



CAMPUS REPLACEMENT FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

# A NEW GRIFFIN MIDDLE SCHOOL

*"Transformation is often more about unlearning than learning."*

*Richard Rohr*



# VISION





# Executive Summary

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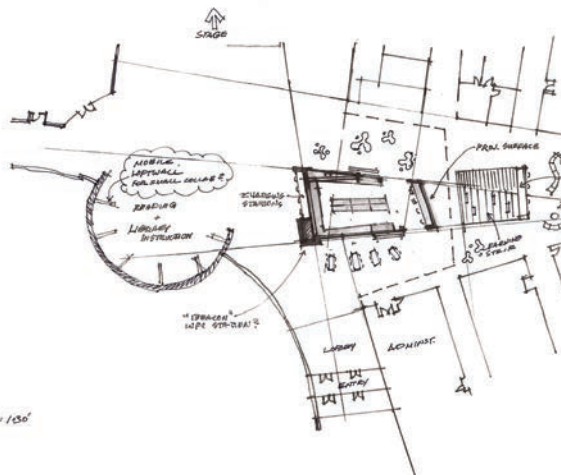
**THE PHYSICAL APPEARANCE OF** and necessity for space in future schools were two of the school district's primary scoring criteria in a design competition that challenged architecture firms to design the "middle school of the future." And with nominal clarification, the district tested designers' creativity and foresight into a learning environment that abandons the misconceptions of yesterday's classrooms, and embraces the possibilities of future learning applications. The project would incorporate the district's new, progressive learning and teaching approach; and discard misconceptions about what a school is, and what activities in a school should be.





# CREATIVE TENSION

In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge explains that there is creative energy in the gap between vision and current reality. He uses the analogy of a rubber band:



*"Imagine a rubber band, stretched between your vision and current reality. When stretched, the rubber band creates tension, representing the tension between vision and current reality. What does tension seek? Resolution or release. There are only two possible ways for the tension to resolve itself: Pull reality toward the vision, or pull the vision toward reality. Which occurs will depend on whether we hold steady to the vision."*







**THE DISTRICT LEADERSHIP TEAM** decided to stretch the limitations of today's teaching paradigm (reality) towards their vision. During the 2011-2012 school year, the district underwent a transformative process to determine its aspirations for educating 52,000 students in the 21st Century. Aptly named the Strategic Design Initiative, the process established guiding principles for the design of the new Griffin Middle School, setting goals for implementation and final outcome.

To effectively accomplish the lofty objectives of the Strategic Design Initiative, the district engaged the community. They hosted community summits to start the conversation, followed by focus groups of students, parents, community members and district staff to expand on ideas and challenge old paradigms. Additionally, they published an online survey to gather additional community feedback, as they wanted the process to be transparent and inclusive. The process engaged more than 5,000 stakeholders and took nine months to complete.













**THE RESULT** of the Strategic Design Initiative was a shift from the traditional, 20th Century teaching model to a student-centered, personalized instruction model enhanced by increased use of technology and a project-based learning pedagogical model. Core beliefs established by the process included:

—→ Every student is uniquely capable and deserves to be challenged every day.

—→ Uninhibited learning depends on a safe, nurturing, inclusive and flexible environment.

—→ An educated citizenry is essential for equal opportunity and a prosperous society.

—→ Meaningful and relevant work engages students in profound learning.

—→ Critical thinking and problem solving today are necessary for students to be equipped for future challenges.

—→ Genuine transformation requires disruptive innovation.

—→ Education is the shared responsibility of the community.



## GOALS

### *BASED ON STRATEGIC DESIGN*

A priority goal of the Strategic Design Initiative was to facilitate a completely inclusive design process. The district wanted to proactively engage campus stakeholders and develop a whole new set of educational specifications (specs) to guide learning applications that would set the path forward for the new school. It was also critical that the new specs remain in strict alignment with the core beliefs generated by the Strategic Design Initiative. The new specs also served as guiding principles for the ensuing design charrette process – an interactive series of programming and design meetings that involved administrators, teachers, community business owners, city council members, parents of middle school students, and parents of elementary students (who would represent the first class to occupy the new school).

Another important goal for the project was that, once complete, the school would “look and behave” like no other campus in the district. Because of the fast growth nature of its surrounding communities, the district had been repeating prototype schools for many years without ever taking time to engage and reflect on the needs of the learning community. So, with area growth slowing, the district formalized the Strategic Design Initiative, which enabled them to identify how their learning environments needed to change. They also felt that, with its rich history and strong position as a community school, the existing campus needed to be completely replaced; and this posed numerous opportunities to completely modernize and set a new path forward for the community campus. In its existing condition, the district felt the campus was very limiting to the innovative programs, passionate staff and enthusiastic students that occupied its classrooms.





### **THE ORIGINAL MORRIS T. GRIFFIN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

opened its doors in August 1982. The first middle school in the community of The Colony, Griffin Middle School (Griffin) quickly became a community centerpiece that students and families attended and visited with pride. However, Griffin's footprint possessed the limitations of a 20th century campus, with small classrooms containing minimal natural light and no technology. The masonry walls were filled with vermiculite, so any renovation work would require a significant, very expensive asbestos remediation process. With the exception of a handful of surface mounted data outlets and a few minor finish upgrades, Griffin had been operating as a next generation learning environment in a 20th century shell.

Over the years, growth in the City of The Colony skyrocketed, and Griffin's student population quickly exceeded its allocated building space. In order to best serve students and meet the demands of its population, the district studied many options offered by the planning team. In the end, the limitations and associated costs of an "extreme campus makeover" simply did not offer a viable solution. So the district decided to demolish and rebuild on the same site.





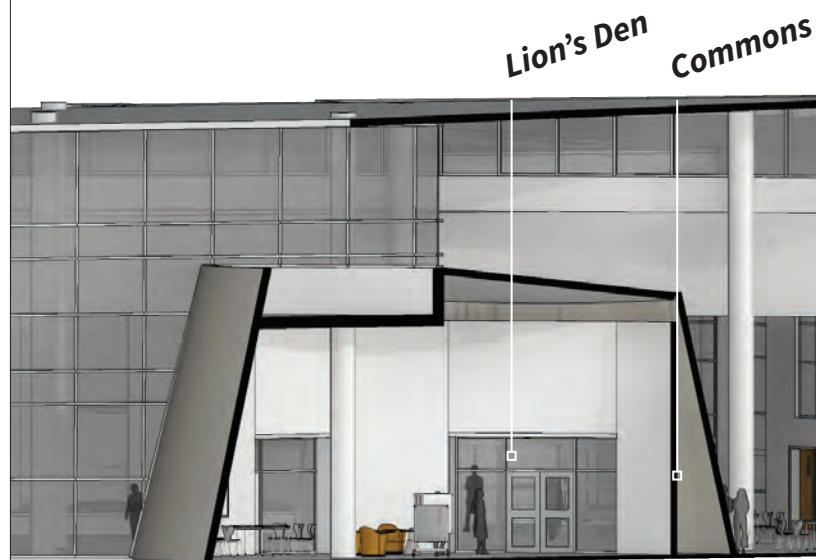
# OUTCOMES

**The strategic planning and design process for this Next Generation campus had many outcomes:**

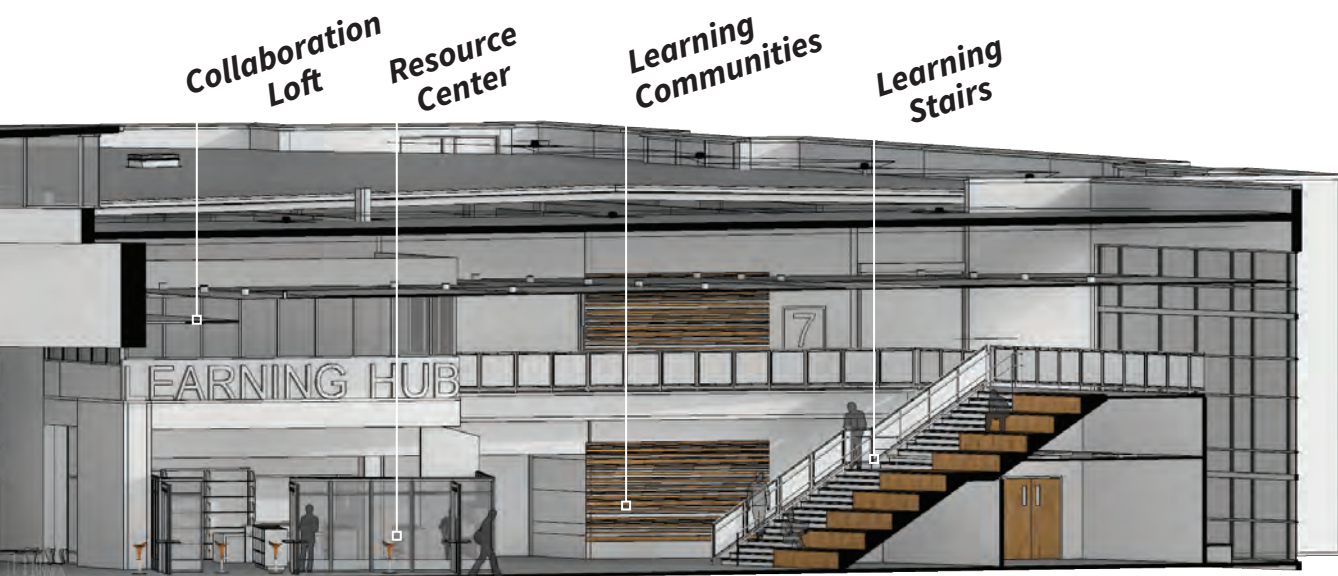
——→ The new school effectively serves as an active learning environment filled with opportunities for learning and collaboration, engagement and inquiry. The environment fully supports the first goal of the Strategic Design Initiative - “Provide all learners with safe, nurturing, inclusive and flexible learning environments.”

——→ The school reflects a total shift in the way teachers design their teaching. Excited by the design of the new facility, the staff worked for two years to reimagine their classrooms in order to take advantage of the new program.

——→ The building has been completely reinvented as a dynamic community centerpiece. Through a strong partnership with the City of The Colony (and thanks to its location adjacent to a city-owned police station and park), Griffin continues to thrive as a very active neighborhood hub supporting ongoing community and student activities after hours (and on weekends). The sharing of parking and open green spaces between the city and school district also play a vital role in the campus’ successful function within the community.







**LEARNING HUB SECTION**



# SCOPE







# Campus Replacement

**IN EARLY 2012**, the district assembled a Facilities Assessment Committee comprised of campus staff, community members, architects and engineers. The committee was tasked with walking all campuses, assessing the physical condition of each building, then prioritizing and packaging every work item into a capital improvement program (recommendation) to be evaluated by the Board of Trustees. At the end of the four-month process, the committee's top recommendation was the replacement of Griffin Middle School. At 121,000 square feet, the antiquated facility had become overcrowded; existing spaces did not meet staff and student needs; and the campus did not comply with requirements dictated by state facility standards (classrooms, science labs, library and computer areas were all undersized).

Board trustees chose to demolish the existing school and construct a new facility. The planning team was tasked with designing a new middle school that would completely support and compliment the core beliefs established by the district's Strategic Design Initiative. The school was to be built on the same site as the existing school and would remain completely operational during construction. Additionally, the football field had to be relocated and completely operational while the new school was being constructed.

**TOTAL AREA:** 181,298 SF

2 stories

1,000 students

Grades 6 – 8

**TOTAL ACRES:** 16.8

**CONSTRUCTION** *(Only)*

**BUDGET:** \$39,000,000

**FINAL CONSTRUCTION COST:**

\$37,092,153



# COMMUNITY

## ENGAGEMENT



**PRIOR TO DISCUSSIONS** about project design, the district embarked on a nine-month long process that culminated in a formalized Strategic Design Initiative. The Strategic Design Initiative established a formal set of criteria that shapes how learning occurs in the district. The process to establish the criteria was essential to achieving the desired paradigm shift, as the district knew it needed to rethink pedagogical delivery. This transformative process transpired during the 2011-2012 school year in order to pursue aspirations for educating 52,000 students in the 21st Century.

### PHASE I

The district hosted a series of community summits in September 2011 to begin conversations and share findings and directions with the educational community about the Strategic Design Initiative. Business owners, parents, students, community patrons and district staff met in focus groups.

### PHASE II

Focus groups provided responses to an online survey that gathered additional input about how teaching and learning should occur in the district.

### PHASE III

Committee members for the Strategic Design Initiative developed a system of new core beliefs, a vision, mission and goals from the information gathered from the community summits, focus groups and survey responses.

### PHASE IV

Sub-committees were formed to create an action plan that would address the goals. Over 5,000 people participated in the design process and, to this day, continue to provide proactive support for the plan. After approval from the Strategic Design Team, the Board of Trustees approved the Strategic Design Plan in June 2012.





## SURVEY RESPONSES

### Vision

——→ All of our students enjoy thriving, productive lives in a future they create.

### Mission

——→ Students, staff and community design and implement a learning organization that provides engaging, innovative experiences every day.

### Goals

——→ Provide all learners with safe, nurturing, inclusive and flexible learning environments.

——→ Engage learners through the use of technological tools to access, create and share content as well as collaborate with other learners throughout the world.

——→ Reframe state readiness standards in a way that leads to profound learning and has meaning and value for students.

——→ Create flexible systems that result in a learning organization supported by innovative and engaged staff.



——→ Continuously involve our diverse community, staff and students to use their strengths, resources and talents to provide engaging, innovative experiences for all learners.

——→ Develop and implement meaningful, varied assessments that inform and inspire students and educators for continuous improvement and growth in a way that transforms learning and teaching.

——→ Design an accountability system that transcends state/national mandates and reflects local values and expectations.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

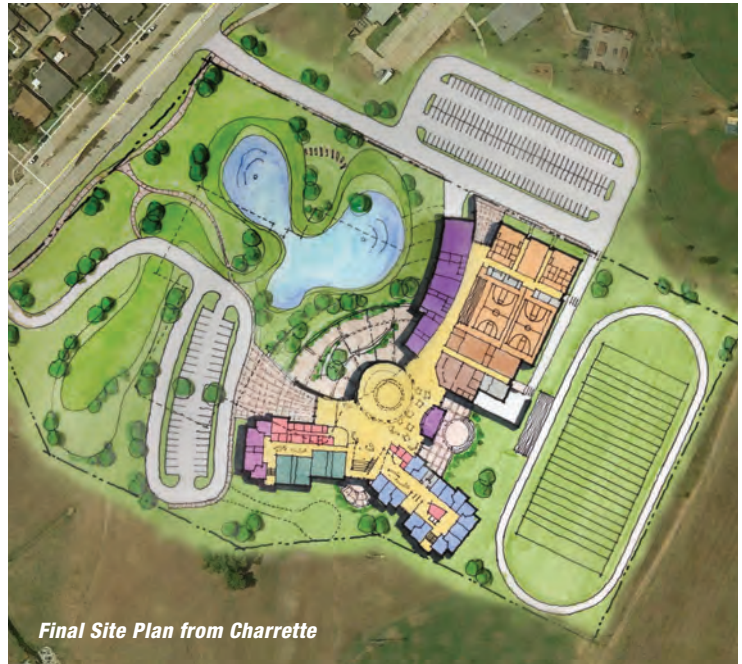
## DESIGN PROCESS

**THE DESIGN PROCESS** proactively engaged stakeholders and encouraged them to participate in an active manner. Armed with the Strategic Design Initiative, the design team met with campus personnel and walked the existing facility. Conversations with teachers and administrators explored desired outcomes for the new facility, as well as challenges with the existing building. Coupled with evidence-based research on Next Generation learning environments' pedagogy and technologies, the discussions resulted in the creation of educational specifications for the new campus.

After initial meetings with campus staff, the design team facilitated a two-day design charrette in the existing school's library. More than 60 participants in the charrette process included campus staff, students and parents, as well as city council members, city planning officials and community business owners. In addition, parents of elementary school students representing the first sixth grade class at the new school came to share their input.

The charrette process kicked off with a review of the school's history and a glimpse into the school's future. Some of the teachers participating in the process represented the school's alum, and were now parents of students attending the school. They shared their experiences of the past and experiences of their students today. As part of the visioning process, participants answered questions about technology, community involvement, outdoor learning, and library spaces.

Hosting the design charrette in the school itself also afforded the design team opportunities to interact and gain input from students. Students rotated through the charrette work space during math period, where they interacted with members of the design team and provided insightful opinions



about what they thought their building should look like. As they saw the facility take shape, one sixth grade student exclaimed, "I think I can see my future." Students were also able to engage designers with questions about architecture, engineering and design; so the charrette actually doubled as an effective tool in revealing potential career pathways for interested students.

The Strategic Design Initiative and design charrette processes brought incredible value to the community, as they had never been given an opportunity to participate in the design of their community schools. The district had previously replaced an elementary school across a small creek from the project site, but the process was different – they simply repeated an existing elementary footprint and the community had no say. A change in district leadership provided a strong belief in the success of involving community in all design processes.







# LEARN







# Educational Environment

**THE DESIGN OF THE NEW MIDDLE SCHOOL** supports the work of the Strategic Design Initiative and its core belief that all schools should be true **learning organizations**. Peter Senge defines a learning organization as ***“AN ORGANIZATION THAT IS CONTINUALLY EXPANDING ITS CAPACITY TO CREATE ITS FUTURE.”*** He explains:



- Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human.
- Through learning we recreate ourselves.
- Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do.
- Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it.
- Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life.





**THE DESIGN TEAM MASTERMINDED** a learning environment that enabled a learning organization's core disciplines of personal mastery, shared vision and team learning to thrive. By creating small learning communities within the school to support and nurture individual academic strengths, the design enables students to capitalize on self-sustaining growth. Within each community or learning organization, learners tackle individual learning activities as part of a team, which promotes mastery. In addition, the design capitalizes on the concept of lifelong learning by promoting opportunities for this to occur at all levels throughout the campus – for students, teachers, administrators, and parents. These spaces assume a variety of forms and shapes – from the large learning hub where many convene to learn and work together, to quiet areas (like the nook above the library) where opportunities to immerse oneself in learning is more private and personal.

Students learn through a variety of instructional programs, but the two most significant pedagogies are project-based learning and blended learning. During the strategic design process, students were asked “How do you like to learn?” From the answers received (and based on the parallel work of the strategic design team), the district decided that an active learning model supported by team activities would be the best form of curriculum delivery for students. Project-based learning accommodates this method, as well as supplying students with a relevant skill-set to succeed in today's society. To further support this, the district launched its 1:X initiative to provide students with a personalized learning experience. 1:X is a transformative installation of a flexible learning environment that gives students tools to access, create, share and collaborate as digital citizens.

The design of the new middle school successfully establishes a seamless synergy between the two pedagogical delivery methods and applicable learning spaces:

————→ Each classroom contains sliding glass doors that open to a central work space within each learning community. The doors remain open most of the day to permit seamless navigation between classrooms and team areas. Learning is constant, as it spills out to the team areas where students and teachers collaborate on projects in a responsive diversity of groupings and settings. The glass doors double as display areas, as students can write on them to showcase project work. Also, classrooms share a common operable wall, which opens to permit team collaboration outside classroom groups. The doors are marker boards, so they also provide alternative surfaces for writing and projection. They can also be completely expanded or sectioned off, which creates the possibility of organizing small team spaces.





Ms Chase

6th Math

lary +

Common Language  
The language of mathematics is a language of symbols and numbers. It is a language that is used to describe the world around us. It is a language that is used to solve problems and to communicate with others. It is a language that is used to build a better world.

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Classroom and team area furniture is completely agile, maximizing ease of movement and flexible functionality. Inherently, the mobility of the furniture permits a variety of settings to be created and enhances the fluid transition between classroom team areas. As part of a hands-on charrette facilitated by the design team, furniture selections were made by students and teachers. Demonstration products provided an opportunity for the design team to review and discuss a multitude of configurations functional capabilities.

——→ Classrooms and support areas contain a very robust technology infrastructure. Students gain access to presentation mediums through connecting their devices to interactive projectors. The 1:X initiative allows for a variety of devices to be used (i.e. iPads, Chrome Books, Macs, etc.) so students are working with the technology they feel most comfortable with, or the one best suited for the task at hand. Team areas are also equipped with a robust wireless access system and interactive projectors.

——→ The design of each learning community is identical so they can react to and accommodate changing school organization models. This allows for organization by grade levels, project teams, or common interest areas. It also enables the building to respond to fluctuating student populations.

Teachers receive constant training and support in the creation of flexible learning environments. The strategic design team provides support to all campuses to ensure maximum use of the Next Generation learning environment.



# THE LEARNING HUB

Understanding that every student learns differently, the new building is designed to be a complete hub for learning, where all white spaces are used to support teaching and learning. From this concept, the design team incorporated a central learning hub in the school that supports multiple activities. The hub combines cafeteria, library, presentation space, and collaboration spaces. It serves as a centralized school activity hub used continuously throughout the day. The different components enable students to engage in learning activities that best suit their interests and offers settings that best support students' individual learning styles and preferences.

## LEARNING HUB COMPONENTS

### 1 *Resource Center*

This kiosk houses the entire book collection for the campus and serves as a place to ask questions for anything related to learning and technology. Modeled much like a Genius bar at an Apple store, this kiosk is bustling with activity and inquiry all day long. This area is flanked and surrounded by a variety of seating areas, including soft seating areas for casual collaboration.



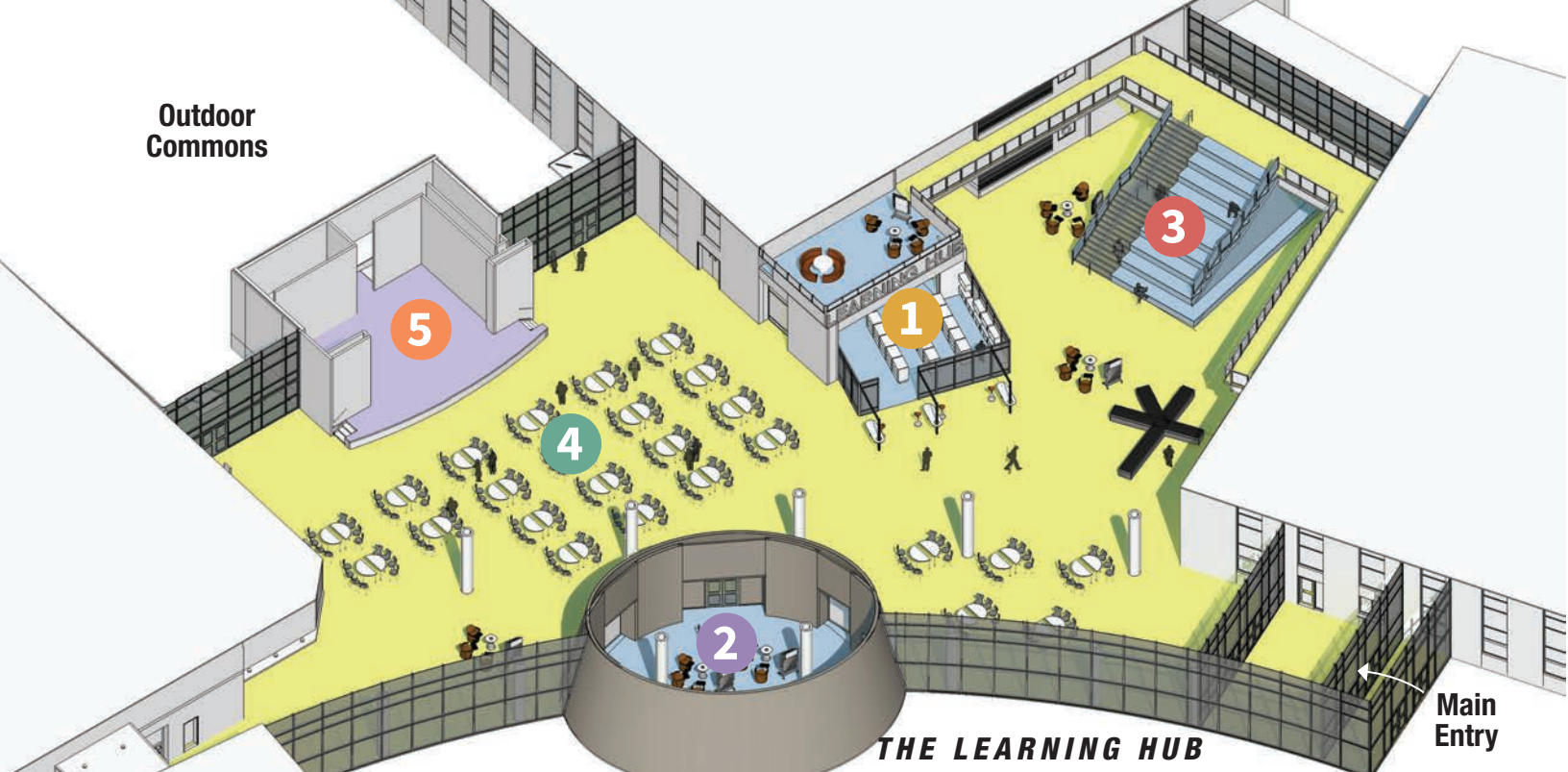
### 2 *Lion's Den*

Central to the building's glass filled façade is the Lion's Den, a quiet gathering space for collaboration. This room is technology rich and acoustically enhanced to provide a quieter setting for meetings and class sessions. The objective for this space is to provide a quieter, more subdued setting within the learning hub that supports certain activities where additional noise could be a distraction. Furniture in the space is collaborative in nature, with marker board tops that enable teams to work seamlessly together





## Outdoor Commons



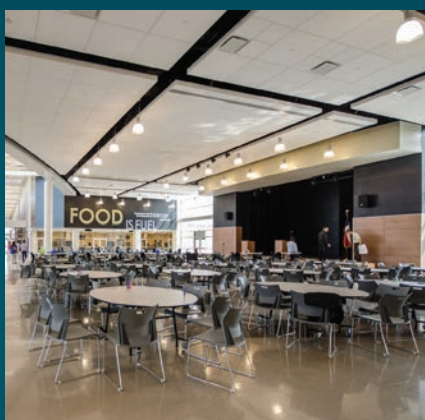
### 3 Learning Stairs

The three learning communities are adjoined by learning stairs in the middle. This space is constantly occupied by students as they traverse through the facility during the day. This space accommodates presentations and class meetings, but is most often used as a comfortable learning locale for students. This area also lends itself to a variety of student activities and has become (in many ways) the heart of the building.



### 4 Commons & 5 Stage

The school's cafeteria and serving lines are important elements of the learning hub, bringing students and staff together in an active setting. Enhanced by graphics that support the importance of nutrition, the open area includes different types of furniture that enable students to select their meal setting depending on daily needs. This natural light filled space is an extension of the learning communities, providing for a variety of activity zones including group presentations, performances, project based investigation and discovery.



The school's main performance stage is located in the learning hub. Students eat lunch and study in the hub while other students simultaneously build sets on stage, or rehearse performances for a play. The visibility of the space puts fine arts front and center to the campus. Students enjoy musical performances or rehearsals while they eat, making the environment truly a backdrop for artistic expression and creativity. This exposure to fine arts also encourages serendipitous learning throughout each day.





***“IT’S NOT ONLY UNLIKE ANY OTHER  
SCHOOL IN THE DISTRICT...”***

***IT’S UNLIKE ANY OTHER  
SCHOOL IN THE COUNTRY.”***

***Project Architect***

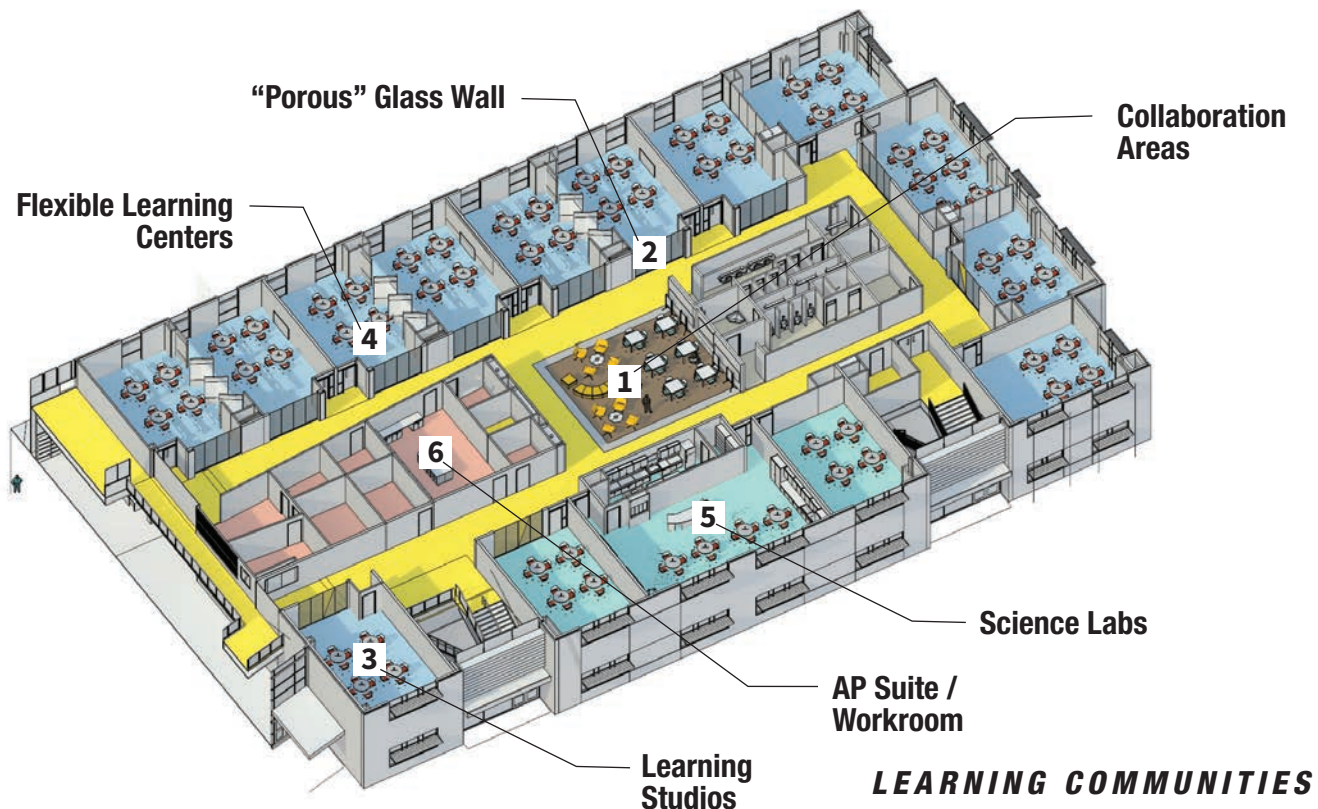


HOME OF THE PRIDE



# LEARNING COMMUNITIES

**IN ORDER TO EMPHASIZE** the concept of **LEARNING ORGANIZATIONS**, the school is organized around small learning communities. This configuration allows the 1,000 student school to be divided into three individual learning communities of no more than 350 students. Each community is organized around a central team area that permits collaboration and team development; and each learning community is led by an administrative duo of assistant principal and counselor. The communities provide safe, nurturing environments for both students and staff. Open collaboration spaces are located next to an enclosed workroom area, so additional choices are provided for students and teachers in their planning. All classrooms open to the collaboration spaces, again providing multiple options for student and teacher meeting arrangements.





The shared spaces, shared activities, and shared goals of the learning communities enhance opportunities for teaming and permit project-based learning to thrive. Teachers no longer “own” their classrooms, but rather share collaboration spaces with students and work rooms in support of their own professional learning community. These communities are served by a robust technology infrastructure including wireless access systems and interactive displays that support the districts 1:X initiative. Activities are further supported by agile furniture that is easy to rearrange. Markerboard-topped tables, light tables and chairs allow students to move and work in teams. Soft, curved seating gives students the choice of alternative work areas, and the finishes and colors help frame working settings within the building. Naturally lit, acoustically enhanced spaces containing folding walls that expand learning areas to promote collaboration create an environment that completely compliments the school’s support-based model for lifelong learners who enjoy thriving, productive lives in a future they create.

## ***SUPPORTING LEARNING COMMUNITIES***

**THE LEARNING COMMUNITIES** are complimented by activities and programs that help students become healthy and well rounded. Griffin Middle School also includes a state-of-the-art fine arts suite, career and technology suite, and full athletics and PE spaces - all of which afford students diverse learning opportunities. These programs support learning happening throughout the school and accommodate students’ diverse learning styles. These programs are directly accessible from the learning hub, so students traveling through the hub (to get to these programs) are exposed to (and frequently participate in) activities happening in the hub. These programs also spill out to the outdoor areas via art gardens and athletic fields. Thanks to an agreement with the City of The Colony, students also have access to the city’s baseball and softball fields.





# ATTRIBUTES







# Physical Environment

The design is a modern reinterpretation of the original school, incorporating the latest knowledge and evidence-based design attributes of a built environment that positively impacts learning and student performance. During the design charrette, participants evaluated different building features, functions and characteristics in order to arrive at the final design. During this evaluation, some questions answered included (answers in **bold**):

1. What is the primary organizing feature of the school?

a. A central linear hallway

**b. A Student community center**

c. A courtyard with outdoor learning areas.

2. What qualities would you most appreciate about a new Middle School?

**a. Informal and active**

b. Formal and direct

c. Open and interactive

3. How are classrooms arranged?

a. Classrooms are banked together by departments with a centralized administration.

**b. Interdisciplinary learning studios with their own administration.**

4. Which best describes a classroom for Griffin?

a. A classroom is highly focused with limited interaction among individuals.

**b. A classroom adaptable for multiple learning styles and activities.**

5. What is the role of a learning center in the school?

a. A place primarily for books, computers for reference and, quiet areas for study.

**b. A multi-activity space that acts as the hub of the building.**

**c. An active, technology rich space that is independent of other spaces in the school.**

6. In what manner will technology delivery occur within the school and curriculum?

a. Technology shall be limited to computer labs & library.

b. An integrated approach with technology throughout the school in more formalized settings.

**c. Technology is ubiquitous using devices and media in all settings.**



7. What is the student and public perception within the building?

- a. Cool, clean and consistent
- b. Bright and colorful

**c. Bold and contemporary**

8. How does the community engage in the school?

- a. The center should be designed for limited community access.

**b. The school is designed to welcome and reflect the community.**

9. What will the entry of the school convey to students & community?

- a. Strong and Formal
- b. Relaxed and Welcoming

**c. Engaging and Dynamic**

Modeling the design to address these findings, the design team got inspiration from contemporary architecture. With large expanses of glass and a curved front face that brings the outdoors into the building, the new school incorporates an exterior color palette that mimics the original campus in order to preserve its relationship with the neighborhood. The interior environment is saturated with natural light by large curtain wall systems that frame the learning hub. The curved façade serves as a backdrop for the main circulation spine of the building, tying the athletics/ fine arts/CTE wing to the learning hub, and ultimately to the learning stairs leading to the learning communities. These spaces all showcase high ceilings that maximize scale and brightness, and LED lighting provides effective and efficient lighting throughout.

The learning communities anchor the curve and represent a two story rectangular building with classroom spaces situated along exterior walls to permit natural light. Each community has a clearly marked entrance with an administrative suite located immediately inside. Security doors anchor each community entrance to enable immediate lockdown in the event of a security threat. The learning communities overlook and provide access to an adjacent creek, allowing science programs to utilize the creek for exploration. Art labs also have direct access to the exterior and creek area for enhanced project activities.





## ***HOW DOES THE FACILITY FIT WITHIN THE LARGER CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY?***

Through a partnership with the City of The Colony, the campus enjoys an enhanced site that ties seamlessly into the adjacent city park. Careful consideration was given to the site design, as the new school would be constructed behind the existing building, setting it back from the road. The charrette committee felt strongly that the setback was a positive, as it effectively creates a park-like setting in front of the building by tying it to the city park. Most students that attend Griffin walk to school - either alone or accompanied by a parent - so this park creates a welcoming setting for those commuting by foot each morning and afternoon. This setback also allows the taller building structure to be seen at a distance from the road, bringing it to scale in the neighborhood setting. The park in front of the school ties into the city park on one side and links to an elementary school across the creek. Understanding that most students walk to and from school, the design team added a bridge across the creek to improve safety for students traveling between schools, and fostering the opportunity for vertical teaming and collaboration between the two campuses.

The park setting also provides plentiful opportunities for outdoor learning. The landscaping is clean and seating areas provide outdoor spaces for students and staff to work on projects. The spaces are also linked to the creek, accommodating a variety of outdoor science and art activities. Students and teachers work on projects that require experimentation of local environmental characteristics such as flora and botany. The interior Lion's Den is expressed as a circular feature on the exterior of the building. It naturally creates two class areas on its sides.

Collaboration with the city has also afforded the school access to the city's fields and recreation center. It's location adjacent to these facilities, as well as the

police department and senior center, has created additional opportunities for continued collaboration between the two entities. The city benefits from increased parking areas after hours and on weekends (when school is not in operation).

From a student's perspective, the active learning environment supports the district's commitment to provide flexible learning environments for all students to succeed. Many students that attend Griffin come from the district's newest elementary school, Camey Elementary, which is located less than two miles away. Camey was also a replacement school designed to complement the core beliefs of the district's Strategic Design Initiative. Familiar with the flexibility of learning environments, students attending both schools are equipped with the tools necessary for collaborative, project-based learning success and digital citizenship for a lifetime of learning. As a community, citizens of The Colony (fastest growing city in the district) have access to both facilities and remain actively involved in their child's progression from primary to secondary education.

In response to its geographic location, the design of the new school also incorporates safe rooms (within the fine arts areas) that can house the entire school population in the event of a weather disaster (such as a tornado). The City of The Colony is located in "tornado alley," and concerns with glass areas were addressed during the charrette. Members of the committee were not willing to sacrifice natural light and the enhanced learning environment, so the design team provided safe rooms in the fine arts areas. These rooms provide additional safety for all of the school's community.







## HOW DOES THE PROJECT INSPIRE AND MOTIVATE?

Several participants in the design charrette expressed a desire for a state-of-the-art middle school that is warm, welcoming and inspiring. Teachers that attended the original school shared memories of the old facility and challenged designers to create a lively place where new, exciting memories could be created. As the charrette concluded, these same teachers expressed satisfaction with the outcome; some even teared up with happiness over the result. They felt the new campus delivers on its promise to serve as a hub of inspiration, creativity and innovation for current students, as well as many generations of students to come. Some design elements in the final solution that enabled the project to achieve such results include:

—> An engaging school entrance with a large sweeping curve to welcome students and community into the building and offer attractively scaled, open activity spaces.

—> High ceiling areas with ceiling clouds for improved acoustics and visual excitement.

—> Wide circulation spaces and hallways lined with student work display areas enhance building navigation and seamless transition between spaces.

—> Large expanses of natural glass connect the indoors to outdoor learning areas.

—> Outdoor learning areas extend learning outside the building walls and provide connection to the community and neighborhood.

—> Shared team areas and collaboration spaces allow students choice, and activities in those areas foster spontaneous learning opportunities.

—> Learning stairs are the nerve center of the school with classes, student groups and organizations utilizing them continuously throughout the day. The stairs are highlighted by a contemporary lighting fixture that is creatively haphazard in design, signaling opportunity for unanticipated and unexpected learning to occur.

—> The learning hub is a bustling activity center where learning opportunities abound. This area showcases motivational graphics that inspire students in their daily journey through the building. These graphics include quotes and messages about school pride.

—> Materials and finishes were specifically selected to simultaneously enhance the learning environment while inspiring school pride. A combination of black and gold hues highlight the school and provide definition to shared learning areas.

—> Technology displays sprinkled throughout the school serve as learning kiosks, as well as provide critical information about daily campus events and news.











# RESULTS

*"Collaboration spaces provide learning alternatives to the regular classroom environment. Students enjoy having another place to work, either independently, with a group or as a whole class."*

**Karen Hames**  
Griffin Middle School  
ELAR/Dance





# Results of the Process & Project

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**THE NEW GRIFFIN MIDDLE SCHOOL** excels at achieving its educational goals and objectives by providing an active learning environment that enables alternative pedagogies and learning modalities to materialize. The new school is designed to promote social interaction and collaboration, as these activities provide a strong foundation for learning in the 21st Century. Len Vygotsky's research on *social development proclaims that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition*. He also strongly suggests that social interaction brings about community, which plays a central role in making meaning. Capitalizing on the importance of social interaction in the learning process, the new Griffin is designed around three major concepts:

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## ***DESIGNED FOR COLLABORATION***

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Griffin Middle School is populated with many learning-centered spaces that facilitate collaboration. Dispersed throughout the facility are spaces that encourage collaboration and team work, supporting the platform for project-based learning. Walls that have traditionally divided learning spaces have been "blurred" with the use of sliding doors and glass. School activities that have traditionally been separated (i.e. dining and reading) are now conjoined in an active learning environment that fosters interaction and conversation. Traditional school furniture has been replaced with comfortable, lightweight furniture

that permits flexible seating arrangements to be re-worked with ease in a short period of time. These spaces also harness the collaborative nature of technology. To support the district's 1:X initiative, great effort went into providing a platform where students could use any device (including their own) to jointly develop content with those in the learning organization, and then seamlessly share the outcome on various projection outlets. Such exploration, design, creation, and sharing is precisely the kind of technology use that impacts student learning.

***THE LEARNING PROCESS WAS NEVER  
COMPROMISED AS THE NEW SCHOOL  
WAS CONSTRUCTED...***







# DESIGNED FOR INQUIRY

Human beings are inherently curious from birth – always searching for answers. Traditional school models promote the notion that learning is best delivered from teacher to student, with no consideration of information flowing the other way – student to teacher. They also discourage the possibility that students may learn from their peers. These school models have yielded stagnant environments where students ask few questions and miss opportunities to learn by exploration. At the new Griffin Middle School, learning spaces are designed for inquiry, so there is nominal demarcation between teacher and student spaces. In addition, there is no defined “front of the room,” as walls open up and learning spills into all areas of the school. Learning spaces are enhanced by a strong connection to the outdoors where exploration and discovery support daily learning. Lastly, the design of the learning hub, with overlapping activities that are typically siloed in schools, allows students to be actively exposed to learning opportunities throughout their daily journey.

## ***DESIGNED FOR MOVEMENT***

The new school is designed to support the notion that learning is active, and a student’s ability to move only enhances education. By incorporating walls and furniture that move, students are encouraged to be active and alert during the day. They are also encouraged to navigate elements such as the learning stairs and seek comfort in the diverse settings of the building. The learning environments at Griffin enable staff and students to mobilize into learning, and work as a team in the many shared spaces throughout the facility.













## **HOW DOES THE PROJECT ACHIEVE SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS?**

District leadership charged the design team with creating a school like no other in the district. They wanted the process to be inclusive and emphasize goals and outcomes generated by the Strategic Design Initiative. Griffin is the result of such a process; and it is not only a facility different than any other in the district – it is a facility unlike any other in the country.

Building on the success of the Strategic Design Initiative, the design process for the new school was highly inclusive. The community actively participated by helping to establish a vision and goals for the new campus; and they were instrumental in bridging the design of the school to community foresight. Teachers and staff shared the limitations of the existing school, as well as their lofty goals for changing educational delivery in the new school. Students expressed their desire for a school that was all about them – their learning, their friends and their future. Lastly, designers became part of the Griffin community, owning the goals and vision of the group as their own; and delivering a student-centered learning environment that is active, technology rich, and ultimately - inspirational.

Although a major project challenge, educational operations at the existing campus were not compromised by ongoing construction of the new school. This was a priority for the school district, as they had no options for relocating students. Through a collaborative planning process, the team comprised of district staff, campus representatives, architects and contractor devised a plan for phased construction that kept school running and met all deadlines. In order to effectively move student activities to the new school, phasing first included the construction and turnover of the new gymnasiums; and then the demolition of the old gym to allocate space for new classrooms. The planning team took great care to ensure utilities were not disconnected and maximize student safety when traveling to/from the old school to the new gym. In the end, the transition to the new school was successful and campus occupants now enjoy learning in an environment they created.



## HOW DOES THE PROJECT ACHIEVE COMMUNITY GOALS?

The community-based organization behind the design and planning process for the new school was a tremendous success. The district recognized a need for the school replacement via a community-based Facilities Assessment Committee. This committee recommended the project as a top priority to district leadership. They recognized that the core beliefs of the district's Strategic Design Initiative would be impossible to emulate in the existing structure; and as such, they knew the community would be better served in a new school.

The project provides a community school linked to the city through shared park and athletics facilities. Previously occupied by the old building, the park setting in front of the new school now provides a pleasant, inviting setting for students and visitors during school days and weekends. The fast growth

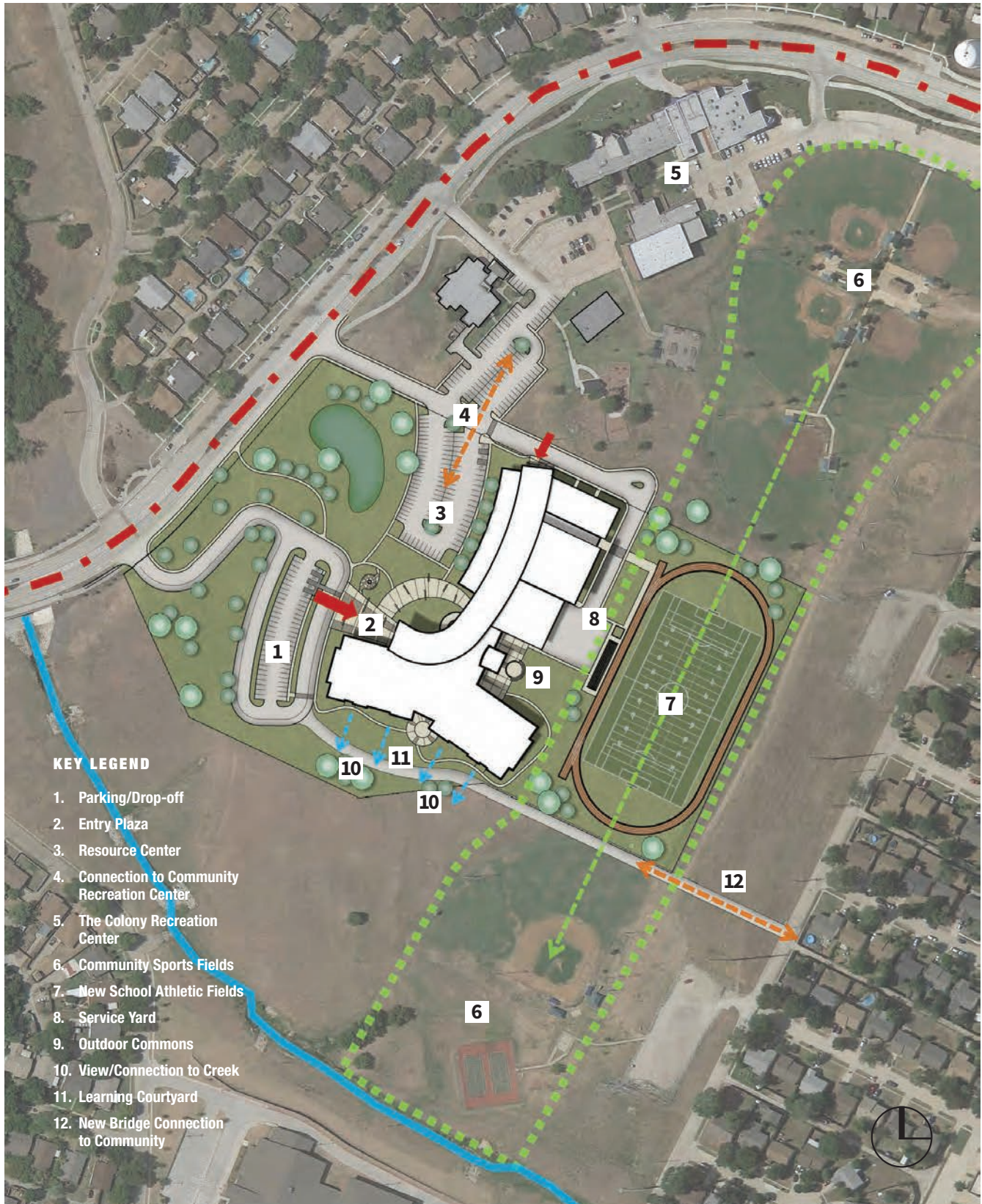
experienced by the city due to its booming economy dictated the need for a larger facility. The new campus enjoys an increased capacity for additional students, with ample space to support learning activities and extracurricular activities (dance, music and athletics). As a community school, the fact that the new school was designed and constructed without having to relocate the old school has afforded its students additional learning opportunities with local businesses. The new school serves as a true *learning organization*, offering staff and students an engaging, innovative teaching and learning environment every day.





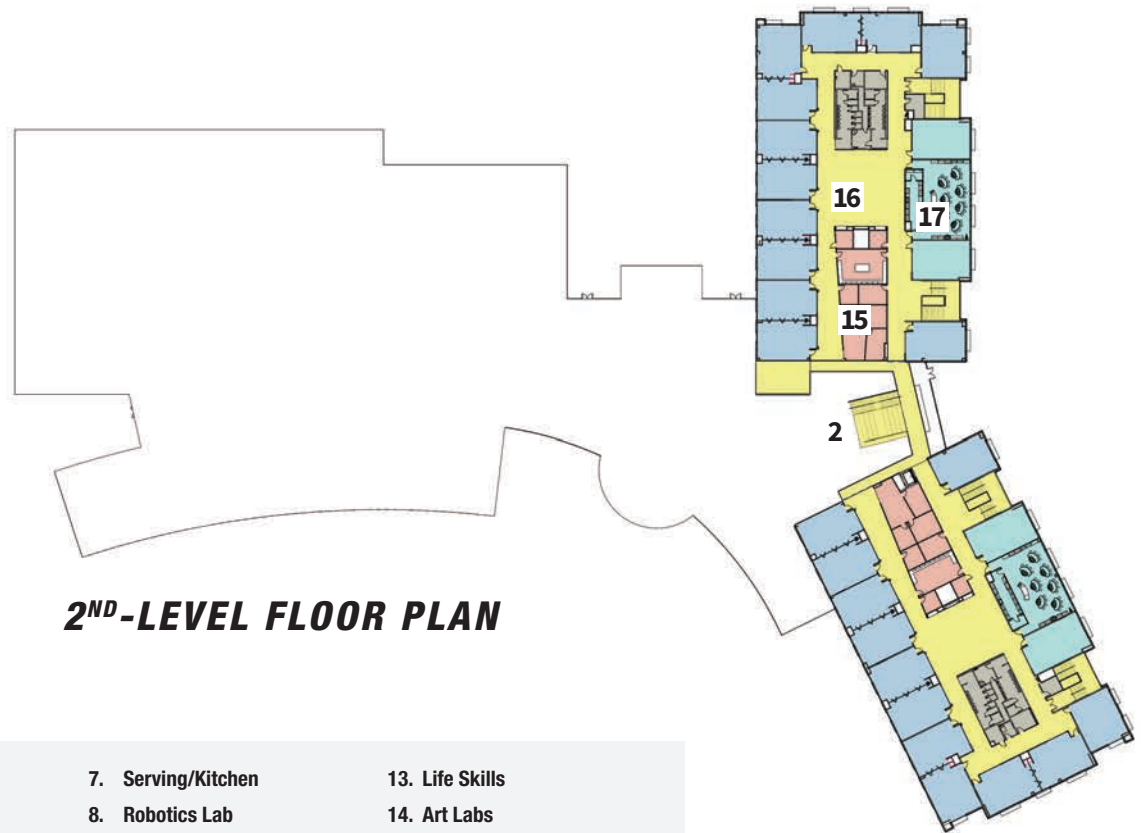






## SITE PLAN

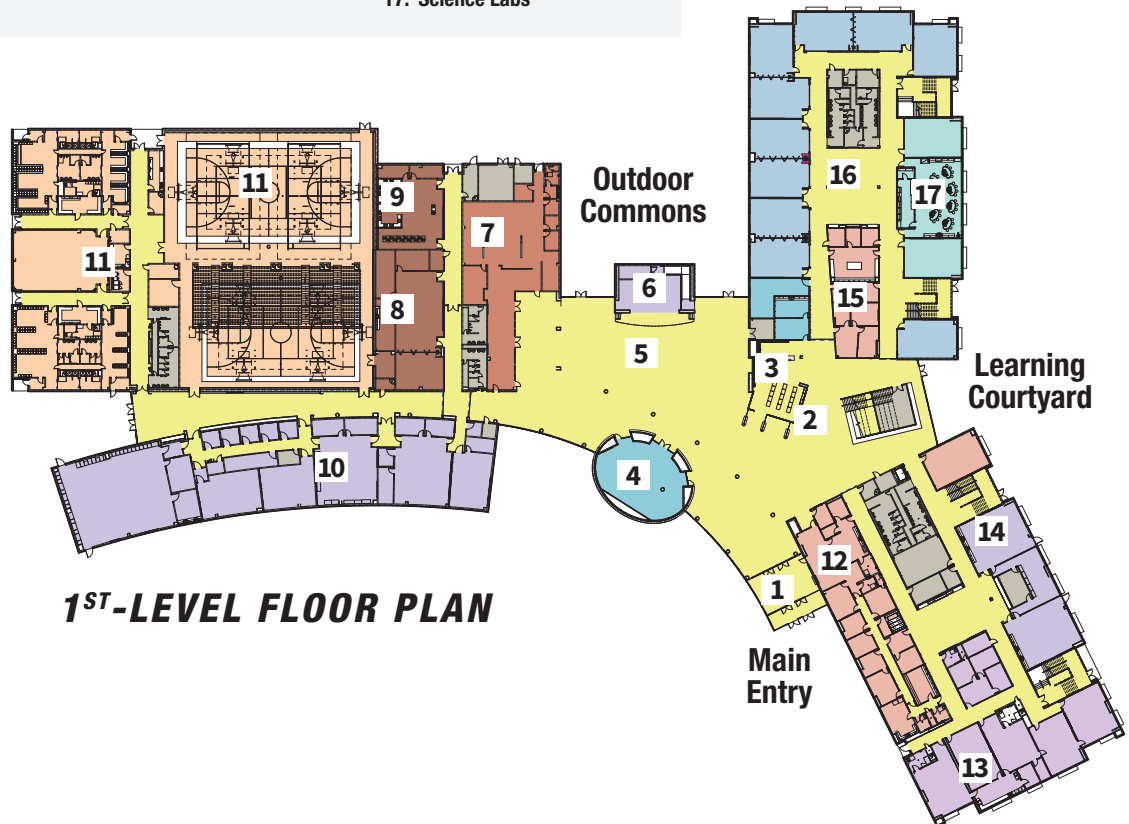




**2<sup>ND</sup>-LEVEL FLOOR PLAN**

**KEY LEGEND**

- |                       |                         |  |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Security Vestibule | 7. Serving/Kitchen      | 13. Life Skills  |
| 2. Learning Hub       | 8. Robotics Lab         | 14. Art Labs   |
| 3. Resource Center    | 9. Culinary Lab         | 15. AP Suite   |
| 4. Lion's Den         | 10. Music + Drama Rooms | 16. Learning Communities, Learning Studios, Collaboration Area |
| 5. Commons            | 11. Athletics           | 17. Science Labs   |
| 6. Stage              | 12. Administration      |  |



**1<sup>ST</sup>-LEVEL FLOOR PLAN**