PAULINE FLETT MIDDLE SCHOOL

SPOKANE, WA



PAULINE FLETT
1926-2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Designed in 2020, during a time of profound separation, the future students and staff of Pauline Flett Middle School re-imagined education as a place of connection. As the first new middle school in over three decades for Spokane Public Schools the design evolved collaboratively in a fully virtual environment during the 2020 pandemic. The school's vision centers on a unifying commons at its heart—an active, welcoming hub that anchors the surrounding community while giving every educational and student support program a visible and accessible presence to students and staff throughout their school day.

The building extends the main entry points and community plaza east opening toward the city and surrounding neighbors while the academic spaces extend west, facing the adjacent state park. The six academic neighborhoods create smaller communities that adapt their neighborhoods throughout the day to maximize educational opportunities in groups and individually with continual visual and physical connection to the outdoors.

Drawing from the adjacent river valley and the school's namesake, the materials, colors and overall aesthetic is intended to reflect the natural environment, grounding students and families in history while also inspiring the creation of a new school identify and culture.

SCOPE OF WORK & BUDGET

OWNER	TOTAL SITE AREA	COST PER SQUARE FOOT	CONSTRUCTION COST	OCCUPANCY DATE	SQUARE FEET PER PUPIL	STUDENT CAPACITY	GRADES HOUSED	BUILDING GROSS AREA
Spokane Public Schools	22.8 acres	$305.89	$43,500,000	Fall 2022	190	750	6-8	142,210 GSF

Spokane Public Schools

NAC

GARCO

DCI ENGINEERS

COFFMAN ENGINEERS

SPVV LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

MSI ENGINEERS



PLACE MATTERS:
The school is conceived as a rich spatial ecosystem that offers meaningful choice for every child. Each environment is intentionally designed to provide a diversity of experiences so every student can discover a favorite spot or a quiet nook to call their own. **Spaces support a range of needs, from places to rest like the areas under and around the learning stairs or encourage social connection such as the overlook into the learning commons**. Through this balance of calm and energy, the school enables students to engage with learning and with one another in ways that feel personal, empowering, and inclusive.

CORE VALUES

LEARNERS FIRST

Achieved by recognizing students as the ultimate beneficiaries of our work; demonstrated when planners, designers, builders, and school systems think first about the needs of students.

DIVERSITY

With the intent of fostering equity and inclusion, achieved by deliberately and authentically engaging all voices and perspectives; demonstrated when everybody's ideas, suggestions, and recommendations are heard and valued.

INNOVATION

Achieved through the exploration of opportunities at the intersection of learning and place; demonstrated when the value of place in learning is recognized and our work strengthens learning for all through exceptional environments.

COLLABORATION, COLLEGIALITY, CONNECTION

Achieved through the sharing of ideas, resources, and values; demonstrated when our members operate seamlessly across market sectors and geographic boundaries.

RESPECT

Achieved through recognition and acceptance of ideas, thoughts, and perspectives that differ from your own; demonstrated when a culture exists where new ideas and perspectives are embraced and welcomed.

PLACE MATTERS

Achieved through alignment of learning and place; demonstrated when the value of place in learning is recognized and our work strengthens learning for all through better environments.

ROOTED IN HISTORY

Pauline Flett was a Spokane Tribal elder credited with saving the Spokane Salish language. Pauline's family members and friends exchange stories of her love for sharing and preserving the Salish Language. This is exemplified by her copious notebooks containing information regarding the Spokane Salish Language, some of which are on display at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, DC. Flett is acknowledged as the co-creator of the first Spokane-Salish dictionary. Pauline Flett's passion for her culture, community, and the next generation of Spokane Salish speakers is a key inspiration for the middle school named in her honor.

CARRYING FORWARD A CULTURAL LEGACY

At Flett Middle School, they strive to build a community of learners who will make a difference in the lives of their peers for generations to come. **Pauline Flett's passion for her culture, community, and the next generation of Spokane Salish speakers is a key inspiration for the middle school.** They celebrate her spirit in their school with small communities where all voices are heard, and all cultures are celebrated.

RESPECT:
Flett Middle School honors Pauline's legacy through hosting an annual powwow, along with the Native Language Graduation. Finding ways to further her impact and expand on the efforts she has to preserve the native language to the region.

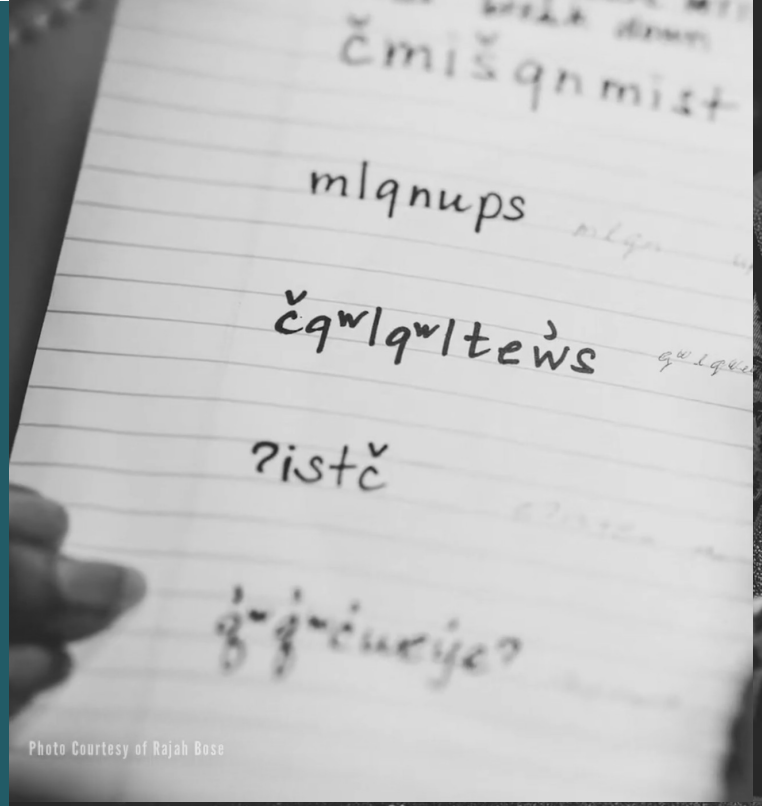


Photo Courtesy of Rajah Bose


Photo Courtesy of Rajah Bose



Photo Courtesy of The Spokesman Review

SCHOOL & COMMUNITY RESEARCH / ENGAGEMENT

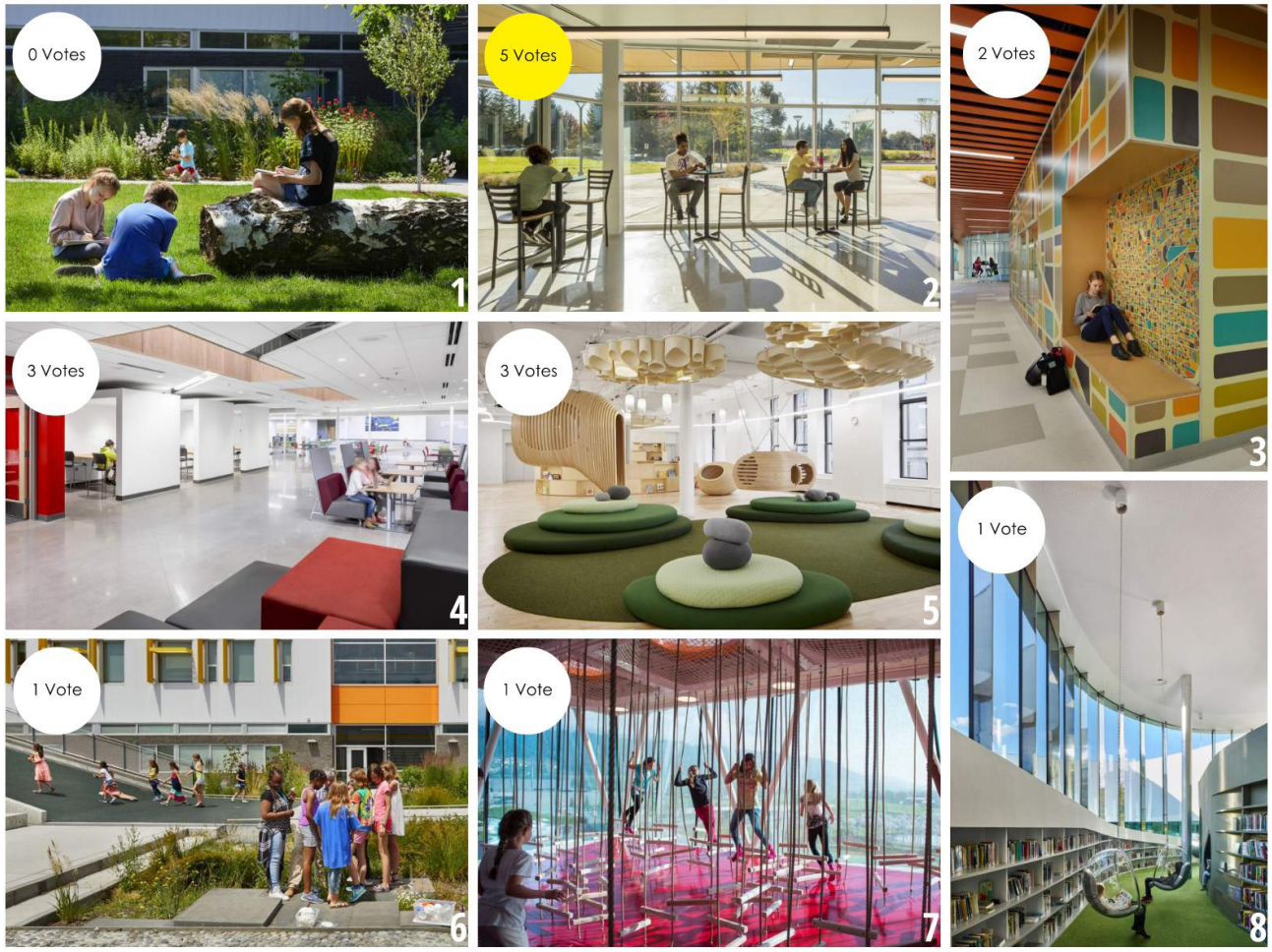
ESTABLISHING A NEW SCHOOL CULTURE

Located in Eastern Washington, Spokane Public Schools is the third largest school district in the state of Washington and the largest on the east side of the state, serving 28,000 students, including approximately 5,500 middle school students. Prior to starting the Flett Middle School Educational Specification and design process, a series of district-wide workshops were held culminating in a **three-day Community Facility Design Forum**. The outcome of this district-wide effort was eight principles each school community should interpret to reflect their unique identity.

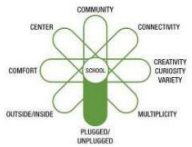
As a **new middle school in a less affluent area of the city, this would support the district-wide transition from junior high (7-8 grades) to the middle school model (6-7-8 grades),** allowing students to gain the benefits of a longer middle school career in a single building. The commitment of the Flett Middle School planning committee to hear from their parents, students and surrounding neighbors was steadfast, despite the limitations for in-person connection due to the pandemic. **Stakeholders included key representatives from around the district that would ultimately teach at this school once it was open.** Perspectives were intentionally broad, bringing together strong educational and student-focused professionals serving all K-12 age ranges with a passion for being part of imagining a new school, and new way of delivering education.



EXAMPLE WORKSHOP BOARD - Workshops included 8 boards with worksheets to explore principles.



New middle school facilities should be sensitive to how students learn and provide for diverse learning and teaching styles. They should be student-focused from formal to casual; large to small group; active to static; they should provide for the learning community as a whole; and/or the unique learning needs of the individual.



MOST VOTES: #2

COMMENTS ON PHOTO #2:

1. There is a value that students can stay inside and sit by themselves during lunch.

2. Like the seating area has plenty of light and the students can see the outside world.

3. Allows students to unplug in this area while connecting with others for project/ideas in an open-air area where is relaxing.

4. Indoor/outdoor for meeting /learning. Equals connection between outside and inside.

5. Individual space, but easily could pull groups together.

6. Students can switch from the indoor space to outdoor space for activities and application easily.

7. Bright and inviting.

8. A freewill of choosing indoor or outdoor.

9. Protected from weather but still feels like an outdoor space.

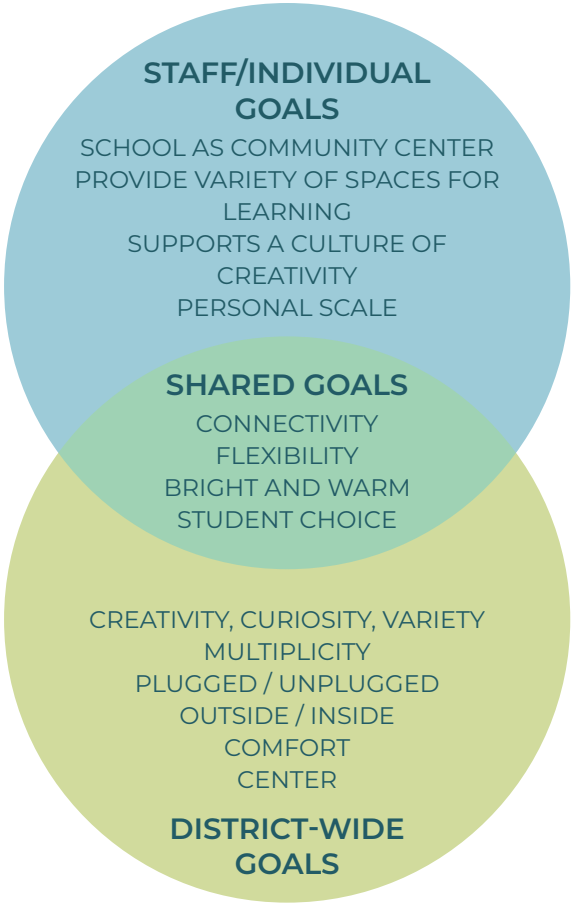
Plugged Unplugged
Homework Results
04/01/2020

RESPECT:
For the first time, children in the neighborhood are able to attend a school within their own community, one that is rooted in and inspired by local culture and that acknowledges its place within the neighborhood and the land. The school replaces absence with opportunity, **providing a framework through which the community can reinforce its bonds and strengthen its shared sense of identity.**

FEEDBACK

Challenges: Tackling what a new school should be, given that this school district hadn't brought a new school online for over three decades. This challenge also presented a huge **opportunity to envision something new and inspiring for students and families.**

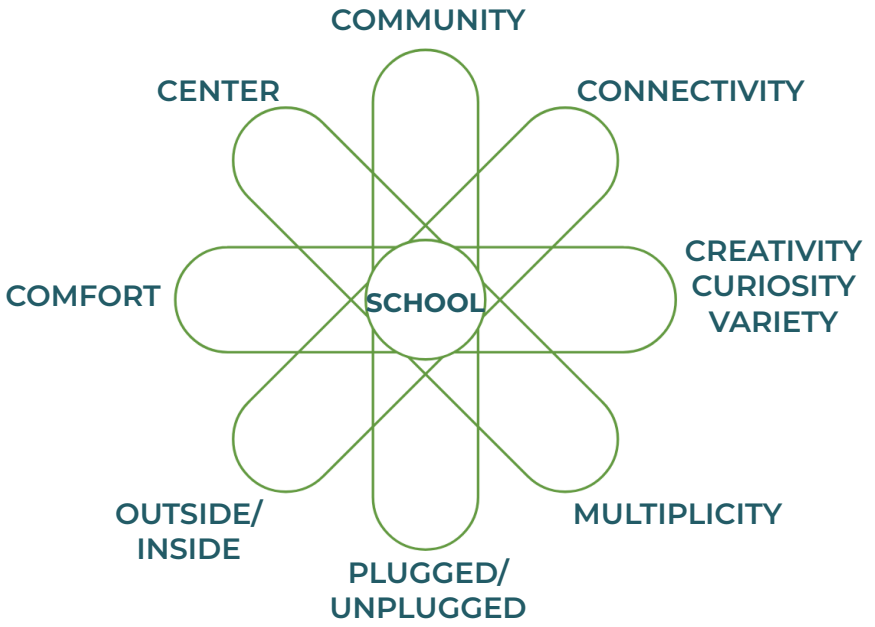
Assets: Available assets included **enthusiasm, commitment, and drive** by all of the participants to make something that would support students, bring value to the neighbors and community, and create something bigger than themselves and generate a sense of **pride and identity in this part of the City**.



LEARNERS FIRST:

To identify is to begin becoming. **By making learning visible, the school allows for views into all spaces, enabling students to passively observe activities they may not normally engage, peaking curiosity and expanding their future possibilities.** Being able to see students working in art or CTE, quickly accessing supplies in the Resource Center, or talking with a counselor, allow students to access what they need conveniently while also feeling connected to all other school activities at their pace. Students are encouraged to form meaningful connections not only with the spaces around them but with their own interests, strengths, and aspirations, fostering confidence, curiosity, and a sense of purpose in their educational journey.

DISTRICT-WIDE DESIGN PRINCIPLES



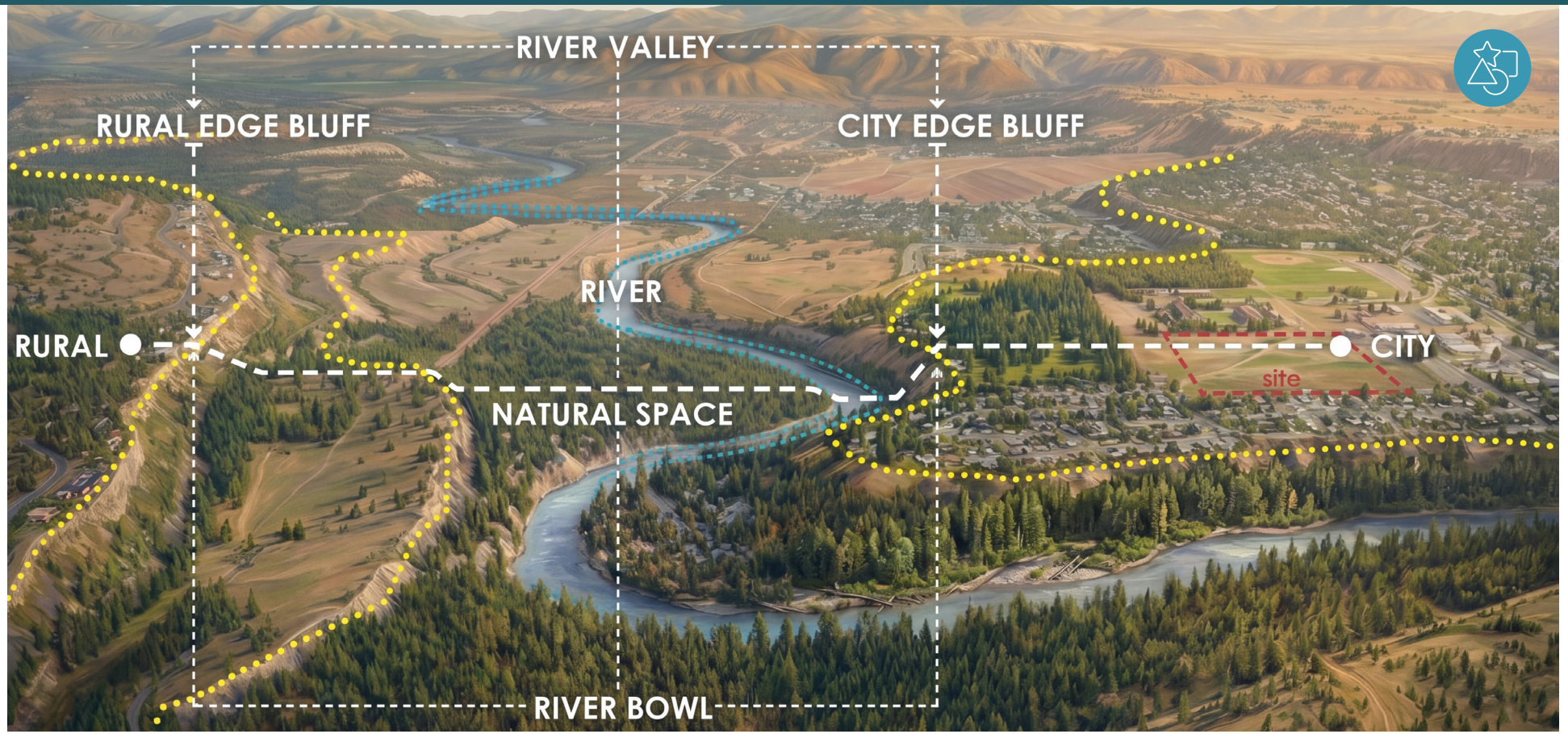
ESTABLISH NEW SCHOOL CULTURE >>> VISIONING WORKSHOPS EXAMPLE >>> FEEDBACK >>>

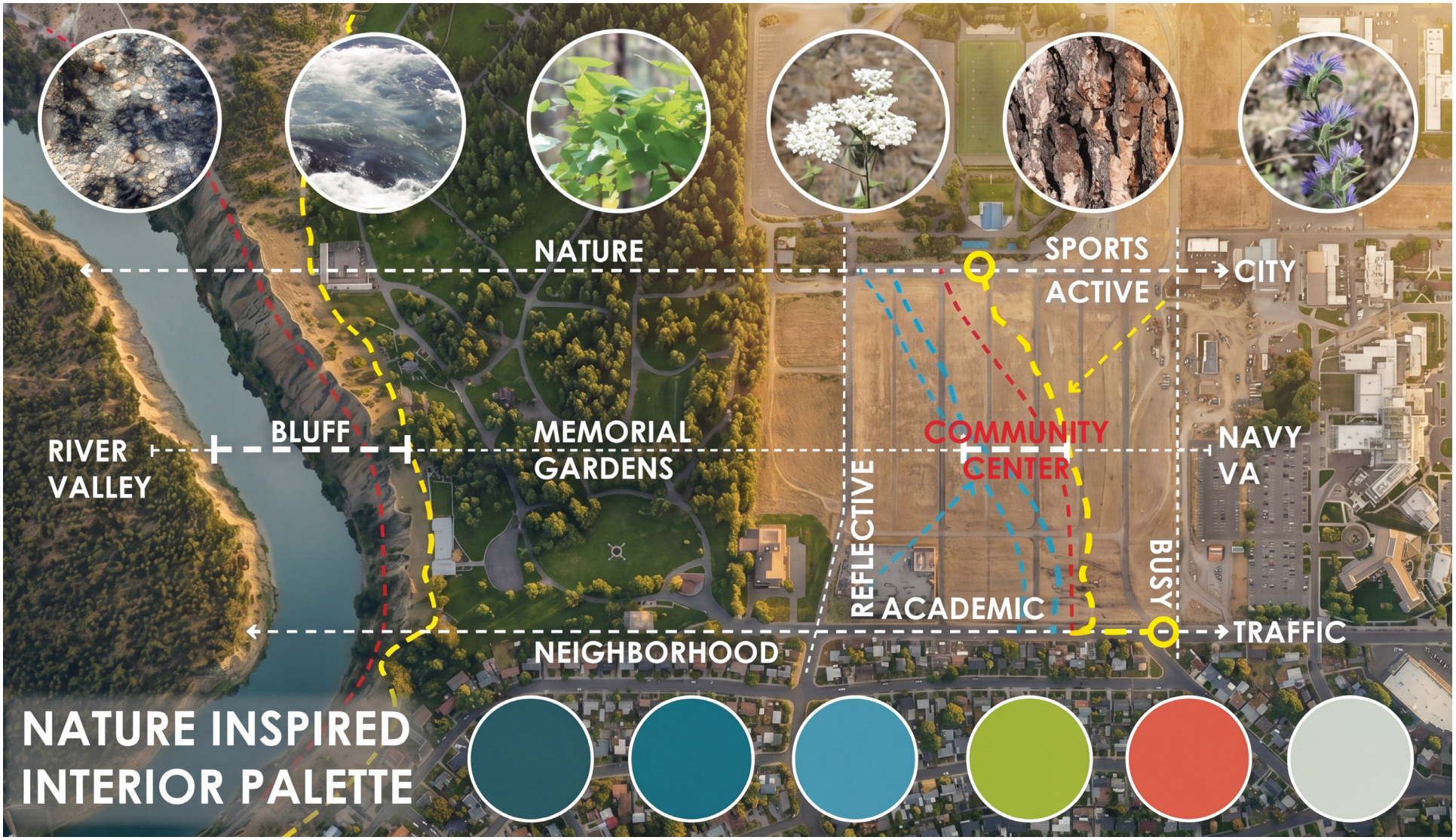
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT

Pauline Flett Middle school is located in northeast Spokane and sits at the urban edge between established residential neighborhoods and the natural landscape of the Spokane River Valley. This natural feature serves as the primary design inspiration for the building. The school occupies land that was formerly undeveloped parking, allowing the school freedom to develop a site that was larger than most school sites in the area. **Inspired by the Spokane River Valley, the school emulates how hikers enter the Spokane River and valley, an experience that is deeply embedded in the culture of the current and past generations of community members.**

Just one half mile west of the school site, the Spokane River cuts through basalt formations as it enters Riverside State Park's Bowl and Pitcher area, one of the most dramatic natural landscapes in the city. Steep columnar basalt cliffs and rock outcropping ridges along the river guide the views and orientation from the academic wings while the dense ponderosa pine and riparian vegetation within the river valley serve guided the material palette, maximizing the biophilic benefits from the beautiful natural setting. **The natural of the Spokane River Valley is viewed as an equalizer, providing all students with an opportunity to experience and engage with this shared ancient landscape.**





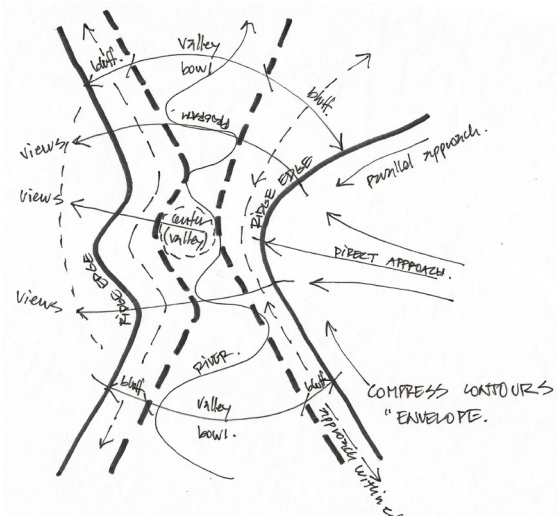
COMMUNITY CONTEXT

As a community center, Pauline Flett Middle School bridges the urban fabric and the natural world of the Spokane River Valley. The community is able to use and engage with the building through outdoor activities and courtyards customized for difference use and access. **Like boulders within the landscape, the school is experienced as a collection of community driven spaces, reflecting how Riverside State Park and the River Valley function as places shaped by collective use.** The school design and layout mimics the Valley through its shapes and forms, while also inviting movement, gathering, and shared experience, reinforcing its role as both a place of learning and a civic amenity. Pauline Flett Middle School, like Riverside Park, encourages contemplation, connections and interaction, experience and wonder, which are fundamental to the way students and the broader community identify with the Spokane River Valley, these qualities are embedded throughout the design of Pauline Flett Middle School.

PROCESS

Diagrams supporting educational and cultural objectives in different ways were explored based on feedback shared in initial workshops. **Ideas valued by participants were translated into different floor plans; for example, the student values of Personal Scale and Sense of Community were translated into the "Balance" experience model; the "Front Porch" experience model responded to the Staff values of Community and Connection.**

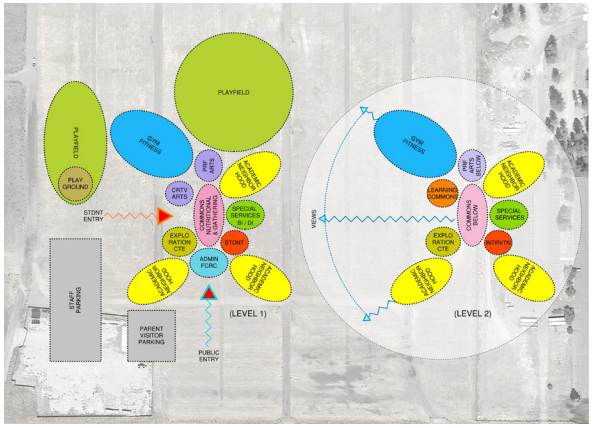
PARTI SKETCH OF SPOKANE RIVER VALLEY



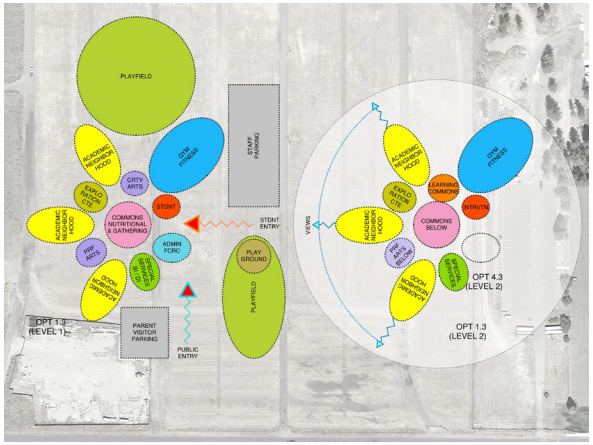
COLLABORATION, COLLEGIALITY, CONNECTION: In the end, the "Balance" option piqued the interest of the steering committee because it accomplished the shared ideals of Students and Staff – Community and Connection. In this model, curriculum and teaching are leveraged to create connection through visibility from the commons into all major academic, student support (huddle rooms, PBIS Room, learning commons, special ed) and adult support (counseling, intervention, administration) through the building layout, creating a unique educational environment, customizable for each student.

PLACE MATTERS: The proximity to the Spokane River Valley and the Bowl and Pitcher gives the school a strong environmental identity, with the river corridor acting as a natural backdrop and outdoor classroom for ecology, geology, and Indigenous history tied to the Spokane Tribe. The flora and fauna of the river valley served as inspiration for the interior materials palette, which in turn encourages students to engage with the outdoors and constantly reminds them of the natural wonder of the Spokane River Valley.

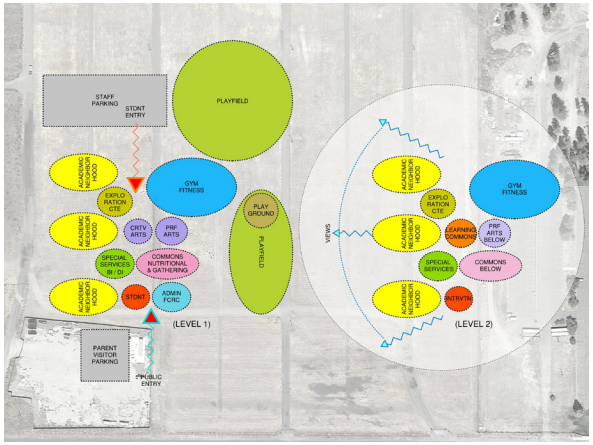
OPTION 1 - BALANCE



OPTION 1.5 - BALANCE



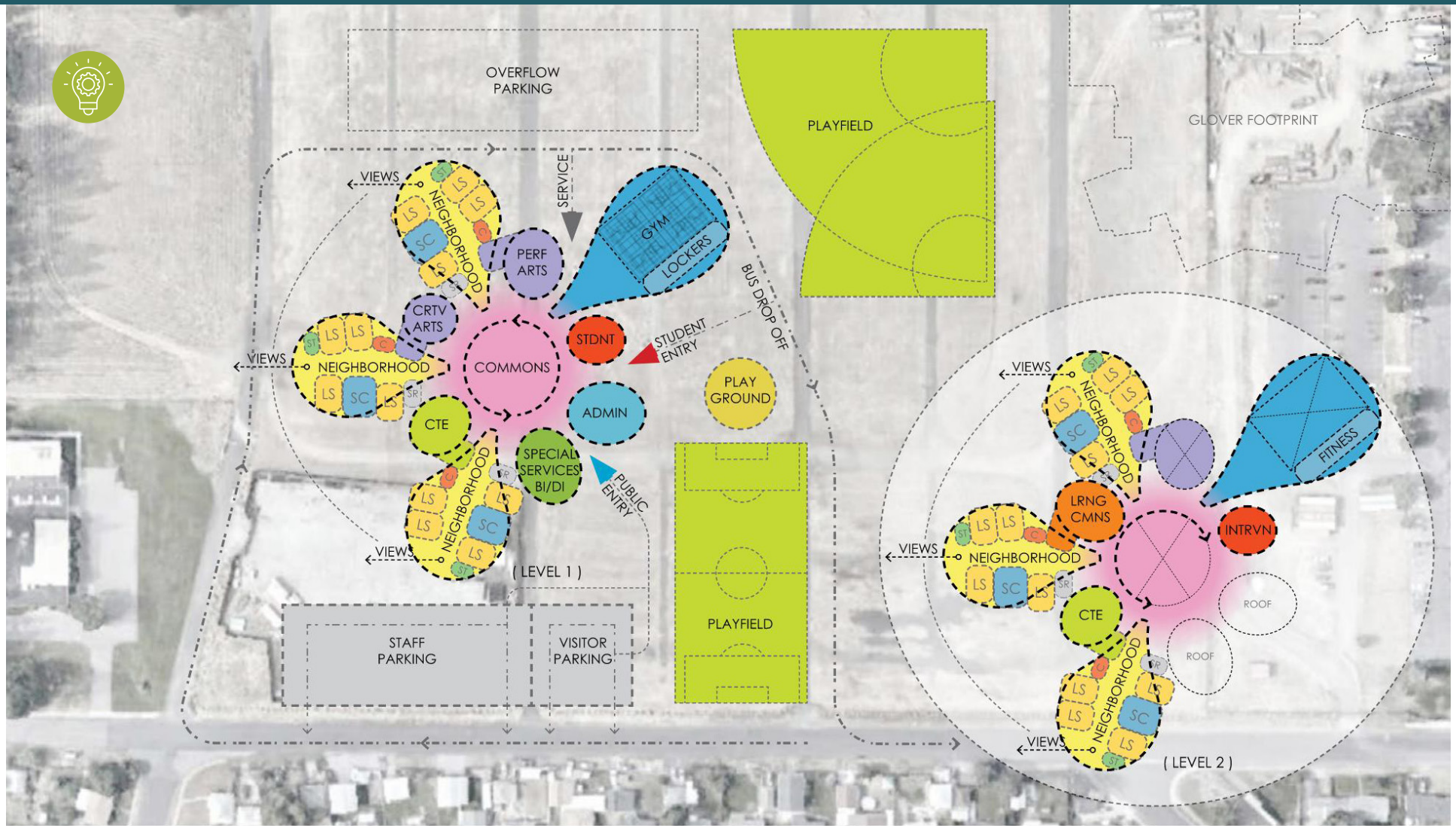
OPTION 2 - FRONT PORCH

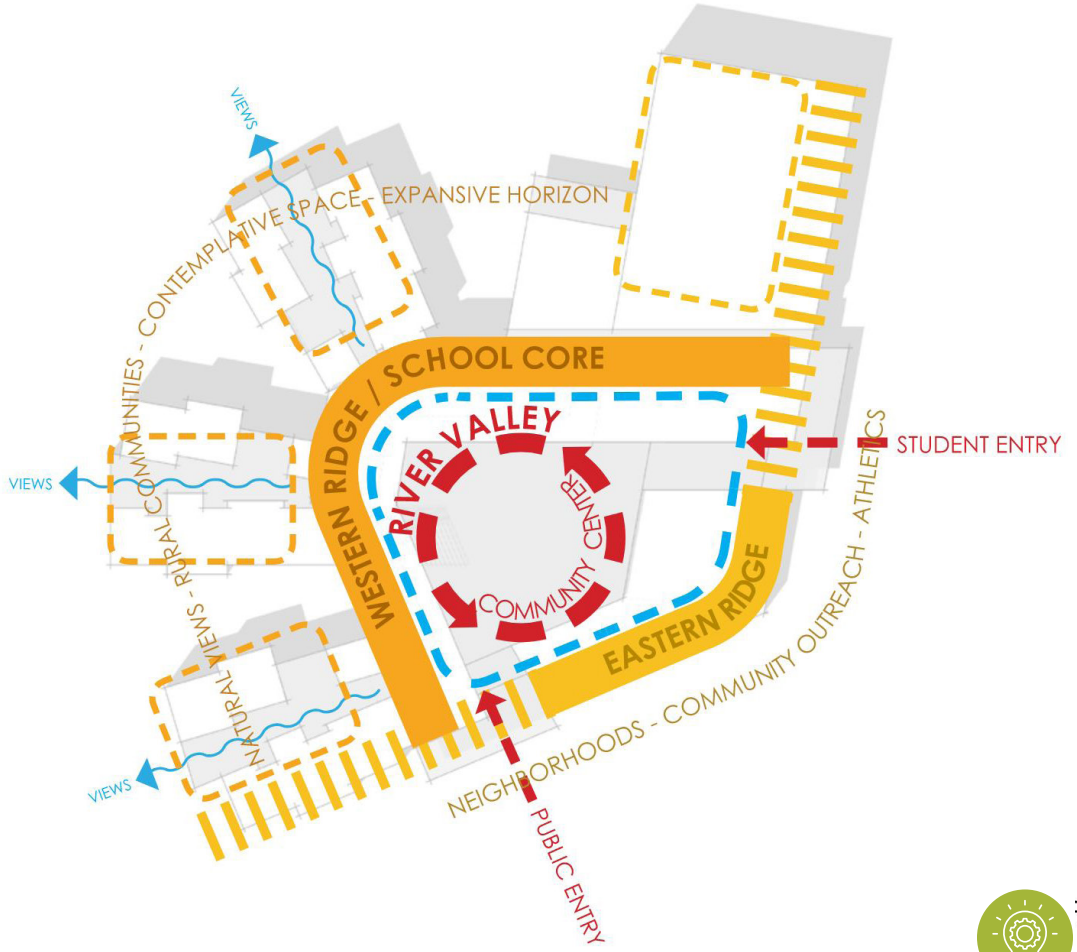


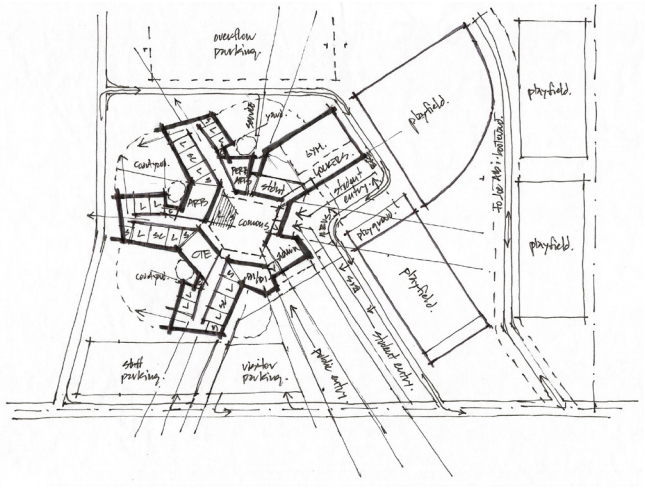
EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

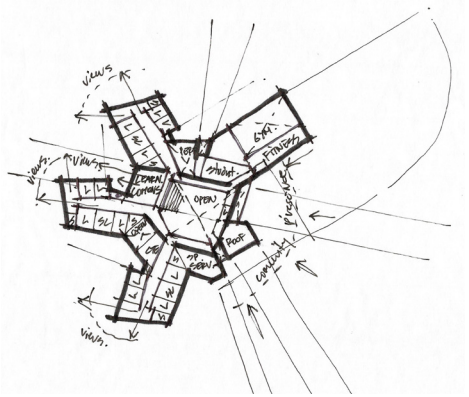
CONTEXT

The central Commons, defined by a large canopy and a learning stair, acts as the River Valley's forest canopy and the bluff, hosting the entire school community as a place to gather and collectively experience the school. From this heart, the school branches out into four academic wings, all visible from the center, presenting education on display. With most programs engaging the Commons through double volume spaces, bridges, and connections to courtyards, the gym, counseling and administrative spaces, and the main entries, **the Commons serves as the programmatic and experiential center of the school, reinforcing a student centric learning environment.**







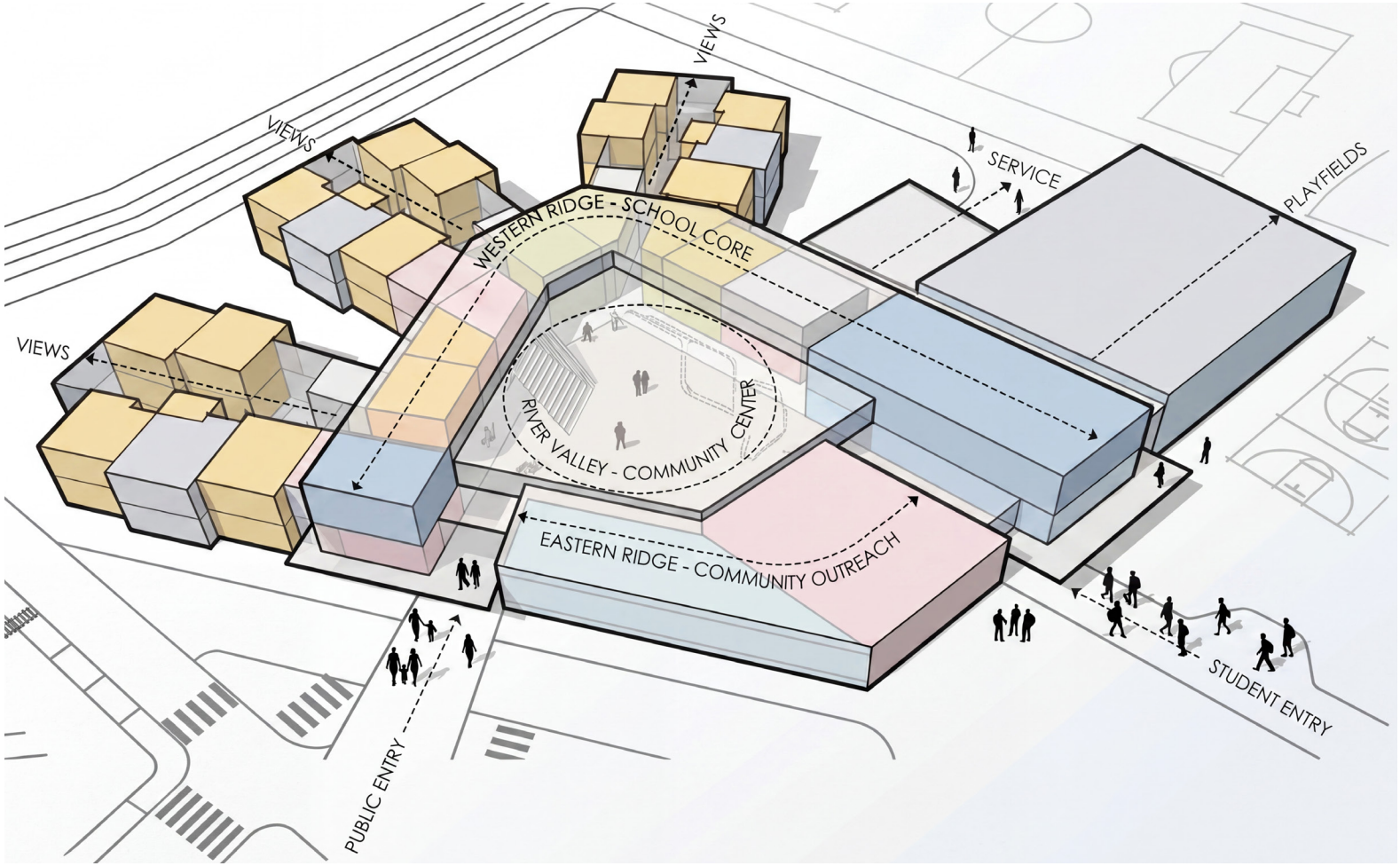


SUSTAINABILITY AND WELLNESS

The project achieves sustainability and wellness outcomes through a holistic, place-based design approach that aligns environmental performance with human experience. **Daylight and strong connections to the natural landscape reduce energy demand while supporting circadian health and visual comfort, establishing a sense of belonging unique to the sites culture and place. Healthy indoor air quality, durable low emission materials, and access to outdoor spaces promote physical wellbeing, while spatial diversity encourages movement, self-regulation, and mental balance.** By reinforcing cultural identity and community connections, the project advances environmental, social, and emotional sustainability as integrated outcomes.

INNOVATION:

Rooted in community, the school is organized around a central gathering space that welcomes both students and the public, reinforcing education as a shared civic experience. This heart of the school provides immediate visual access to all learning spaces and programs, placing teaching and learning on display and emphasizing transparency as a core educational value. **From this center, students connect to outdoor environments, framed views, and their academic neighborhoods, supporting collaboration, orientation, and identity.** Each neighborhood maintains a distinct character while remaining visually and spatially connected to the whole, fostering belonging and encouraging awareness across ages in support of innovative learning.



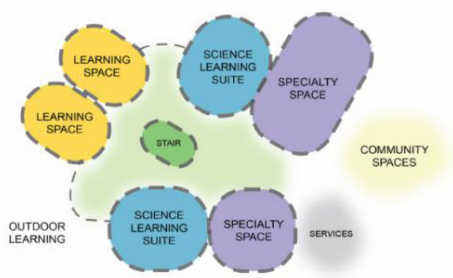
DIVERSITY:
Through a range of scaled experiences, smaller and more intimate moments are created, enabling all students to develop a personalized experience throughout each day depending on what is needed most to support successful outcomes socially, emotionally and academically.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

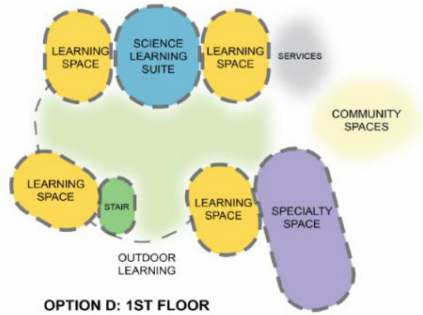
Structure matters. The physical distribution and adjacency of program elements influence student experience in profound and often immeasurable ways. **Pauline Flett Middle School offers an immense variety of rich experiences by overlapping and exposing school programs not only to the individual student, but also to the student body as a collective social entity.** The central Commons, as the heart of the school, allows interaction amongst students, teachers and administration throughout the day. These are casual and informal allowing adults to meet students when and where they need it, strengthening relationships and fostering meaningful experiences and connection for every student.. Inspired by nature as a universal force, Pauline Flett Middle School provides an environment rich in variety and exposure, fostering meaningful and distinctive experiences for every student.

RESPONSE

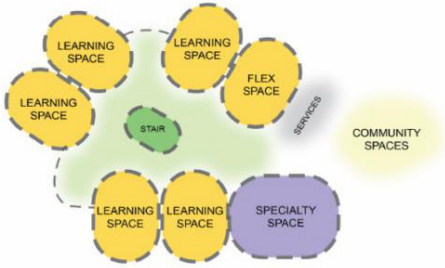
How do you weave the rich natural context, aspirational educational goals and external community focus together to allow all 750 middle school students to feel engaged and seen? The neighborhoods which would house around 125 students each were careful examined. The spaces included within and vertically connecting the neighborhoods offered multiple individual and small group zones, while also allowing the entire neighborhood to come together to start and end each day. This smaller community was supported by adults who met students on their level. To connect the entire student body, a second level of branding was integrated into the design to support their goals of using a house system. **The interior colors, ability to change lights at key locations, and display house banners reflecting the "League of Four", including Earth, Wind, Water and Fire, elevated the overall school culture and community while also respecting the Salish community who honored these natural elements.**



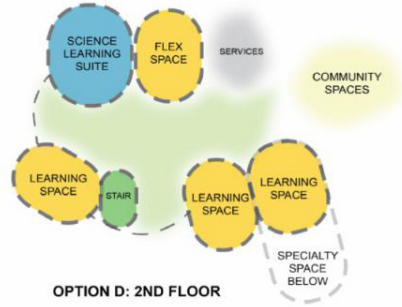
OPTION C: 1ST FLOOR



OPTION D: 1ST FLOOR



OPTION C: 2ND FLOOR



OPTION D: 2ND FLOOR



LEVEL 1



LEVEL 2

LEARNING NEIGHBORHOODS

Learning neighborhoods were designed to be flexible for large group gatherings, small huddles, or individual work whenever the different styles of learning or reflection are required to meet the needs of each student. The variety of spaces also allow for personal conversations to occur within the neighborhood, offering students and support throughout the day without the need to leave their community.

LEARNERS FIRST:

Each wing is similar but unique with it's own theme, colors, and specialty anchor space. Similar but unique views to nature were strategically placed in each neighborhood.



LEVEL 1 - LEARNING NEIGHBORHOOD



LEARNING NEIGHBORHOOD

RESPECT:
This image shows an example of the personalization walls where students and staff have the opportunity to customize their learning environment to reflect each unique group culture within the larger school culture



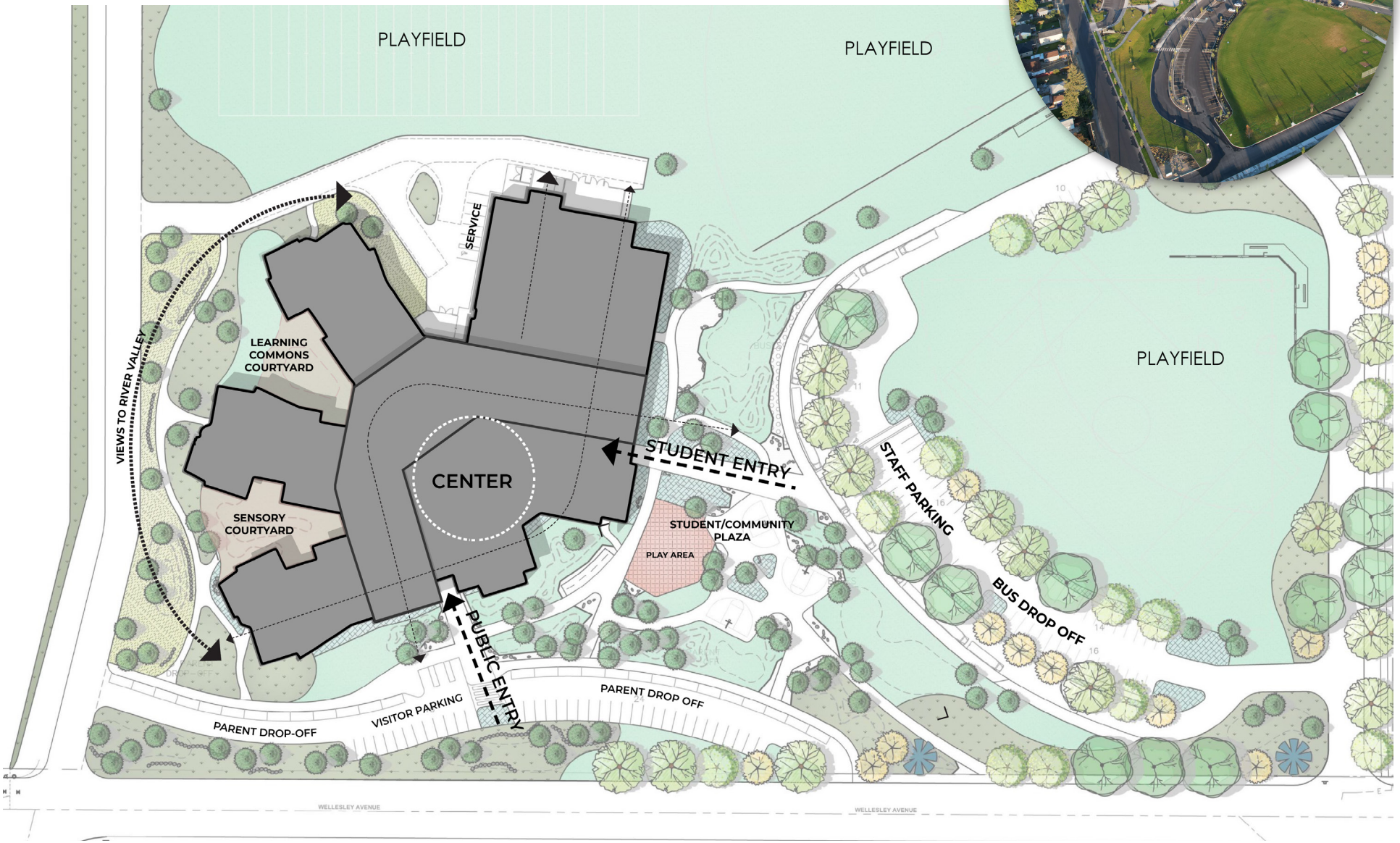
LEVEL 2 - LEARNING NEIGHBORHOOD

LEARNING NEIGHBORHOOD

COLLABORATION, COLLEGIALITY, CONNECTION:

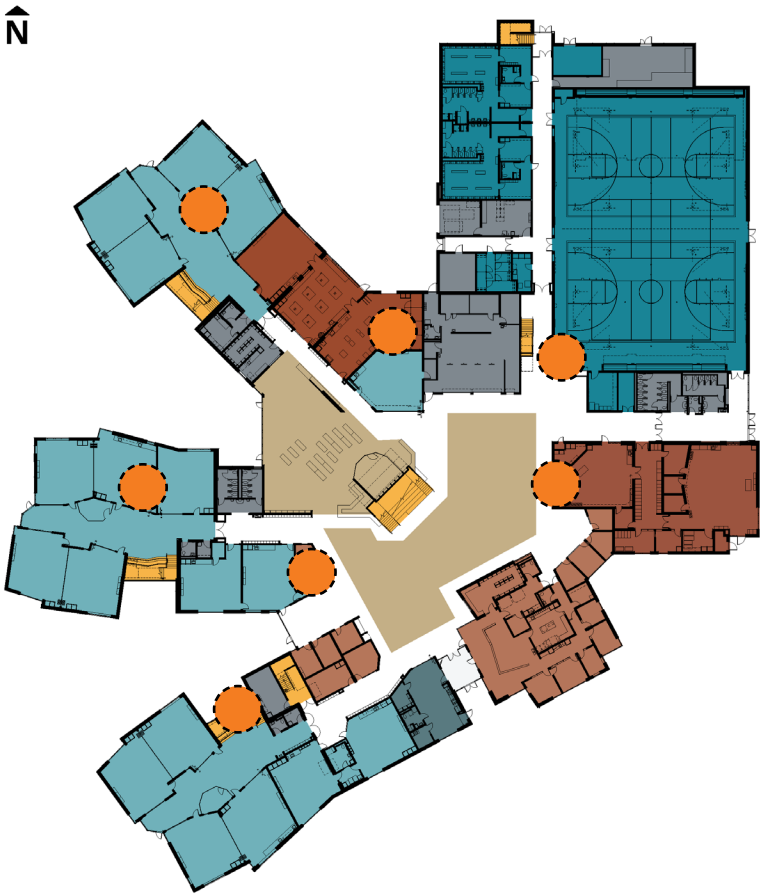
As the first new school in this neighborhood, it was intentional to keep the student play area and grass playfields open and un-fenced for community-use during non-school hours. Celebrating the love of basketball in Spokane with several half-court hoops, accessible play features for all abilities, playfields used by community organizations, this public school gives back to constituents and neighbors in several meaningful ways.



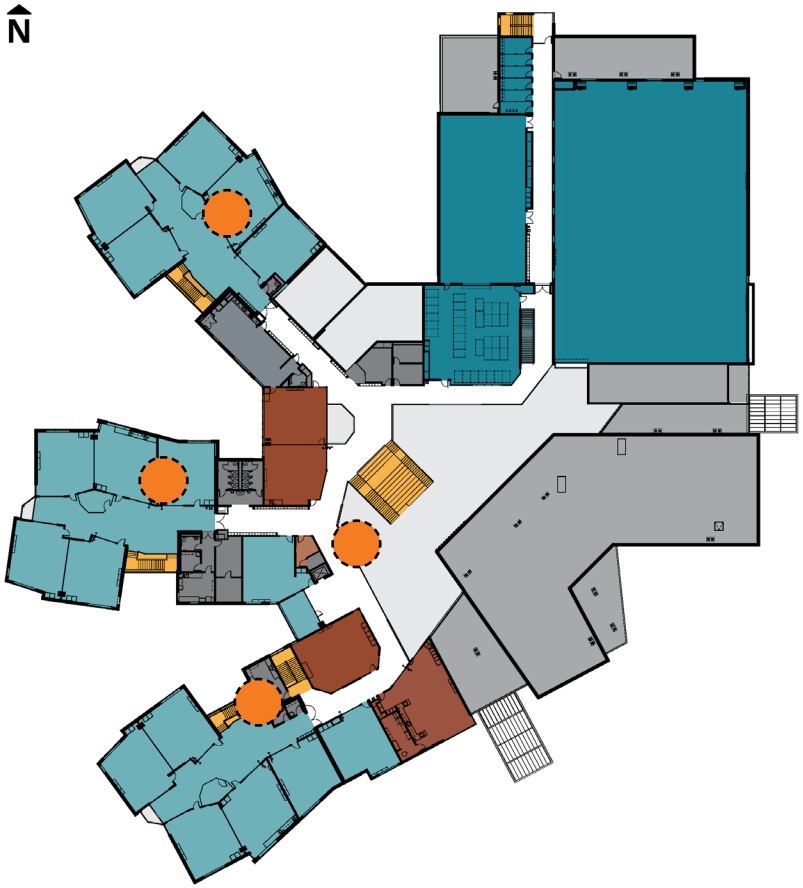


RESULTS

The final layout, realizes the goals of the early diagrams, allowing students to stand in the commons with visual access to all programs around the school. Windows and glass operable walls allow for passive supervision for adults as along with flexibility to customize spaces depending on the evolving student and staff needs. The neighborhoods are customized to support small communities of students, connecting vertically to one another, while also connecting to the center commons. Outdoor courtyards expand the educational opportunities beyond the built environment and serve as continual visual connection to nature. The primary entries are clear access points to the community framing a play area and clearly opening up the building to serve as a community hub.



LEVEL 1



LEVEL 2

COMMUNITY
COMMONS
ADMINISTRATION
ARTS & CTE
HEALTH & FITNESS
LEARNING
BUILDING SUPPORT

DISTRICT GOALS

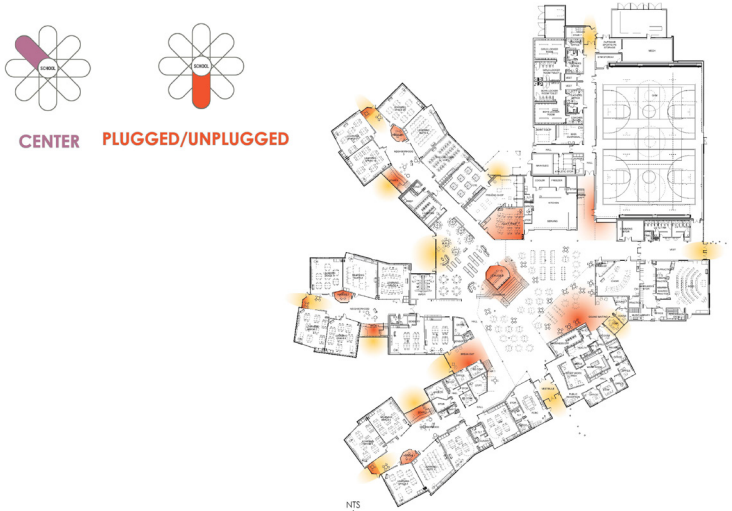
Quote from Dr. Matthew Henshaw, Founding Principal:

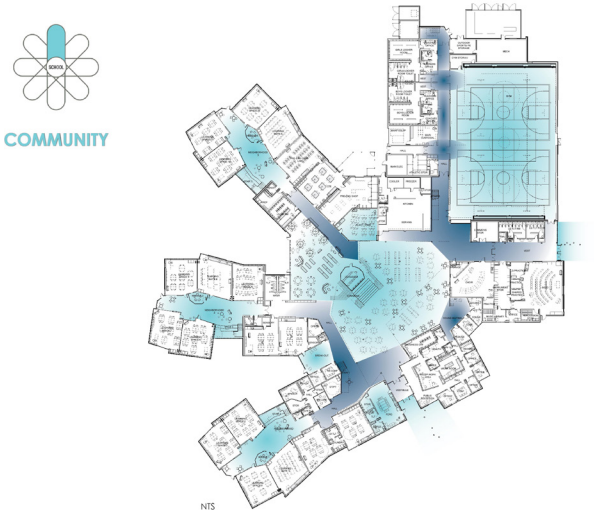
"When we started planning Pauline Flett Middle School, none of us could have predicted that an entire building would be designed without our team ever sitting around the same table. Designing during the pandemic didn't flatten the work, we pushed our thinking past what we had previously known or experienced and helped us build a school that does exactly what we hoped it would."

"The neighborhood model has been transformative. Each cluster of classrooms around a shared commons functions like a smaller school within Flett, so students see the same peers and adults regularly, transitions are easier, and no student gets overlooked. Layered on top of that, our House system connects every student and every staff member to a community that reaches across grade levels."

"Just as importantly, the building gave us room to honor our namesake. Pauline Flett spent her life preserving the Spokane Salish language, and our school carries that forward through Salish programming and our annual Pauline Flett Powwow, now in its fourth year. The gathering spaces NAC designed make events like the Powwow feel like they belong here, because they do. **Flett's mission is to be a gathering place where all are seen and empowered to be dreamers, ambitious learners, and involved citizens. The building doesn't just house that mission, it actively supports it every single day."**









PLACE MATTERS:
In a part of the city that did not have a central identity or community gathering space, Flett Middle School filled that void. The outdoor spaces are deliberately design to encourage use outside of school hours with active zones, amphitheater spaces, native vegetation with signage, and many other features to allow families to find a safe place to learn, recreate and enjoy the newly developed school site. Once in the building the scale fosters a sense of welcome, with community spaces immediately accessible, including a resource space that is unprogrammed to allow for outside organizations to bring in whatever is needed to best support students and families. In honoring the namesake, this school has embraced the Spokane Salish and surrounding tribal languages building a community within the larger school systems that connects to the original inhabitants of the Spokane River Valley.



STUDENT ENTRY

INNOVATION:
Native landscaping and meandering pathways breakdown the institutional experience and bridges the urban and natural environment, while also providing a respectful backdrop for annual events, such as the Powwow.







PUBLIC ENTRY

INNOVATION:
Embedded within the northeast Spokane neighborhood, the school replaces long standing absence of a parking lot with opportunity, strengthening community connection and reinforcing a shared sense of identity rooted in the local cultural heritage. The abstraction of the Spokane River serves as the primary acoustic treatment in the commons, providing a functional, yet highly customized sense of place.







CENTRAL COMMONS

DIVERSITY:
The design process and project yielded several meaningful outcomes beyond their original intent. **The emphasis on spatial diversity led to unanticipated patterns of student ownership, with learners informally curating favorite places that supported self regulation, peer mentoring, and wellbeing without prescriptive programming.**

The integration of Pauline Flett's life work in revitalizing and teaching the Salish language became an unexpected cornerstone of school identity. Language, graphics, and spatial storytelling embedded throughout the building strengthened cultural continuity and affirmed Indigenous knowledge as a living presence within daily learning. This contributed to a deeper sense of belonging and recognition of place for both students and the wider community.

The strategy of education on display generated increased curiosity and cross age interaction, enabling students to envision academic pathways through observation and participation rather than instruction alone. The central commons, originally intended as an organizing element, emerged as a cultural and social anchor that strengthened collaboration, pride, and shared identity.



CENTRAL COMMONS

LEARNERS FIRST:
Connections abound within the school, empowering student to connect with one another, teachers, activities and supports without barriers to access.



CENTRAL COMMONS



Pauline Pascal Flett, the late Spokane tribal elder who is credited with saving her tribe's ancestral Salish language became the namesake of the future middle school. Research clearly demonstrates the importance of locally relevant connections to creating a deep sense of belonging. Pauline was determined to ensure the Salish language was accessible to new generations, she co-wrote the first Spokane Salish-English dictionary, and taught the language at Eastern Washington University.

Pauline's influence emphasized the importance of community culture and connection—particularly with new communities. Understanding and appreciating the importance of culture and student engagement to long-term success, Flett Middle School embraced the regionally unique and valuable cultural identity of Pauline Flett.

Pauline's grandson, Joshua Flett, is the Salish Club instructor at Flett Middle School. The district is working toward Salish becoming an accredited elective, similar to French and Spanish. Three to four percent of current students identify as Native American. An annual pow wow at the school is open to the community and honors Pauline Flett.



"What's remarkable about Flett is that an entire school community was built — culture, identity, and all — inside a building that was designed without any of us ever standing in the same room. The neighborhoods, the houses, the gathering spaces — they didn't just give us a school; they gave us a place where students feel known."

Dr. Matthew Henshaw
Founding Principal, Pauline Flett Middle School