Field Elementary School

Elmhurst, Illinois

Wight

Executive Summary

Field Elementary School occupies a prominent location along North Avenue, just west of I-290—a position that makes it both a gateway to the Elmhurst Community Unit School District 205 and a defining presence within the Elmhurst community. For more than a century, the original 1915 Field building embodied the spirit of a true neighborhood school, serving generations of families and earning admiration for its historic charm and strong sense of place.

Over time, however, the aging facility presented significant challenges. Site and building accessibility were limited, security was difficult to maintain, and infrastructure had deteriorated to the point where continued maintenance was no longer practical or cost-effective. Frequent lower-level flooding disrupted daily operations and learning. With strong voter and stakeholder support, the District committed to building a new state-of-the-art elementary school—one that elevated learning, enhanced safety, and responded thoughtfully to its surrounding neighborhood and environment.

A central design focus for the new Field Elementary School was to support seamless transitions—those students and educators experience daily within the building—and those that occur as learners progress from one grade level to the next. Three core design principles helped guide this approach from planning through completion:

Flexibility
Spaces were designed to support safety, operational efficiency, and evolving instructional practices.

Transparency
Clear visual connections between spaces and across the site were prioritized to strengthen security, supervision, and collaboration.

Adaptability
Learning environments were created to evolve with future academic programs, technological advancements, and community needs. These principles are expressed throughout the school in ways that respond to program needs, grade levels, and site conditions.

Together, these design principles helped establish a future-ready learning environment that honors the legacy of the original school and supports the District's vision for educational excellence.



4.2 acre site

78,200 sf facility

600 student capacity

130 sf per student

7/23 occupancy date

$36.3M total cost

School & Community Engagement

Building Consensus: FOCUS205

Focus205 was a visionary community engagement initiative launched by the District to collaboratively shape the future of education. Beginning three years prior to the project implementation, the District invited stakeholders—including parents, students, educators, and residents—to participate in a transparent, inclusive dialogue about modernizing learning environments and facilities. Through a series of professionally facilitated workshops, surveys, and forums, Focus205 gathered input on educational priorities, facility needs, and financial planning.

Community Engagement Sessions (CES)

These sessions were designed to foster dialogue, gather input, and build a shared vision for educational priorities. Each session began with a brief presentation outlining key challenges and opportunities facing the District, including educational efficiencies, student achievement, regulations, finances, facilities, and digital learning. Participants then worked in small groups to discuss session-specific questions. The insights and feedback gathered during these sessions were compiled into a communitywide collaborative vision to inform long-term planning.

Facilitating Team

Composed of a mix of District residents, parents, students, and community members, this team played a key role in guiding the engagement sessions, ensuring that the process was inclusive, transparent, and productive. This team ensured that the community engagement sessions were well organized and that feedback from participants was effectively captured and synthesized into a collaborative vision for the District's future.

Thought Exchange

This online platform was used as a digital tool to gather broad-based input from the community in a transparent and inclusive way. This tool complemented the in-person CES and other outreach efforts, helping the District ensure that the Long Range Facility Plan was shaped by a truly representative set of voices.









1,500
Stakeholders participated in Focus205

12
different methods of community outreach

9
Community Engagement Sessions (CES)

2,400
thoughts shared in thought exchange

7
years of community engagement and planning

500
stakeholders attended CES

Building Consensus: FOCUS205



The Charge

- Hear and define community aspirations, desires, and priorities
- Involve a broad-based group of District 205 citizens in dialogue and deliberation
- Engage the community in the future of District 205
- Build an ongoing process to strengthen trust, communication, and collaboration

Top Priorities

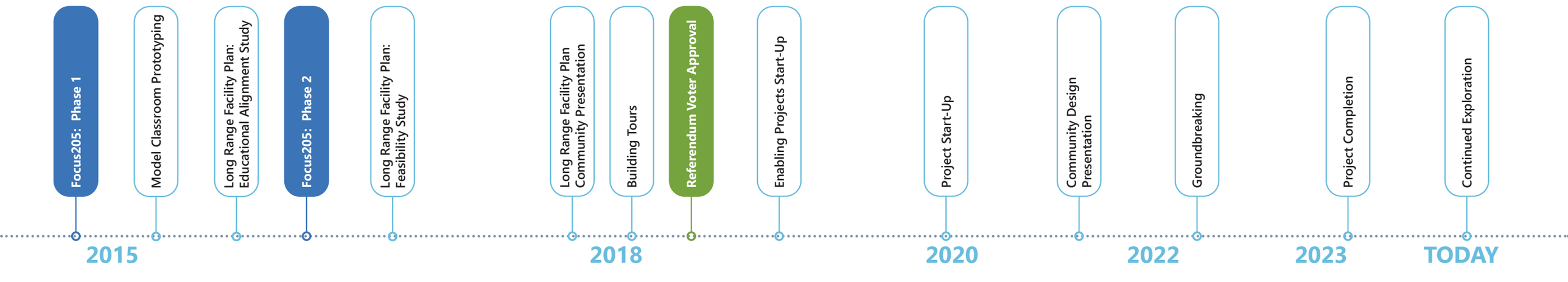
- Improve safety and security
- Rebuild Field Elementary School
- Address physical and maintenance needs
- Add full-day kindergarten
- Develop future-ready spaces

Facilitating Teams By the Numbers

- 70% parents of current students
- 13% parents of former students
- 13% staff members
- 13% community members/ business owners
- 11% alumni

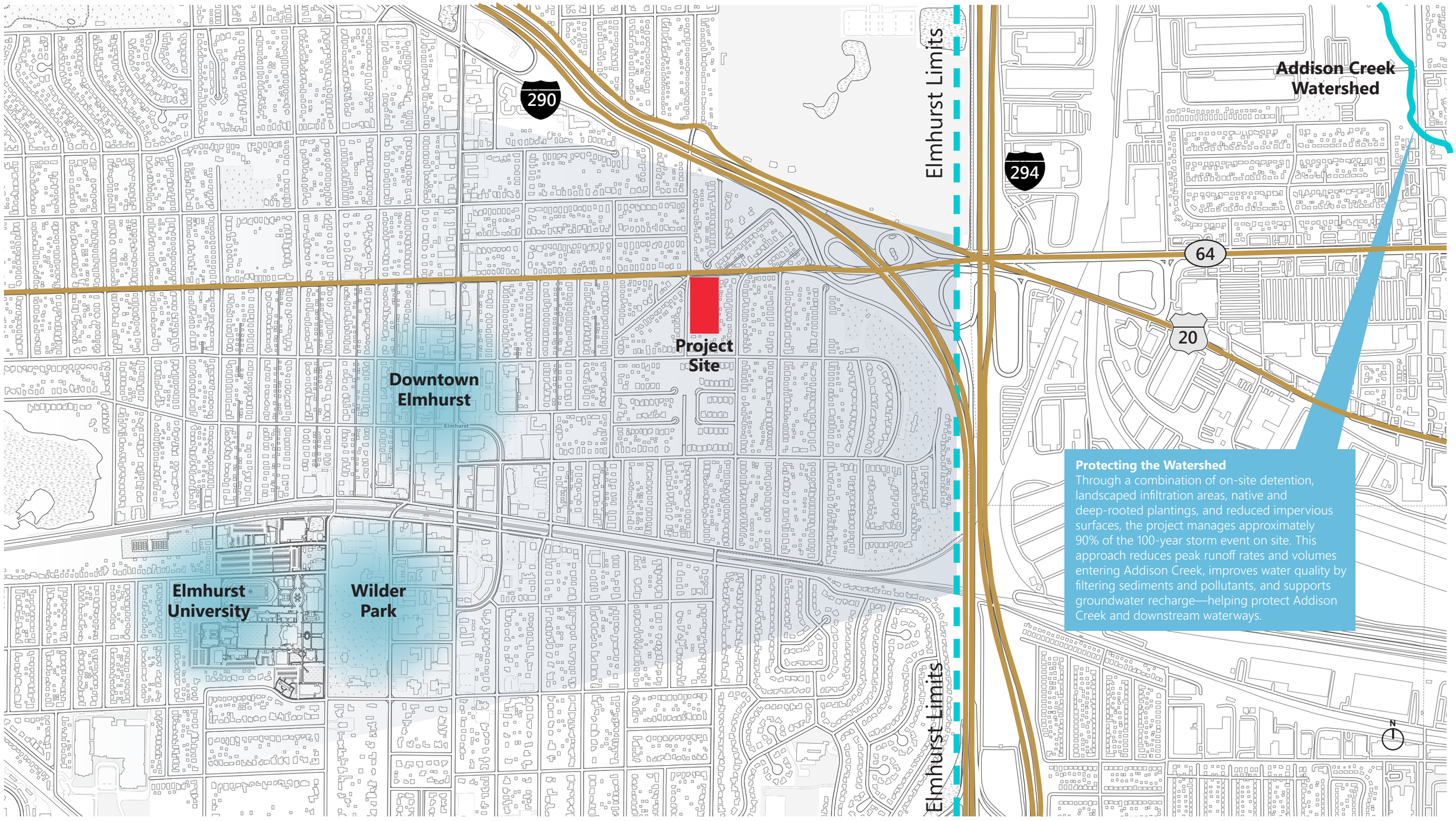
During the Focus205 community engagement process, then-Board Vice President Shannon Ebner emphasized the importance of listening to the community:

> Listening to the community is an important duty of the Board of Education, and hearing perspectives from a large number of diverse community members will provide direction as we plan for the future educational needs of our students.
>
> – Shannon Ebner, former Board Vice President



Physical Environment

A Neighborhood School. A Community Gateway.



Protecting the Watershed
Through a combination of on-site detention, landscaped infiltration areas, native and deep-rooted plantings, and reduced impervious surfaces, the project manages approximately 90% of the 100-year storm event on site. This approach reduces peak runoff rates and volumes entering Addison Creek, improves water quality by filtering sediments and pollutants, and supports groundwater recharge—helping protect Addison Creek and downstream waterways.

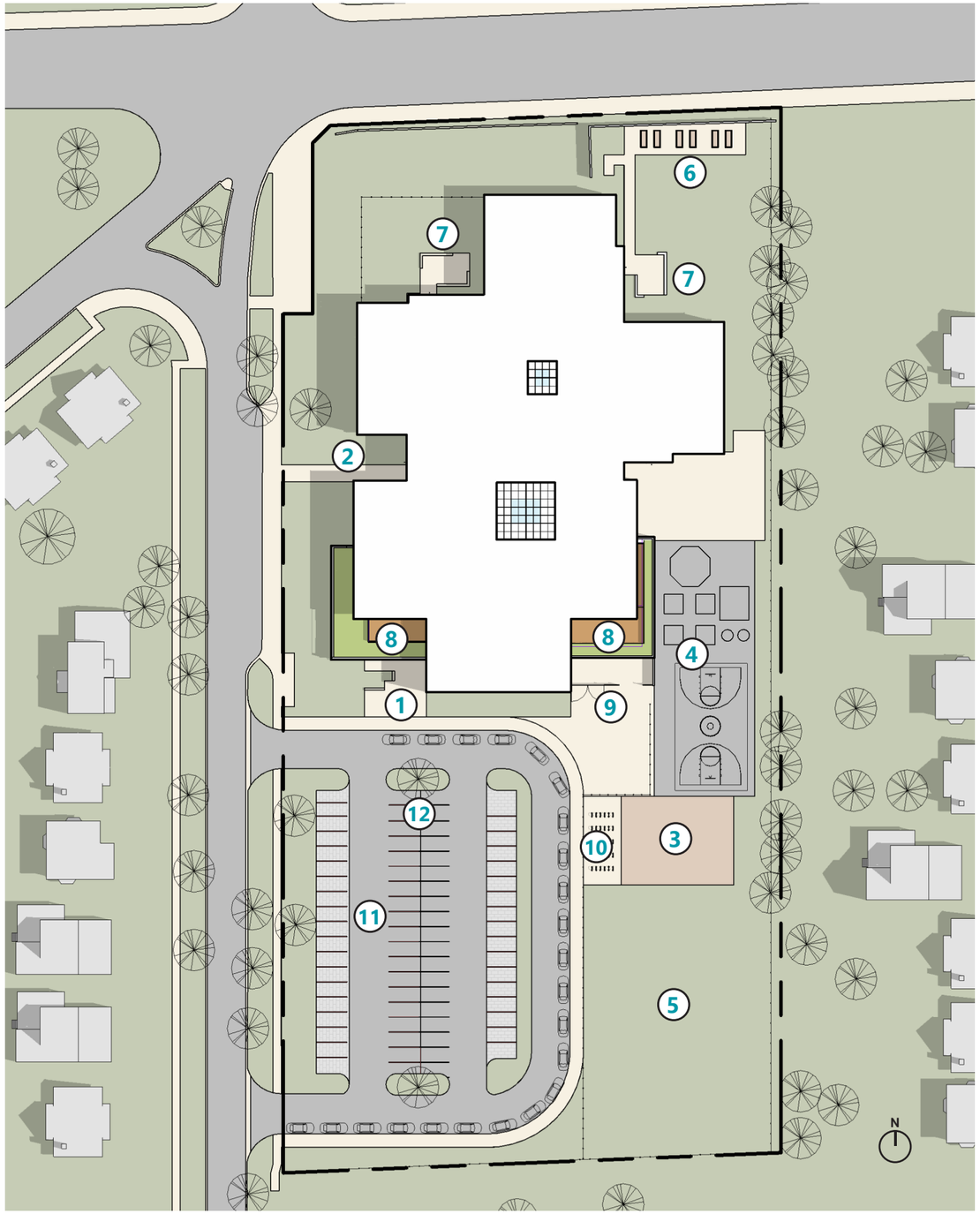
Physical Environment

Learning, Wellness, and Water.

The school site was thoughtfully designed to extend learning beyond the classroom while fostering a strong connection to nature. Garden beds offer students opportunities for hands-on exploration and environmental learning. Outdoor patios and project terraces provide welcoming spaces for collaboration, fresh-air activities, and informal gathering. The landscape also plays an important role in managing stormwater, capturing and filtering rainfall to support a healthy site.



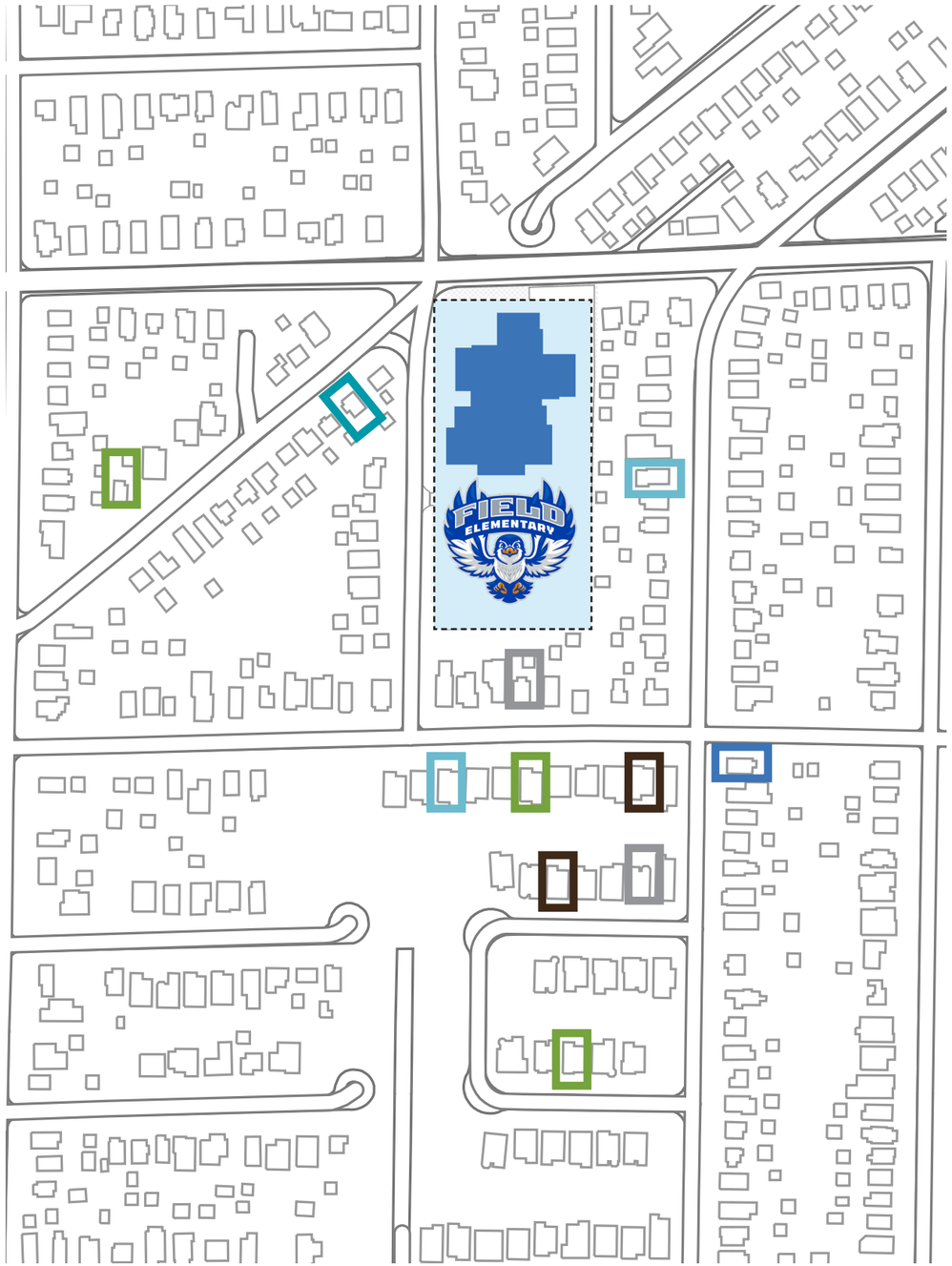
SITE PLAN



1 Main Entry
2 Arrival/Dismissal Secondary Student Entry
3 Playground
4 Hard-Surface Play
5 Field Play
6 Student Gardens
7 Outdoor Learning Patio/Green Roof
8 Outdoor Instruction Terrace
9 Service Area
10 Bicycle Parking
11 Permeable Visitor & Staff Parking
12 Electric Vehicle & Carpool Parking

Physical Environment

Authentic to its Place. Unmistakably of its Time.





















Physical Environment

Authentic to its Place. Unmistakably of its Time.

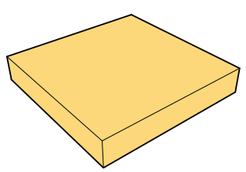
The Neighborhood School.

The building is now organized into three distinct sections. The media center and dining commons occupy the heart of the school and serve as the connective backbone between all program spaces. An ample amount of daylight flows into these areas. Enrichment studios for the sciences and arts are positioned adjacent to these larger areas to take advantage of and share common resources.

Three, two-story grade level "neighborhoods" are configured around a central, common collaboration zone. Although similar in appearance, small details and embellishments give each neighborhood their own distinct identity. Each pair of classrooms share a small group room, toilet facilities, and storage rooms. Casework and other built-in elements were designed and incorporated into the classrooms based on age and anticipated instructional needs.

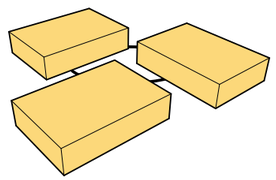
Administrative and staff offices, along with community rooms providing long-term instruction expansion opportunities, comprise the final section. The gymnasium is also considered part of this portion of the facility, as it not only supports daily physical education and athletic activities for students, but also serves as a separate after-hours performance and gathering venue for community groups. The space also doubles as a storm shelter, providing protection for students and staff during inclement and hazardous weather events.





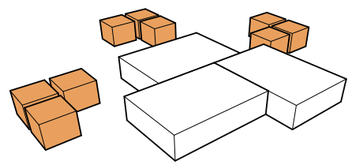
THE NEIGHBORHOOD SCHOOL

There's something delightful about the idea of a neighborhood public school. Not only is it a place where the students can walk or bike to on a daily basis, it's where one can meet neighbors, attend a performance, host an event, and otherwise build community.



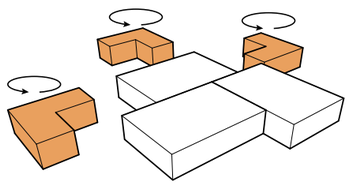
SCHOOL AS A COMMUNITY CENTER

Community is an important aspect of any school. By balancing and integrating amenities for both the community and the learners, a true neighborhood center is created, rather than an exclusive shelter for children. The school is centered around this 'town square' of community spaces.



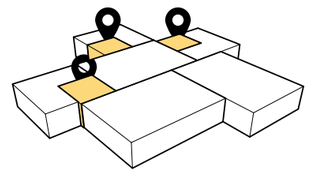
LEARNING NEIGHBORHOODS

Given the school program centered around a three-section school, careful planning was given to the arrangement of classrooms to maximize daylight and views, well as shared resources between classrooms. These 'learning houses' revolve around the town square of the school.



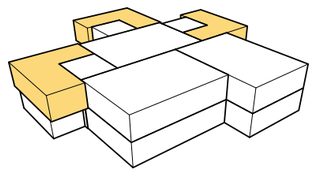
ROTATING FACADES

The stacked volumes of the 'learning neighborhoods' pinwheel around a main hub, not distinguishing any single front facade along North Avenue, but providing a consistent aesthetic regardless of the direction from which it is approached.



COLLABORATION ZONES

Each learning house also contains a smaller collaboration zone within itself, extending learning opportunities beyond each individual classroom.



DIFFERENTIATION

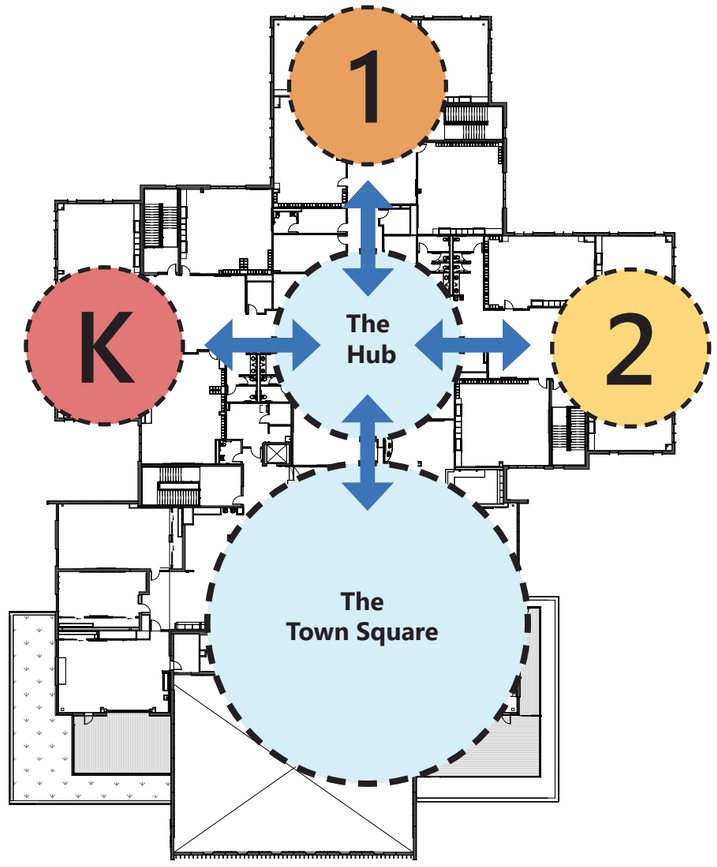
Considering the evolving student experience as learners transition from early childhood education to the upper grade levels, the building changes expression between the spaces for younger learners and those preparing for middle school.

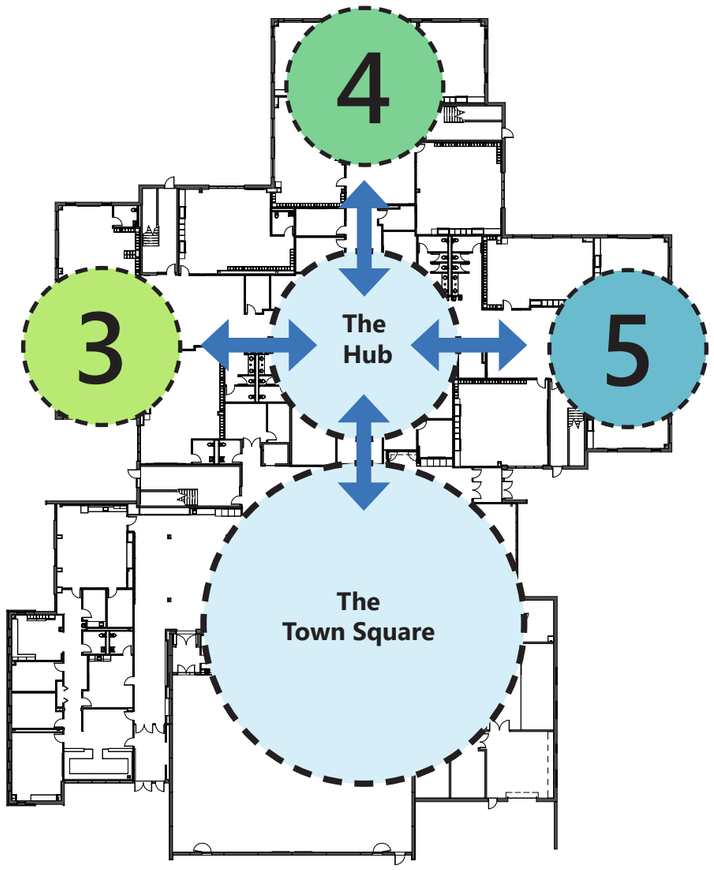
Physical Environment

School as a Community.

The school is envisioned as a vibrant landscape of exploration—an interconnected world where students journey through increasingly complex environments as their skills and independence grow. Each **grade-level neighborhood** represents a mode of travel that symbolizes developmental growth, while two major shared environments—**The Hub** and **The Town Square**—serve as the connective tissue and the communal heart of the school.

Students "travel" between neighborhoods, The Hub, and The Town Square. This system creates a learning environment where movement, discovery, and belonging shape daily experiences.





K Kindergarten
First steps into exploration, intimate paths, sensory discovery



1 First Grade
Developing balance, confidence, and early independence



2 Second Grade
Navigating choices, understanding direction, early autonomy



3 Third Grade
Community awareness, shared journeys, teamwork



4 Fourth Grade
Leadership, sequencing, systems thinking



5 Fifth Grade
Independence, future readiness, expanding horizons



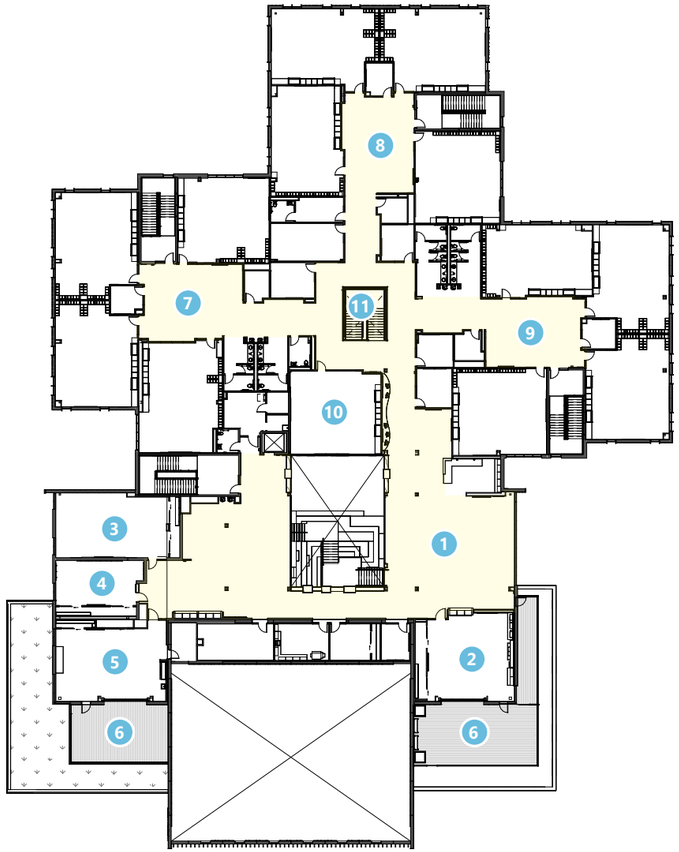
Physical Environment

School as a Community.

The building layout supports clarity and community with distinct grade-level neighborhoods unified through common spaces.

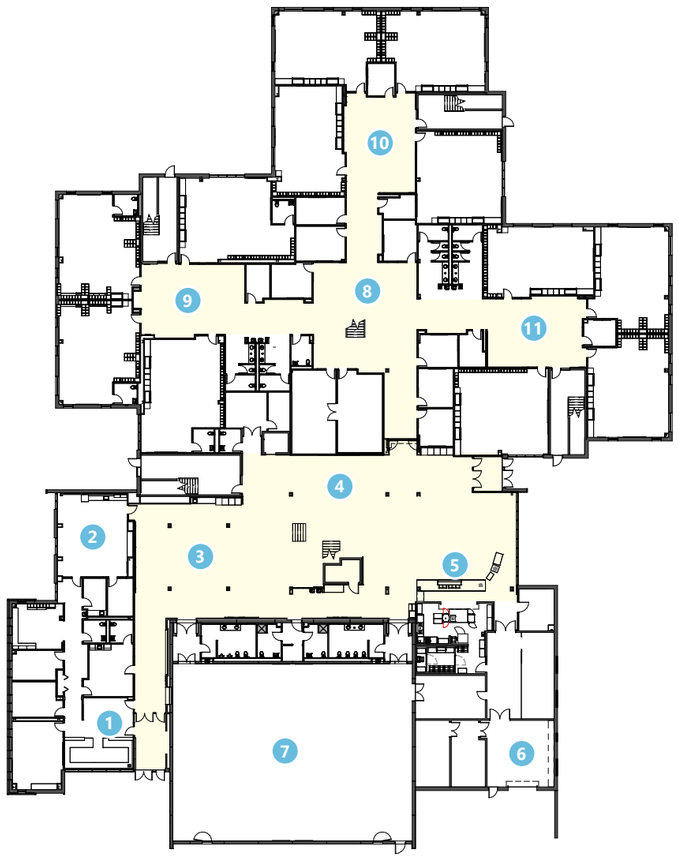


SECOND FLOOR



1 Learning Media Center
2 Makerspace
3 Music Room
4 Ensemble Room
5 Art Studio
6 Outdoor Instruction Terrace
7 Third-Grade Neighborhood
8 Fourth-Grade Neighborhood
9 Fifth-Grade Neighborhood
10 Flex Classroom
11 Student Services Commons

FIRST FLOOR



1 Main Office
2 Staff Dining
3 Community Hub
4 Dining Commons
5 Food Service
6 Maintenance Space
7 Gymnasium/Storm Shelter
8 Student Services Commons
9 Kindergarten Neighborhood
10 First-Grade Neighborhood
11 Second-Grade Neighborhood

Physical Environment

The Town Square: The Heart of the School.

The Town Square serves as the school's central gathering place—the communal destination where explorers of all ages converge. It symbolizes the lively core of a thriving city and is the epicenter of shared experiences, interdisciplinary learning, and community engagement.





The Hub:
Where All Journeys Connect.

The Hub is the central support zone that links all grade-level neighborhoods, functioning as both an intersection and a resource network. Symbolically, it is the "logistics center" of the explorers' world—where explorers regroup, refocus, and access tools to support their journey.

Purpose and Function

- Provide equitable, close-to-classroom access to essential student services
- Create a centralized place of support, reflection, and regulation
- Connect neighborhoods to each other and to the Town Square

A **Sensory Room** – a refuge for regulation

B **Wayfinding and Identity** – helping every student feel oriented, confident, and at home

C **Toilet Rooms** – shared, accessible, and conveniently located

D **Student Services / Small Group Rooms** – spaces for intervention, counseling, and coaching











Educational Environment

Educational Environment

Grade-Level Neighborhoods: Creating Identity for Every Age.

The school becomes a world of exploration—an unfolding journey where each grade level represents a new stage of independence, capability, and curiosity. As students grow, their "vehicles" of exploration evolve.

Each grade-level neighborhood is designed to:

- Support the developmental needs of the age group
- Provide a visual and experiential identity
- Promote belonging, agency, and excitement
- Reinforce the metaphor of students gaining independence

These environments create a cohesive and meaningful progression—a child's adventure from first steps to taking flight.



Kindergarten: First Steps into the World

Developmental Focus: Safety, comfort, sensory exploration, predictable structure



First Grade: Balance, Coordination, and Momentum

Developmental Focus: Growing confidence, emerging independence, structured risk taking



Second Grade: Choice, Direction, and Learning to Navigate

Developmental Focus: Increased self-direction, problemsolving, early executive function



Third Grade: A Community of Passengers

Developmental Focus: Peer Collaboration, social identity, group belonging



Fourth Grade: Leadership, Systems, Purpose

Developmental Focus: Logical thinking, sequencing, ownership, growing leadership roles



Taking Flight: The World Expands

Developmental Focus: Independence, forward-thinking, readiness for middle school







Educational Environment

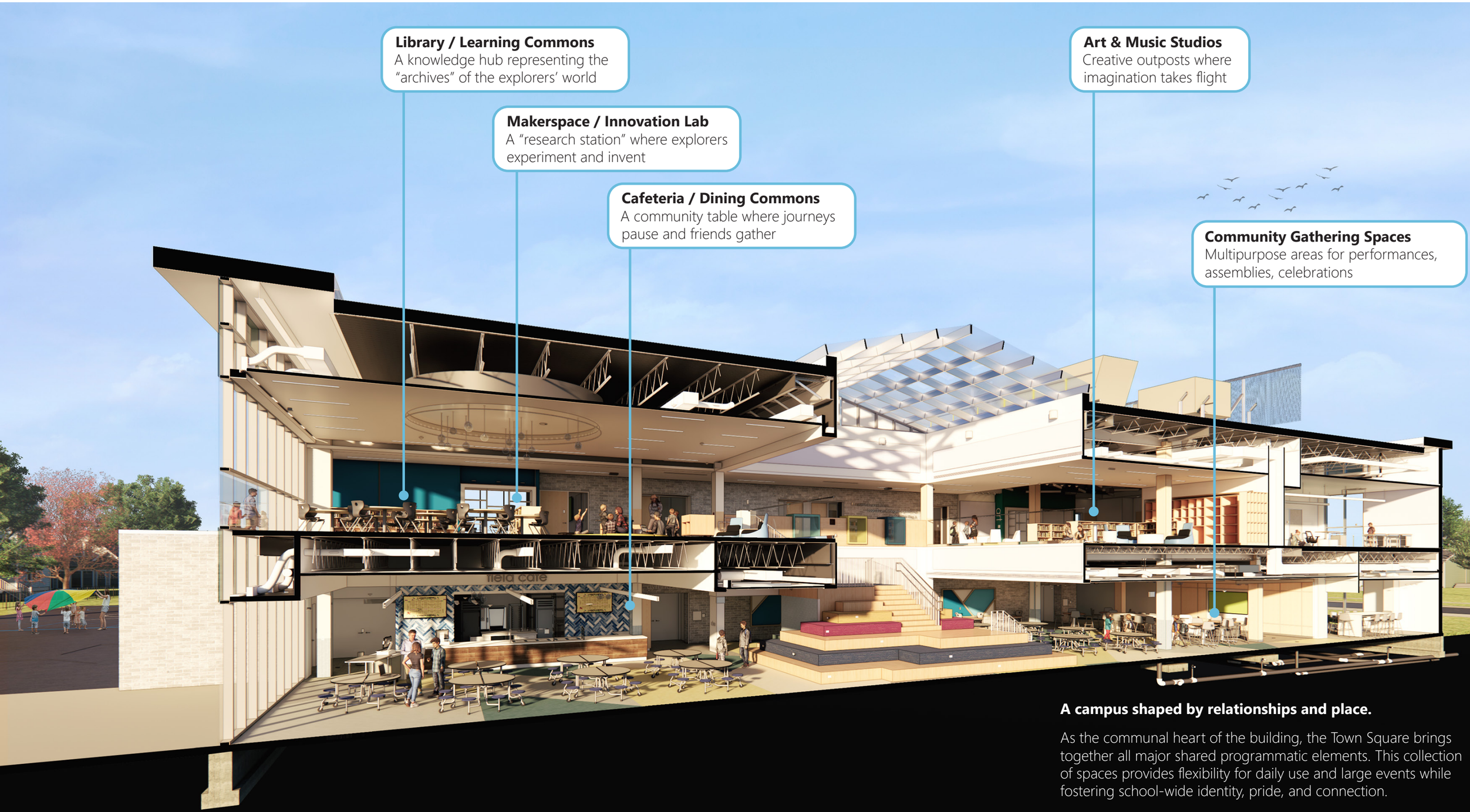
Library / Learning Commons
A knowledge hub representing the "archives" of the explorers' world

Makerspace / Innovation Lab
A "research station" where explorers experiment and invent

Cafeteria / Dining Commons
A community table where journeys pause and friends gather

Art & Music Studios
Creative outposts where imagination takes flight

Community Gathering Spaces
Multipurpose areas for performances, assemblies, celebrations



A campus shaped by relationships and place.

As the communal heart of the building, the Town Square brings together all major shared programmatic elements. This collection of spaces provides flexibility for daily use and large events while fostering school-wide identity, pride, and connection.

Educational Environment

Student Wellbeing.

Wellbeing in Every Space

A restroom may not be the first space that comes to mind when thinking of spaces that support student wellbeing. However, the thoughtfully designed restrooms at Field Elementary School promote safety, dignity, and emotional comfort throughout the day. When students feel safe and comfortable in every space (even restrooms) their overall wellbeing and sense of belonging grow.

The design focuses on the balance between privacy and natural supervision, including:

- Open or transparent sink areas connected to hallways
- Full-height partitions that protect privacy and dignity
- Clear sightlines for passive supervision
- Calming, clean finishes that help students feel at ease



Educational Environment

Student Wellbeing.



Nourishing Connection The cafeteria is more than a space for eating. It's the social hub where students build relationships, practice independence, and reset for the rest of the day.

The cafeteria plays a powerful role in meeting students where they are emotionally by promoting inclusion by providing spaces where every student—regardless of personality or needs—can feel comfortable. Choice is offered with a variety of seating options to support students' emotional states whether in large gathering areas, small group tables, or more personal zones.



Designing for Dignity There are often moments in the school day where students become emotionally overwhelmed. In those moments, students do not need to be reprimanded, they need safety, dignity, and time for their emotions to regulate.

Short-term calming spaces, such as comfortable reading spaces throughout the building, help support emotional regulation while protecting student dignity.



Choice is Not a Distraction, it is a Strategy One of the most powerful tools in any learning environment is choice.

Young learners are developmentally wired for movement rather than long periods of sitting still. Each neighborhood is designed with zones for small group work, centers, collaboration, and quiet focus, normalizing movement as part of learning rather than treating it as misbehavior.

Educational Environment

Student Wellbeing.

Learning Beyond Walls

Outdoor spaces are powerful drivers of social emotional wellbeing. Time in nature helps students regulate emotions, reset their stress levels, and return to learning calmer and more focused.

At Field Elementary School, outdoor opportunities consisting of project terraces, learning patios, and garden beds support the whole child and strengthen social-emotional learning (SEL) beyond the classroom.









Results

Results

District Goals Achieved

CULTURE

- Welcoming community spaces, The Village Square, and The Hub promote connection, belonging, and school identity
- Transparency, student-inspired murals, legacy features, and display of student work celebrate learning and community pride

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

- Clear organization and grade-level neighborhoods create comfort, safety, and age-appropriate learning
- Diverse learning spaces support choice, wellness, and daily engagement

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

- Flexible classrooms and breakout spaces enable collaboration, small-group learning, and differentiation
- Adaptable environments support project-based, interdisciplinary, and evolving instructional approaches

Community Goals Realized

PRIORITIZE STEM OPPORTUNITIES

- Makerspace, project terrace, and art balcony support hands-on, interdisciplinary learning
- Fine Arts Commons links STEM thinking with creativity, collaboration, and design
- Flexible spaces encourage inquiry, experimentation, and problem solving

ACCOMMODATE FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

- Dedicated kindergarten neighborhood creates a secure, age-appropriate learning environment
- Classrooms and nearby shared spaces support a full day of academic and developmental growth

CREATE MORE INTERVENTION & ENRICHMENT OPPORTUNITIES

- Student support rooms, sensory rooms, and intervention spaces are centrally located in The Hub
- Centralized access supports timely interventions, collaboration, and enrichment without stigma

SAFETY & SECURITY

- A controlled main entry creates a clear point of arrival, allowing staff to greet visitors and manage access before they enter the school
- Open circulation and thoughtful layout provide views into hallways and shared spaces, supporting visibility and easy supervision
- Grade-level neighborhoods can be safely separated from the rest of the building when needed
- Safety measures are integrated seamlessly into the architecture, reinforcing security while preserving a positive school experience









Results

Educational Goals Attained

FLEXIBILITY

- Operable walls, furniture, and shared spaces support multiple teaching styles and group sizes
- Learning areas easily shift between individual, small-group, and large-group use

TRANSPARENCY

- Interior glazing creates visual connections between classrooms and shared spaces, supporting supervision and collaboration
- Daylight and sightlines reinforce an open, welcoming learning environment

ADAPTABILITY

- Non-prescriptive spaces and flexible infrastructure allow the school to evolve with changing programs and technology
- The design supports long-term use with minimal need for future renovations

> The features of this building are nothing short of extraordinary and provide a modern learning space for all our students and staff.
>
> – Dr. Keisha Campbell, Superintendent



Results

Sustainability + Wellness Outcomes.



DESIGN FOR ENERGY

The new spaces are right-sized, flexible for future use, and use a fraction of the energy compared to the previous facility. The overall Energy Use Intensity (EUI) is 35.44 kbtu/sf/yr. This represents a 57.8% reduction from the Architecture 2030 Commitment baseline EUI.



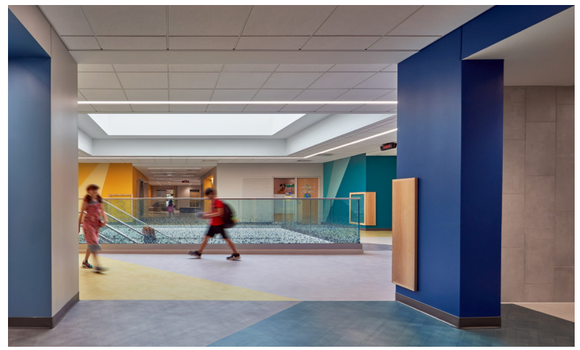
OCCUPANT WELL-BEING

Regularly-occupied spaces have ample daylight and significant views of nature. Operable windows in every classroom further promote healthy air quality, well-being, and user control. To maintain indoor air quality, ventilation rates in classrooms are seven air changes per hour, CO2 levels are monitored to save energy and provide fresh air as needed, and MERV-14 filters are implemented to mitigate risk of airborne pathogen transmission.



WATER + ECOSYSTEM

No site area supporting vegetation was lost after development. Approximately 6% of the site is covered by native plants that support native or migratory species and pollinators. Additionally, 90% of the 100-year storm event is managed on site to help mitigate community flooding.



RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP

Estimated embodied carbon emissions for the structural system associated with this project was analyzed, including the extraction and manufacturing of the materials used for construction. The study resulted in an estimated emissions of 158kg-C02e/m2 for that portion of the project, which is significantly less than other educational projects that have reported embodied carbon of structural systems to the Carbon Leadership Forum.



RESILIENCY + CHANGE

The new gymnasium functions as a fully-rated tornado shelter designed to protect students and the surrounding community during severe weather events. Its hardened structure, reinforced envelope, and life-safety systems ensure reliable performance under extreme wind loads, demonstrating a proactive response to evolving climate risks.



CURRICULUM + COMMUNITY

By opening its spaces for shared use—such as gathering areas, outdoor spaces, learning rooms, and recreational amenities—the school becomes a place where education, civic life, and community connection come together. This shared approach maximizes public investment, reduces the need for duplicate facilities, and strengthens neighborhood relationships.



DESIGN FOR ACTIVE OCCUPANTS

The project promotes occupant wellness through a clear design strategy for active occupants, featuring a highly visible main stair that connects entrance, destination, and common floors, with re-entry on all regularly occupied levels and open stair access to each floor. The stair is encountered before elevators, is well-lit, daylit at each level, and enhanced with sensory features. In addition, an on-site gym/exercise area serves all children and staff, further supporting daily physical activity.



HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

Throughout design and construction, priority was given to building products with verified environmental information and reduced impacts, helping support both occupant well-being and environmental stewardship. By selecting materials with disclosed lifecycle information, responsibly sourced content, and improved health attributes, the project contributes to healthier indoor environments while encouraging manufacturers to offer more sustainable, transparent products.

90%
of rainwater is managed on-site

100%
of area supporting vegetation maintained after development

32%
water use reduction for domestic fixtures

+50%
parking reduction

75%
of students within a walkable distance

38%
savings in energy

29%
savings in carbon (building performance)

Upon completion of the new Field Elementary School project, then-Board President Kara Caforio thanked the community:

> You are walking into a school that thousands and thousands of people in this town contributed to and will never have students or grandchildren or themselves come into this building. They did it because they care so much about you and your education. So, to our community, thank you for coming along with us and supporting this endeavor.

– Kara Caforio, former Board President



Created by students. Inspired by the community.

The final design featured work from a local artist, who incorporated artwork from students into full-sized murals throughout the building.