executive summary
Alderwood Middle School is the second middle school Edmonds School District has built, replacing an outmoded junior high school building at the end of its service life. Four years earlier, the District engaged in a deep dive to explore the unique needs of the emerging adolescent learner. The result of that investigation was Meadowdale Middle School, a highly successful new school project that was a MacConnell award finalist, and a project so successful that District Superintendent Nick Broussit proclaimed that the District would “just build Meadowdale three more times until our middle school program is complete!”

The District’s Capital Projects Director, however, knew that we could learn from our past while building on the success of Meadowdale. For the next project, Alderwood MS, the District approached the Alderwood MS community, formed a design committee, and began a deep lessons-learned review of the Meadowdale model. The result was an iterative improvement to the successes of the past, highly customized to meet the specific needs of a new community group.

The District embarked on the planning process beginning with several key questions: ‘What makes a middle school different?’ and ‘What are the best practices today that can inform our decisions and ensure that the new school will serve the community well for the next 50 years?’

**Establishing the Vision** The District hired an architect and educational planning team to lead a large group of stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, District staff, and community members in establishing a new vision for their new middle schools. The process entailed a series of workshops, charrettes, and tours, both real and virtual of outstanding recent projects, culminating in a mission statement and guiding principles for Alderwood MS that formed the basis for the design of the new facility, as well as serving as a road map for the school to transform their curriculum.

**Transforming the School Culture** The new building has provided an inspiring and invigorating new setting that has helped to transform the school culture. Carefully tailored to support the developmental needs of the emerging adolescent, the new spaces and their configuration are changing how the students behave. According to the Principal, who was involved throughout planning and design, in the old building lunchtime was the worst part of the day, run as a virtual lock-down. In the new Commons it has become her favorite time of the day, the kids are so different and she enjoys hanging out in the Café area, informally interacting with the students.

**Evolving Curriculum for the Emerging Adolescent** The early visioning process brought into clarity for all participants the need to provide a new building which facilitates and supports a much larger range of teaching and learning modalities to work more successfully with this age group. New paradigms like cooperative and performance-based learning make their way into daily practice. Positive feedback from the staff in the new building indicates that the design intent is meeting that goal.
02 » scope of work & budget
Edmonds School District replaced the existing 1965 Alderwood Middle School with a new facility located on the Martha Lake Elementary School site, a site originally sized to accommodate an elementary school and a middle school. The new facility is approximately 112,000 square feet with a two story main classroom building adjacent to a one story Gymnasium, Library and Commons area. The project included site improvements for new ball fields, parking, bus and auto circulation, emergency vehicle access, neighborhood pedestrian connections and new storm water management facilities.

The existing Elementary School remained in session during construction of Alderwood Middle School.

Project Data
Area: 119,935 sf; Two stories
Site Area: 26.63 Acres
Construction Cost: $48 million
Opening Date: January 2017
scope of work and budget
03 » school & community engagement
In the beginning of 2014 a representative group of community members, neighbors, students and their parents (both current and future users), staff, administrators, educational planners and architects were organized to assist the school district in creating a vision for Alderwood Middle School that would guide the planning and design of the new facility. Wanting to go beyond the standard community collaboration process, the District put a challenge to this group: develop guiding principles and design goals that would bring together the District’s overall mission and philosophy with the best and most appropriate current thinking on teaching and learning and school design in a way that will ensure that Alderwood MS will be a comprehensive learning center designed to support various educational models will serve the high standards of the District for the next 50 years.

Major participants: Roles and Opportunities

» School Board: Elected Directors having final responsibility and authority.

» Project Steering Committee: Core project decision making group composed of the Capital Projects Director, Executive Director for Business and Operations, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Education Programs, and School Principal. Also staffed by District Project Manager and Architect. This team was responsible for all aspects of scope budget and schedule, and made final recommendations to the School Board.

» District-wide Middle School visioning committee: Met during the Predesign phase.

» Alderwood MS Design Review Committee: Broad based committee composed of site-specific teachers and staff, parents, students and community members.

» Curriculum Focus Groups: District-wide reviews of programming, schematic and semi-final designs for specific curriculum and activity areas.

» Integrated Design Charrette Team: Formal facilitated goal setting and preliminary plans review that focuses on sustainability issues in the context of overall project goals and objectives.

» Community Presentations: Milestone presentations and discussions at open houses and staff meetings.

Project Assets

» Widespread community support for the project. The Citizens Planning Committee recommended the Alderwood project as a priority for the 2014 Bond measure.

» History within the District of continuous community support for progressive projects following a series of well-received innovative schools.

» Having an established and successful community engagement process within the District, used for acclaimed projects, such as Lynnwood HS.

» Extensive experience and sustaining continuity within the Capital Improvements office.

» Well established relationship with Integrus, lasting over 20 years.

» Building on the success of Meadowdale Middle School, which opened three years earlier, as a template for the District’s evolving middle school programs.
Challenges

While the District had success previously developing their first middle school at Meadowdale MS, they still were evolving their approach to middle school education delivery. Compounding the challenge of a moving target, the Alderwood MS was a community of tenured teachers who felt strongly about their current successes and the strength of their community. They were not looking for a solution that would challenge current thinking, but rather they wanted a new building to continue all of their old traditions, and to not force change. The District had a long standing policy of an inclusive planning process that included teachers and maintenance staff. The District was facing reduced state funding for educational operations and increased state requirements for student and teacher evaluations. Any additional demand for staff time created both logistical and emotional stress, as these stakeholders had limited time to devote to planning a new facility. To allow full participation of these critical stakeholders and give them an important voice in shaping the new building, a strategic, streamlined process was developed with the architects and educational planner. All of these challenges contributed to an atmosphere in which it would have been far easier to resort to a highly conventional and traditional design that used minimal community input, however the District held to their established process in the belief that it would yield a more successful outcome.

Process Value

» The process maintained trust and credibility with the community by delivering a quality product within tight schedule and budget constraints.

» The process allowed involvement at many different levels, thus was both inclusive and efficient. Anyone could be involved without compromising their schedule. The process focused input so that there was appropriate review when needed.

» The process introduced the guiding concept of the unique developmental needs of middle school students.

» The process yielded design changes that enhanced educational program performance, e.g. enlarging the CTE/STEM room template and giving it a unique “suite” of connected spaces, including a high profile student display area, a visually connected “clean room” for design activities, and an expanded covered outdoor learning lab.

Establishing Mission Statement and Guiding Principle

» A major turning point occurred in the visioning process when Jon Wiles, author of ‘The Essential Middle School’ joined the team to share his perspective on the developmental stages of the typical middle school student, and to help work through the details of moving to block scheduling.
Heart of the School Diagram
Jon spent the morning session briefing faculty on this unique stage of development, where kids are changing faster than at any other time. This pivotal ‘aha’ moment coalesced many disparate ideas and led to the creation of the mission statement with its five key components.

The following summarizes the essential understanding that came out this session.

**Creating Appropriate Programs For Emerging Adolescents And Why It Is So Important?**

- The new school should acknowledge the developmental level of this age group and support adapting curriculum that directly meets and accommodates their needs.
- Middle school students are a unique age group that is very diverse, with many social needs who need help to appropriately experience this exciting but confusing time.
- This age group wants more independence as they take on more responsibility and interest in their own learning, yet still needs boundaries.
- “Tween” 10-12 growing so fast, trying to understand themselves and their relationships to others.
- The “tween” is a young adolescent coming of age and trying to deal with hormones, confusion, self-image, searching, excitement, discovering talents.
- The middle school program should make school experiences age appropriate – the student’s physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual development is the basis for how to design the learning process, which should accommodate a wide range of learners based on student interests.
- Health and fitness activities should not only be athletic based, but also be diverse enough to promote the students to pursue them on their own.
- The school program should be appropriate for the middle school attention span, learning styles, as well as depth and breadth capabilities while presenting opportunities to display ones talents.
Alderwood Middle School Creed

“To make Alderwood Middle School a place where we can all learn and reach our potential, it is our responsibility to succeed academically, respect ourselves and others, and create a safe environment.”
04 » educational environment
The Educational Specifications built on the work of the Design Review Team, integrating those long-term conceptual goals with specific day-to-day functional needs identified in numerous interviews with staff, students, and community users during the programming process.

Opportunity for Change  Recognizing that current teaching and learning practices at Alderwood will evolve in the new building, the Steering Committee embraced the strategy of using the move to a new facility as a way to instigate change. The staff used the temporary disruption and dislocation that occurred during construction, and combined with the excitement of moving into a new building, began exploring more innovative teaching and learning modalities prior to the move.

EDUCATIONAL DESIGN THEMES

Alderwood Middle School was designed to preserve its role as a center of learning for the surrounding community while taking in considerations for the future of educational reform.

Variety of Learning Settings

» A variety of spaces was provided for the many learning activities that occur in the new school. The variety is both in size and character, planned for efficient utilization and the ability to be reconfigured easily to allow multiple uses.

» Learning settings are highly flexible to accommodate multiple activities in a single school day.

» The school’s organization and overall character support and promote professional collaboration and teamwork.
Flexibility and Adaptability

» The design provided an adaptable building that is flexible enough to accommodate both short and long term goals for different educational strategies.

» Created adaptability in the use of spaces, building systems, and furnishings by maintaining flexible design solutions that allow for change to take place with minimal effort and time spent.

» Provided a variety of room sizes and volumes to ensure that changes in populations and curriculum can support a variety of class sizes and activities.

Integration of Technology

» Integrated technology was provided that is accessible to all, with flexibility in mind to allow adaptation to future technological advancements. Provided adequate over-sizing in cabling and conduits to allow future expansion of information access technology.

» Decentralized technology and integrated its use into all learning settings while providing a robust infrastructure that accommodates technological change.

» Utilized technology to create a sustainable school facility that minimizes operation and maintenance costs and provides long term efficiency.

SITE PLANNING DESIGN THEMES

The Alderwood Middle School site was considered a part of the learning environment and developed to stimulate a variety of learning activities, while maintaining safety and security for both students and the surrounding neighborhoods.
Safety and Security

» Created an inviting environment where students and visitors feel safe and welcome.

» Access and security for the buildings was zoned so that community members can use portions of the building without having access to other areas of the school not intended for community use.

» Consideration was given to lines of sight between staff and students both on the interior and exterior of the building.

» Blind corners, unsupervised niches, and other obstructions to good supervision were minimized.

Connection to Site and the Environment

» A learning focused landscape was developed with areas to sit within courtyards for casual social gathering while promoting socialization and collaboration amongst students and staff.

» The facility was zoned for community access to athletics and large gathering spaces to the east, adjacent to parking and play-fields, and PLCs located to the west to create outdoor learning opportunities and a “school in the woods” aesthetic.

» Interior spaces, including multi-use teaching areas such as art and science classrooms, libraries, gymnasiums, and music rooms, were provided with daylight through skylights or clerestory windows. This maximized energy efficient operations and focused on reducing glare in the spaces as well.

CONTEXTUAL DESIGN THEMES

Alderwood Middle School responds harmoniously to its context – in scale with both the residential neighbors and the adjacent Martha Lake Elementary School, while creating a civic presence that expresses the unique qualities characteristic of the site, the neighborhood and the school itself.
Image and Identity

» The school’s main entry and offices are welcoming and inviting. They both are easily identifiable to new visitors from both the site entry and the main parking area.

» The school is a community center, which is warm, inviting, visually and spatially interesting, and provides an image and identity that represents the values of the Edmonds School District, Lynnwood community, and Alderwood area.

Community Use and Partnerships

» Space was provided at the school for programs that might form partnerships with various community organizations. This space was provided by means of an adaptable building plan which could be easily expanded or reconfigured in the future.

Programmatic Elements

Personal Learning Communities (PLC)

» The PLC accommodated a variety of learning settings and is able to support a variety of learning modalities. In the future, they should also be able to adapt to embrace more hands-on project-based learning and cooperative learning.

» Provided a centralized shared area, the center of the PLC, crafted to allow for both structured and informal learning, areas for wet and messy work, research, group presentation, and socialization.

» The design is organized to support team teaching with an adjacent conferencing space for teacher collaboration.

» Provides ready access to outdoor learning spaces.

Integrated Science Lab

» Created a space that is interconnected with the PLCs and the regular curriculum, yet located so as to retain a unique departmental identity to enable collaboration.

» Provided connection to outdoor learning focused landscapes to support a wide variety of curriculum.

» The design accommodates various modalities, including lectures, collaboration, private space, wet and messy activities, etc.

» Provided a design that is flexible enough to adapt to a variety of future learning modalities, including the ‘DaVinci’ studio.
Flexible Studios

» Flexible ‘DaVinci’ style studios are zoned with space for wet and messy work, and garage doors that allow activities to spill out into the Shared Area. The studios could be used as a resource space by teaming with other classes. There is extra storage for materials and student work and the spaces are furnished with workshop-style tables.

Tech Lab/Stem program

» Provided a space that is a technically-oriented creative environment supporting a curriculum based around the ideas of theory, design, fabrication, testing, and redesign.

» Created a space that can easily adapt to future teaching modalities and curricula, and accommodate emerging technologies, which could be influenced by fields as disparate as design and modeling, the magic of electronics, science of technology, automation and robotics, flight and space.

» Designed a space that incorporates the principles behind the traditional wood and metal shop, but which also integrates computer technologies.

» Centrally located within the larger school to feature the STEM curriculum and showcase to the kids the exciting technology and variety of student works.

Fitness and Health

» An integrated curriculum is envisioned, combining health, fitness, and athletics, where students can learn to meld ideas about healthy lifestyles, diet, and exercise.

» Created a multi-purpose fitness classroom, intimately linked to the two gyms, outfitted with exercise equipment, classroom area with laptops, and space for stretching.

» Provided two gyms, a main gym for school athletics and tournaments, large music performances, and a second smaller auxiliary gym for fitness and community oriented programs.

» Naturally lit the gymnasiums to save energy as well as to provide a more inspiring space for students and teachers.

Student Social Center: Commons, Café, Library, Covered Outdoor Area

» Commons as the living room- Well crafted setting for dining, informal socialization, studying, formal and informal large gatherings, presentations, and being able to accommodate a variety of performances.

» Created a variety of zones within the Commons that offer different settings for the many different types of middle school students, including a large traditional open area of tables, café area, cyberbar, tiered forum-style seating, covered outdoor area with seating.

» The Commons is immediately adjacent to outdoor activity areas, both active and passive, to allow the easy transition between socializing, play, and athletics.

» Designed a cafe that serves as a social connection between the main commons and the library to provide a buffer between active and non active spaces.

Building Organization

In accordance with and support of the school’s mission statement, the organization of the core academic portions of the school is subdivided into personal learning communities. This smaller scale enables the creation of a more intimate social environment within the larger school, allowing 5 teachers to interact with 150 students, and supports the goals of providing a more relevant and developmentally appropriate, safe middle school experience for Alderwood’s students.

A variety of diagrams were presented to the Steering Committee to weigh the desired amount of autonomy each PLC should have in relation to the rest of the school and also the question of whether elective spaces would be integrated into the PLCs. The final solution is based on the idea of a string of pearls, interconnected with a central circulation spine, each with a distinct identity, but definitely not as separate and isolated neighborhoods. It was decided that including the electives in the PLCs would interfere with a desired sense of scale and intimacy and were to be placed where they were the strongest adjacencies, such as having the music program near the Commons and Gym for performing.
05 » physical environment
The new Alderwood Middle school was designed to serve the cultural values of the Alderwood school community. In particular, the community stressed the importance of having a new school facility that creates opportunities for mixing social and educational activities, that supports the curricular emphasis on collaboration and self-directed exploration, that strengthens students’ awareness of their place within the natural environment, and that can be used by entire community.

**Site** The new building embraces the site with minimal disruption to the existing landscape despite a phasing scheme that allowed students to remain at the adjacent elementary school during construction. The building was located to take advantage of changes in topography and zoned to create opportunities for outdoor learning activities. An existing wooded area was integrated and replanted with native plants. Tucked within this restored landscape is a collection of outdoor learning areas connected by meandering pathways.

These areas include a library amphitheater, an art balcony, a covered outdoor commons, and environmental learning paths and demonstration deck. To complete the site-work, after demolition of the existing buildings, new play-fields, with direct access from the gym and lockers, were terraced into the newly reclaimed sloping landscape.

**Public Areas** The centrally located library on the 2nd floor and Commons are designed to accommodate use by members of the local community and can be zoned jointly or independently to accommodate functions of different sizes and nature. Their placement and organization reinforces the relationship between learning and socialization by creating a flex zone between them that blurs the separation of their
uses. Finishes and furnishings in the Commons area are designed to be attractive and comfortable for both middle-schoolers and adults, zoned for easy community use with the academic wing able to be closed off from the main public use spaces.

Personalized Learning Communities In accordance with and support of the school’s mission statement, the organization of the core academic portions of the school are subdivided into personal learning communities. This smaller scale enables the creation of a more intimate social environment within the larger school, allowing 5 teachers to interact with 150 students, and supports the goals of providing a more relevant and developmentally appropriate, safe middle school experience for Alderwood’s students.

In line with the thinking that there needs to be flexibility to accommodate more collaborative and multi-disciplinary curricula in the future, an organization based around Personal Learning Communities (PLC) works well for both the traditional departmental model and multi-disciplinary models. The PLC expands the traditional range of learning settings beyond the classroom. Each PLC consists of a shared learning area, three humanities classrooms, a science room, a learning support room, and a small conference room opening directly to the shared-use space. Outdoor learning areas are connected both visually and physically to the PLCs through the extensive use of glazing and stairways.

The Shared Area, located off the central circulation spine, is thought of as an active social and work space that serves as the heart of each PLC. Potential activities include socialization, large group instruction, computer research and media access at a cyberbar, and individual or small group work. They can be expanded into the learning support spaces by opening large overhead doors, providing the flexibility to respond to changing needs over time. Each Shared-use area also includes a cyberbar, situated between the PLC and the adjacent corridor, consisting of a flexible combination of seating, display, teaching, and storage opportunities.
"The Nest": Library with views

Main Entry for Community Gathering
Community Reception  The new facility has been extremely well received by the community- “This just makes sense!” said a parent touring the new school.' Parents feel welcomed, with an open and inviting entry area, transparent office and the adjacent Commons, often sitting at the Commons café tables outside the Library.

Developmentally appropriate  “The design has definitely met the goal of supporting the unique developmental needs of the middle school age group through a balance of attractive, varied, and welcoming social space, with ease of supervision.”

Student Behavior  Dramatic improvement in overall student behavior: “Seventh graders at the old building were so unruly that lunch was run as a virtual lock-down. The same students as eighth graders at the new building required no special supervision at lunch. They became extremely well–behaved.”

Teacher Morale  A tenured teaching staff that began the process somewhat reluctant to change, embraced their new facility for its ability to support the cultural heritage of the AMS community’s past, while offering new opportunities in teaching and learning that their old space did not allow.

Safety and Security  Easy supervision throughout the school adds to a feeling amongst the staff of safety and security, a significant change from the way students were in the old building. A main entry that is both secure, and welcoming, has relieved both workload and anxieties for the school’s administrative staff.

Building Organization  Building on the success of personalized learning communities constructed in the District’s first middle school (Meadowdale Middle School), Alderwood is organized around six clusters of PLCs. Each PLC accommodates general education programs and science, and provides amenities that afford expanded learning opportunities for different learning styles.

Personal Learning Communities  The District’s commitment to providing small learning communities in all of their schools, along with the Meadowdale vision of creating personal learning communities to address the particular needs of the emerging adolescent for an intimate, relevant and personal learning experience is highly successful in the new school.

Shared Area as the center of the PLC  The way the Shared Area has been designed works in creating a central area in each PLC that is comfortable, with great northern views and daylight.

Atmosphere as a Learning Community  Students naturally migrate to the space in between classes, while the organization creates an atmosphere of real expectations- it’s okay to relax and socialize in between classes, but during class time it’s a place where work is to be done. Some students have said, “This is more like a college than a middle school.” Being surrounded by five teaching spaces with lots of internal glazing provides an adequate amount of passive supervision without feeling claustrophobic. The large windows on the north side provide a relief from containment.

Connected Community  The cyberbar has succeeded in defining the Shared Area and creating a proper sense of place, without feeling cut-off from the rest of the school, and yet screening distraction from the overall circulation, a nice balance between separation and integration.

Variety of Use  At any given period of the day, there is a real variety of use of the Shared Areas, from being full with students engaged in teamwork from several classes, some working with a tutor, or a single student doing make-up work, to some Shared Areas where most of activity is happening within the teaching spaces. One surprise benefit of the Shared Area is the use of the space for mini-mainstreaming of special ed students by having them work in small groups in the Shared Area where they feel they are part of the rest of the student population.
The loose arrangement of the Shared Areas in each PLC has allowed space for a gradual curriculum evolution, from traditional departmental organization through partial integration & allowing for further development.

Classrooms. Bay window Moving throughout the building, there is a wide variety in how the bay window area is used, a testament to their flexibility. In some the furnishing is set up for informal activity, using bench seating, others set up like a seminar area for small group work. One teacher uses it as an incentive, rewarding students with being able to spend class time there working by the large window. Other teachers are using the area just as part of the larger classroom.

Teaching and learning modalities In discussion with teachers throughout the building, there is a real variety in how the teachers are interacting with the kids. Some classes are in full cooperative learning mode, with several teams working on their own in the Shared Area. Many teachers have migrated to a permanent set-up of four-student grouping. Some use a combination: with the flexibility of the triangular desk, one teacher starts with them in rows, “so I can see all of their faces” and at certain times has every other row rotate, so that they change to a configuration of teams of four. Teachers are learning that they don’t need to be front and center.

Integrated Science The location of being integrated in each of the PLCs, while sharing prep room space with another science room has not eroded the feeling of being a science department.

Tech Lab / STEM. Central Location Gives Technology Labs/STEM front and center prominence and provides a way to showcase the interesting work and ignite student’s interest in the STEM program. Says Tom Pirie: “It’s way better than the old model of putting the tech programs in the back 40. And the new equipment like the wind tunnel and laser cutter are the way to go, allowing kids to combine work on the computer with hands-on fabrication and testing.”