hours access, the gym and commons are shared civic spaces that welcome the broader community as easily as the students it serves. The gym features retractable basketball hoops and a built-in proscenium, allowing the space to quickly shift from athletics to performances. Operable walls separate the gym and cafeteria during the school day—supporting lunch service and physical education—then open to create a unified venue for large events, celebrations, and community gatherings.



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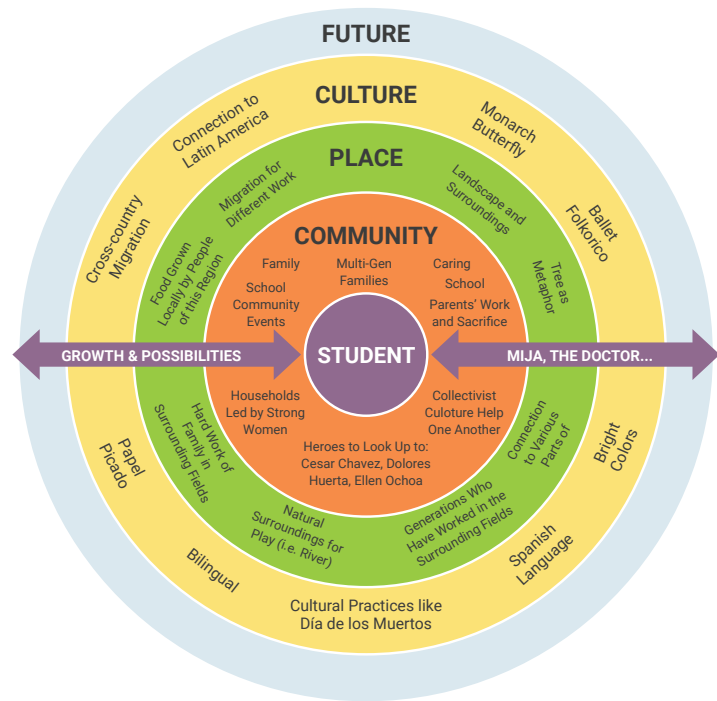
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

CUSTOM MURAL

The moment you walk into the building, you are greeted by a four-wall mural. Measuring 77-feet in length and 13-feet in height, it provides a moment to pause, look up, and be inspired before starting your day.

The community strongly believed students should be reflected in the new school. In response, the design team partnered with a Mexico City-based artist whose vibrant style captured the spirit and cultural richness the community hoped to express.

The art itself is composed of cultural motifs ever present in the school, such as monarch butterflies, marigolds, and Ballet Folklórico, as well as the diversity of the students and their daily activities, such as playing soccer, reading, and studying together. The four colors of the first through fourth grade classroom wings (green, purple, coral, and blue) are also prominent.



ABOVE: The design process for the lobby artwork made clear that a Cornelius student is shaped and supported by layered spheres: social community, physical environment, racial and ethnic culture, and the idea of looking towards who they will become in the future.



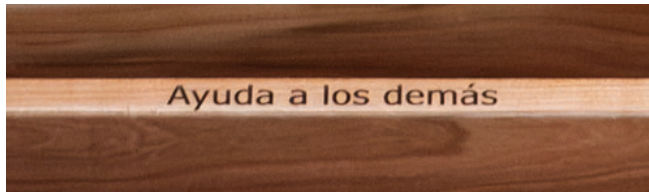
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

WOOD ART INSTALLATION

Art is intentionally woven throughout the school. One of the most meaningful expressions of this approach is a wood slat wall installation that celebrates the legacy of the original school while creating a new place for reflection and connection.

Construction of the new school required the removal of two memorial trees planted in honor of former teachers and students. Rather than allowing that history to be lost, the design team worked with the contractor who carefully cut down and milled the wood for reuse within the new building.

Installed along a hallway outside the gymnasium, the new slats are stained in the colors of the classroom wings. Engraved throughout are affirmations and phrases drawn directly from students. An unexpected outcome is its tactile quality: students and adults alike are drawn to run their hands along the surface, creating a quiet, physical connection to the artwork and the memories embedded within it.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

TOILET ROOMS

Each of the six classroom wings is identified by a distinct entry color that supports both wayfinding and identity. The blocks of toilet rooms play an important role in this color story, with each block tiled in its corresponding hue of coral, blue, green, or purple.

Placing the toilets close to the classrooms reduces student travel time, while the open design allows teachers to supervise and monitor behavior. Toilet stalls provide visual privacy through gapless, 6-foot-tall partitions, while handwashing stations remain visible from the hallway.

Although the toilet blocks are currently gendered, the design allows for future conversion to all-user restrooms if and when the community needs change.



PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT DESIGN

PRIORITIZING PRE-K EDUCATION

Before a child learns to read, they learn through movement, play, curiosity, and connection to the world around them, and the Pre-K environment at Cornelius Elementary is designed to nurture those first experiences of learning.

To support the district-wide expansion of Pre-K services, Cornelius Elementary includes two classrooms designed specifically for early learners. Located in a dedicated wing apart from the older grade levels, the classrooms are intentionally larger to support reading, play, storage, and hands-on learning. Both classrooms also include specialized in-room restrooms for student use, where privacy is maintained and balanced with visibility for staff to monitor behavior and safety.

The Pre-K wing has direct access to a secure courtyard that includes a variety of age-appropriate play structures and a synthetic turf surface for all-season activity. Painted lines on the pavement mark a track circuit for scooters and trikes, and a covered area is provided for outdoor use on those Pacific Northwest rainy days.

ONE COURTYARD, A VARIETY OF USES

The secure courtyard is also shared with the Special Education (SPED) program, which has direct access to a calming outdoor area where crushed stone pathways wind through landscaped plantings. A small patio off the library allows for outdoor small-group reading and class activities in the courtyard as well.

Windows at upper levels have views down into the courtyard creating visual connection and passive supervision.

By sharing these amenities across programs, more students benefit from access to nature, outdoor play, fresh air, and daylight throughout the day.



HIGH PERFORMANCE WHERE IT COUNTS

Early energy modeling sharpened the design team’s focus, revealing that the most impactful investments were high-performance glazing and a highly insulated roof assembly.

GLAZING AND BUILDING ENVELOPE

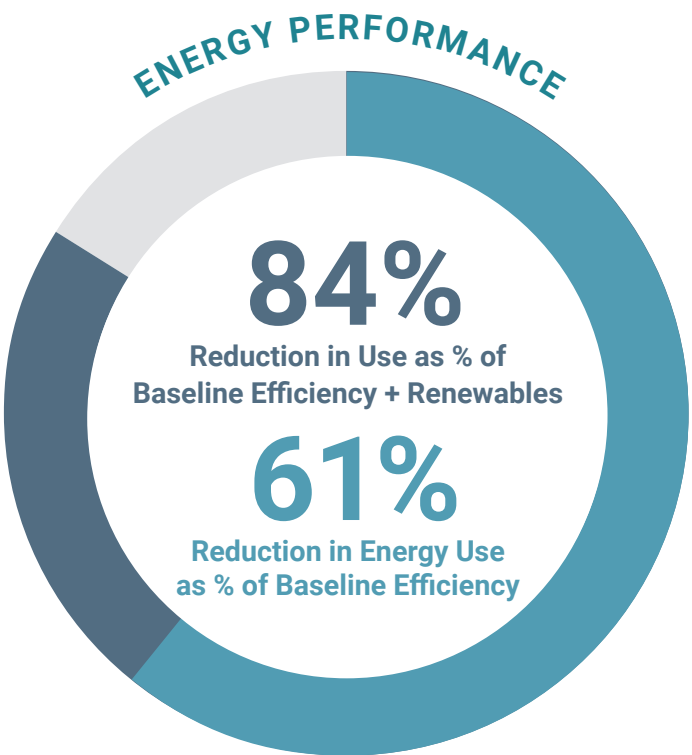
By upgrading to triple-glazed fiberglass windows and exceeding code minimums for roof insulation, the design team prioritized strategies that would deliver measurable, long-term performance—directing limited resources where they would matter most. **These decisions were reinforced by a rigorously detailed building envelope and verified through air leakage testing, achieving 0.119 cfm/SF—well below the code requirement of 0.40.** Together, these measures significantly reduce energy demand, resulting in lower operating costs than the previous school despite an expanded program, while also improving thermal comfort throughout the building.

MATERIALS

Materials choices were culturally tied to the local and broader Latin American experience and support occupant health. Natural, recycled, and low- or non-emitting materials were selected across all systems—from structure to finishes—**contributing to healthier indoor air quality and a more supportive learning environment for students and staff.**

SOLAR ARRAY

Additionally, a 235kW PV array was installed across the entire roof, connected to a battery backup micro-grid. This allows the emergency system to operate with vastly increased runtimes while downsizing the required fossil-fuel powered generator. **The array also offsets energy use by 11.2 EUI, resulting in a total modeled EUI 84% below code baseline, beyond the AIA 2030 Challenge target for the reporting year.**



Climate Zone:	4c	Building Area:	76,315 SF
Window %:	13.6%	R-Slab:	20
U-Factor:	0.15	R-Wall:	22
SHGC:	0.33	R-Roof:	38
PV Array:	235 KW	Air Leakage Rate:	.119 cfm/SF

MODELED ENERGY USE INTENSITY (KBTU/SF/YR):

pEUI: 19.5
NET pEUI: ~8.3

(BASELINE pEUI: 50.6 | TARGET pEUI: 10.1)

THE PROOF IS IN THE POST-OCCUPANCY

In May 2026, design team members visited Cornelius Elementary to sit down and interview the school’s Principal, asking the question, “Reflecting on your first year open, do you believe we achieved the six themes that guided the design of the school?”

From there, the team probed a bit deeper, uncovering the insights highlighted on the following pages.



ABOVE: In support of the themes “Be Comfortable and Safe” and “Welcome and Include,” the Principal greets the students at the beginning of each school day.



BE COMFORTABLE AND SAFE
Comfort and choice to find the space that works for each individual.

- OUTCOMES:**
- > Teachers report feeling more connected via their adjoining room doors and interior relites.
 - > The singular main entry allows for more visibility on who is coming and going which enhances a feeling of safety.
 - > Staff appreciate the variety of gathering spaces, from large (gym and cafeteria) to medium (library, activity areas, courtyards) to small (nooks, reading corners in the classrooms).



CELEBRATE COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS
Families and the Cornelius Community are seen, heard, and supported.

- OUTCOMES:**
- > The Family Resource Center program has grown with the new space—it’s also being used by the school in a variety of ways that supports other types of programming.
 - > The school was able to host the City of Cornelius’ annual Thanksgiving dinner.
 - > Record-breaking attendance (~700 attendees) at the “Meet Santa” event on Christmas Tree Lighting Day.
 - > Beyond the school’s use, the District allows the turf field to be used by local sports clubs such as FC West Soccer Club and Forest Grove Youth Lacrosse.



ENCOURAGE ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE
Students are supported to excel academically and achieve their full potential.

- OUTCOMES:**
- > The activity areas have been a big success. The additional space has allowed for students to catch up on work and meet their goals.
 - > Teachers report that having both a front and a back teaching wall has allowed for more teaching flexibility.
 - > Compared to the prior school building, there is “so much more space to have student-focused programming—more rooms for state testing, book fairs, teacher meetings, etc.”
 - > The location of the two general education intervention classrooms on the second level is helpful because they’re centrally located. “It’s easy for the kids to find them and it doesn’t feel like they’re going somewhere ‘special’ or ‘different’ because it’s right in the center of the school.”



INVITE PLAY

Play is a part of learning. Having the ability to be active, play soccer and be joyful youth.

OUTCOMES:

- > The staff appreciate the accessible connections to the outdoor playground and fields and that the Pre-K playground is both covered and has outdoor play areas.
- > Students enjoy making crafts and messy art projects and the Maker Space on the second level has supported those activities.



REFLECT CORNELIUS CULTURE

Culture is expressed and celebrated. Community can take pride and feel represented.

OUTCOMES:

- > The main entry mural reflects the students for the students.
- > The intentional color palette has been well received.
- > Appreciation that the room signs are printed in both English and Spanish.
- > It has not gone unnoticed that the main entry exterior sign places the name of the school in Spanish (Escuela Primeria Cornelius) on top, followed by the English spelling (Cornelius Elementary School).



WELCOME AND INCLUDE

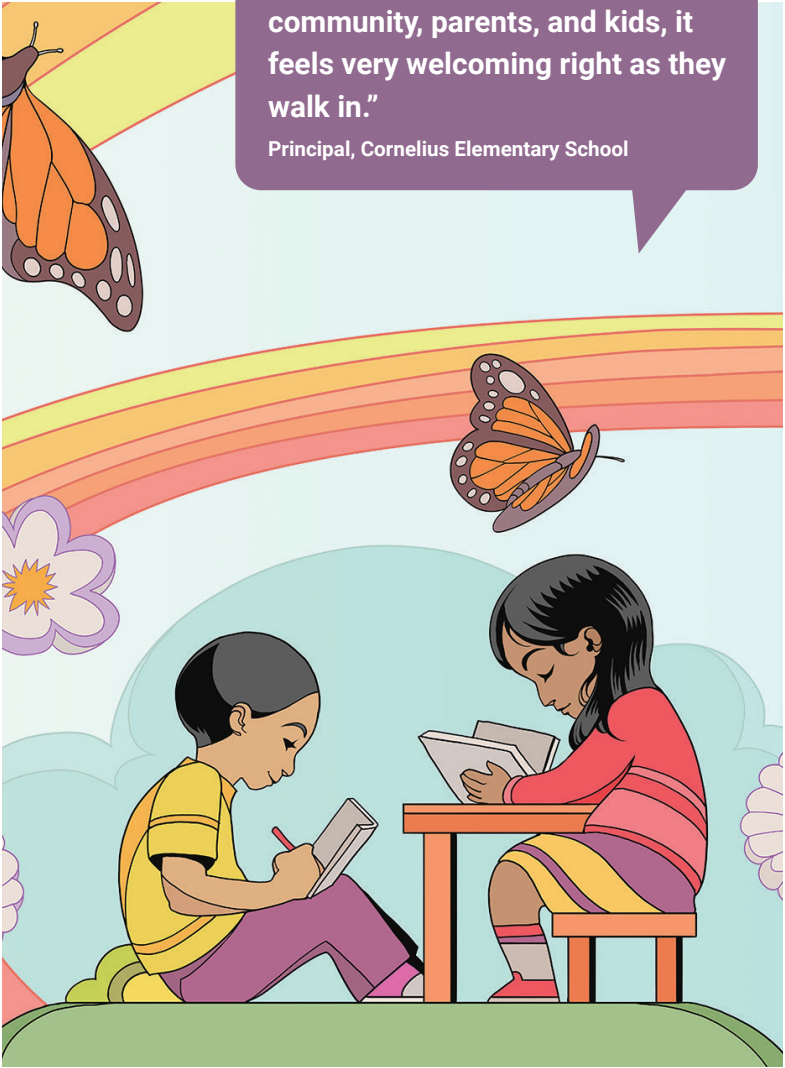
A school where everyone is welcome, they feel like they belong.

OUTCOMES:

- > Families and staff love all the artwork (handprint tree, salvaged tiles, memorial tree reuse) that was relocated from the old school. It feels intentional and not randomly placed.
- > There is great visibility to various spaces via windows and internal courtyards making the building more inviting and connected.
- > Teachers appear to be noticeably happier.

“From the minute you walk in and see that mural, you see students reflected in it. What people love is seeing kids who look like their own kids up there. The colors—all of that is very intentional and people feel very welcome here. I’ve felt and I’ve heard from the community, parents, and kids, it feels very welcoming right as they walk in.”

Principal, Cornelius Elementary School





ESCUELA PRIMARIA CORNELIUS
CORNELIUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL