LEGACY PEAK ELEMENTARY
AND THE CENTER FOR MODERN LEARNING

Association for Learning Environments | LEsolutions Awards 2019
Executive Summary:

Legacy Peak Elementary School, along with its companion facility, the Center for Modern Learning, is the cornerstone project for an 83-acre master-planned PK-12 campus in eastern Colorado Springs. The PK-5 school serves 600 elementary students from the immediate area. The Center for Modern Learning attracts students from across the district with several programs, including a Homeschool Academy, the Academy Online High School, and specialized district labs for Robotics, Cybersecurity and Coding classes. It is also home to the wildly popular field trip destination, The Challenger Learning Center, a NASA-based space mission simulator. The new school is meant to establish a synergy of interests between students on-campus and district wide. It also sets a precedent of multi-age collaboration that will extend to the rest of campus as the master plan is built out with Middle and High Schools.

School & Community Engagement:

Intensely-focused user group meetings were held for the individual entities who would ultimately share a home. Sustainable Design and 21st Century Learning Environments were overarching themes. Challenges included creating a school with character in a relatively new community neighborhood and laying out the master plan so as to establish a safe and synergistic campus.

There was not just one Design Advisory Group, but rather each entity was treated as a significant contributor to the design. In-depth tours were taken of each existing facility (including the homeschool academy, the Challenger Learning Center, and the Academy Online high school). These meetings helped inform adjacencies and reveal amenities that might be shared between programs. For example, it was determined that the district Robotics Program could share a workshop with the Challenger Learning Center. Tours of recently completed facilities helped inform the design of the elementary school and assist with establishing a flexible school environment.

Careful collaboration with the developer of the surrounding community led the team to consider safe walkable paths to the campus, where crossings should happen, as well as building materials that were compatible with the immediate neighborhood and with future plans.

Educational Environment:

The school’s leadership means to implement an educational program that supplements the traditional classroom model with a large variety of alternative learning spaces. These spaces are meant to support project-based learning, small group collaboration, and cross-pollination of different student interests and grade level explorations. This model is further reinforced by the addition of the Center for Modern Learning, which supports even more cross-pollination from around the school district.

The school is designed for a high degree of flexibility. Corridor break-out areas accommodate various learning styles separate from the classrooms. A Learning Commons with moveable furniture allows for diversity of groups and ages to make use of the space. The Online High School includes a multi-purpose wet lab for Science and Art, and the Homeschool Academy is organized around a dual-function music room and performance commons.

Design Goals:

- Enable synergies between students of different ages and interests, on campus and across the district
- Every space is a learning space
- Flexible to meet the needs of all learners while maintaining function for all grade levels.
- A District and a Community amenity
Physical Environment:

The building design is angled on site to take advantage of the stunning mountain views, especially from the Learning Commons and the front door. The building presents 3 aesthetically similar entries facing three directions, to welcome students arriving from the main elementary drop-off, from elsewhere in the district, and from the future schools on the campus.

Three distinct entries face three parking & arrival areas. The entry canopies share details but are different in color. The shapes of the columns and beams supporting the canopies become a visual theme. While there are 3 separate entries, they each have a separately monitored and secured vestibules for security.

Partially exposed steel in the main entry hall establishes a rhythm used to organize ceilings, lights and other details. In combination with varying arrangements of window openings, the composition is intended to distinguish the Elementary School from the Center for Modern Learning, while at the same time having them appear to be part of the same design and campus.

The height of the building is configured so that the 2-story portions are located more to the interior of the site, stepping up further away from the surrounding neighborhood. This allows the areas closest to the neighbors to be of a smaller scale, with more warm and playful entrances.

Sustainable features of the facility include using durable materials such as polished concrete floors, masonry exterior, and beetle kill pine with ceramic tile for interior wainscot. Classroom wings are oriented for good daylighting, and generous natural light contributes to energy-efficiency and student performance.

Results of the Process & Project:

This project has set the stage for the future development of a true community resource, through planning an entire educational campus in a park-like setting. With safe and easy connections between schools and grade levels, and a welcoming configuration for the neighborhood and the district, the Legacy Peak project promises a future of synergy and collaboration for all students in the area.

The Legacy Peak Facility provides for community needs on several levels. Neighborhood access to the Elementary’s central hall amenities, such as learning commons, makerspace, art room, cafeteria, and gym is accomplished without visitors passing through the classroom wings. By solving this security issue, the school can be more open to neighborhood visitors after-hours. It can more often act as a community center by hosting events in the larger central assembly spaces.

The master-planned K-12 Campus will ultimately lay out a wide selection of athletic fields, outdoor classrooms, tennis courts and playgrounds between the Elementary, Middle and High Schools. These will all be walkable within the campus since the parking is arranged in an outer perimeter ring.

The Center for Modern Learning, connected to but separate from the Elementary, provides an array of programs that are available to the entire district and to the Colorado Springs community at large. It includes labs for Robotics, Cybersecurity and Coding. The programs receive students from all over the school district at different grade levels. They also support after-school groups and clubs. The Academy Online High School and the Homeschool Academy allow for families seeking alternative education to have support from the resources of the school district.
The site master plan is arranged to capture the most views for each of the schools, existing and future.
Shared break-out areas allow students and teachers to meet in small groups outside of class and serve to divide the corridors into smaller lengths.
The learning commons can be reconfigured based on various class sizes, age groups and instruction taking place.
A school-wide resource, the elementary school makerspace facilitates hands-on learning.
The cafeteria space is multi-functional and leads directly to the playgrounds outside.
Natural materials combined with bold graphics mark significant zones such as entries to common spaces.
The robotics lab accommodates both design and build functions for the district-wide program.
The Online High School Space is easily adaptable and caters to a more informal atmosphere.
The wet lab of the Center for Modern Learning allows for multiple class types (art, science) and flows into the rest of the space rather than being cordoned off.
The main axis orients toward mountain views and provides a colorful, welcoming arrival.
The outdoor amenities of the school are located toward the center of campus in order to contribute ultimately to a park-like setting shared by each of three planned school buildings.