

# GRANT HIGH SCHOOL MODERNIZATION

PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS | PORTLAND, OREGON





# GRANT HIGH SCHOOL MODERNIZATION

For this \$138 million, 1,800 student modernization of a 1920's historically significant school set within Grant Park in Portland, Oregon, a highly successful public engagement process uncovered how Grant students were experiencing social injustices that persisted solely based on the building's architecture and organization – despite the school's progressive commitment to equity.

GOALS

The historic structure disadvantaged students by lower socio-economic status, color, and gender identity. To address these issues, the design team focused on leading initiatives to:

- > Provide 100% all-access, inclusive restrooms
- > Excavate five disconnected, lacking-daylight basements
- > Create fluid, internal connectivity between all levels and spaces
- > Marry yesterday's historical character with tomorrow's best-practice teaching spaces
- > Heal the relationship with Grant Park

OUTCOMES

Grant's redesign offers a study in how bold spatial solutions can overcome; creating learning environments that intentionally address legacies of disadvantage through design; and how, by designing for all, Grant has realized a more physical, racial, socioeconomic, and gender-inclusive community in which all students feel welcome, accepted, and connected.

Now a revitalized, equitable home for learning, the modernization of Grant High School demonstrates that restoratively addressing hidden bias will empower students to build inclusive communities; uplifting the next generation through the power of architecture.



SCOPE OF  
WORK AND  
BUDGET



OWNER  
Portland  
Public  
Schools

SITE AREA  
10.2 acres

BUILDING  
AREA  
293,360 SF

GRADES  
HOUSED  
9-12

STUDENT  
CAPACITY  
1,800+

SF PER  
PUPIL  
163 SF

OCCUPANCY  
DATE  
Fall 2019

CONSTRUCTION  
COST  
\$138M

COST PER  
SQUARE FOOT  
\$470





# School & Community Engagement



# AN ENGAGED COMMUNITY

Originally built in 1923, Grant High School is located in Northeast Portland, nestled within Grant Park. The school and park have formed the core of the community since the early twentieth century.

The neighborhood immediately surrounding the school can be characterized as historic, single-family homes on quiet residential streets with a mature tree canopy. Nearby is the bustling Hollywood District with shopping, dining, and entertainment options, bisected by two, key cross-town thoroughfares.

Grant High School’s entry portico is referred to as the “front porch” of the neighborhood, flanked on either side by broad front lawns where the community has gathered for almost a century. On the west side of the building, the high school shares fields with Grant Park and beyond that is large, open green space. Early in the design process, there was a community-wide call to eradicate the boundary and buildings that had, over time, infilled the campus and severed the connection between the two public institutions.



GRANT HIGH SCHOOL MODERNIZATION



The Grant High School modernization will result in an **inclusive learning environment that fosters strong, productive relationships among students, teachers, and the community** through inspiring, flexible spaces that honor the history while supporting students’ success in college, career, and life.

**DESIGN ADVISORY GROUP  
COMMUNITY CHARTER**



**We’re modernizing Grant and we need your help!**

**Saturday, October 24th**  
9 a.m. - Noon @ Grant High School Library  
**PUBLIC DESIGN WORKSHOP**

**FREE Breakfast at 8:30 a.m.**

**? What should the future Grant look and feel like?  
What parts of the campus work well? What parts don't?  
How can Grant better support students and families?**

**Help shape your student’s future school!**

Free childcare provided and translation available in Spanish.



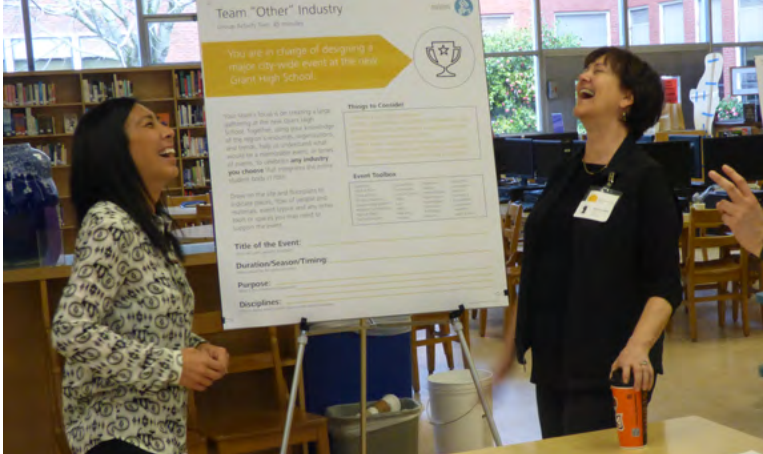
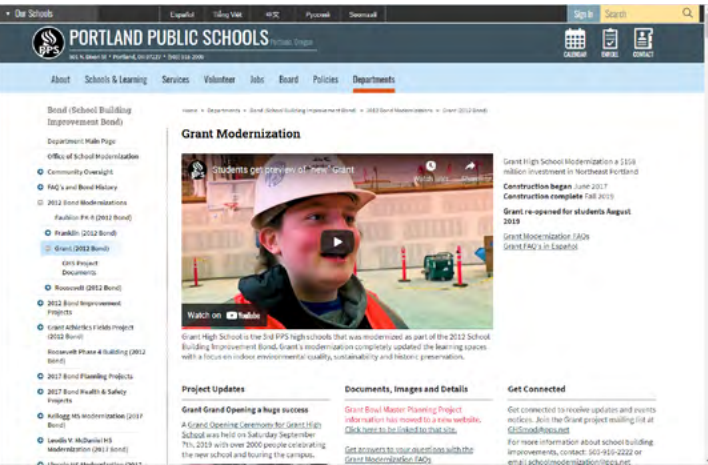
# ACTIVE AND COMMITTED STAKEHOLDERS

The public engagement process consistently drew community participation of well over 100 people, and was followed by in-depth stakeholder engagement, over 100+ user group meetings, and countless student outreach sessions.

Stakeholders included not only the Design Advisory Group (DAG) made up of 20+ members, including the principal, students, teachers, parents, neighbors, local businesses, alumni, and a school board member, but also neighborhood activists, alumni, Portland Parks and Recreation (PP&R), the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), local neighborhood associations, and the general community-at-large. Also included were school partners such as Head Start, Providence Health System, and other wrap-around support service providers.

**The inclusive, transparent process and myriad of engagement tools ensured that all voices were heard and considered in the outcome.** Digital tools, such as websites and social media platforms, were used to collect information as well as share it. Multiple hands-on engagement activities also helped stakeholders and the community share their thoughts and identify and resolve issues in collaboration with the design team.

Strong relationships based on trust, respect, and mutual support were developed between the students, the school, the school district, and the design team, resulting in a successful design outcome.



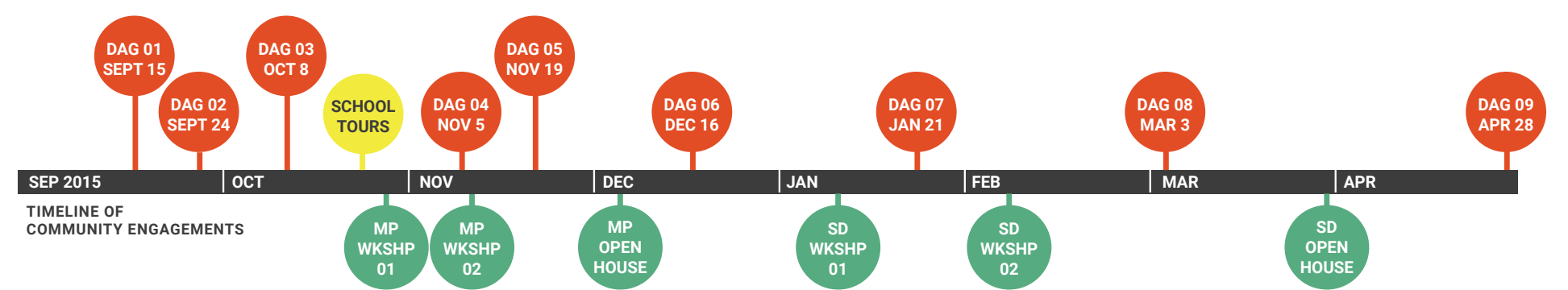
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

100+ STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS

12 DESIGN ADVISORY MEETINGS

4 COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

2 COMMUNITY OPEN HOUSES





CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

PROJECT CHALLENGES

Although the original 1920's Grant High School buildings were beautiful, prominent, historic structures, the student experience was rife with challenges, including:

- A campus without a heart
- A large, comprehensive high school program overflowing a tight, 10-acre site
- Five disconnected, daylight-lacking basements which were home to 30% of the learning spaces and the cafeteria for free or reduced lunch recipients
- Lack of connectivity between multiple levels and spaces
- Accessibility and equity challenges
- Double-loaded corridors
- Significant lack of maintenance
- Environmental material concerns
- Seismic challenges

PROJECT ASSETS

While the environmental footprint of new construction typically dominates discussions about sustainability goals, the successful reuse of existing facilities provides the biggest impact in regard to resource preservation.

Grant's modernization exemplifies how the reuse of an existing structure dominated by a traditional, double-loaded corridor can result in an effective, modern, collaborative high school learning environment that is not compromised, but instead enriched by its historic structure and character.

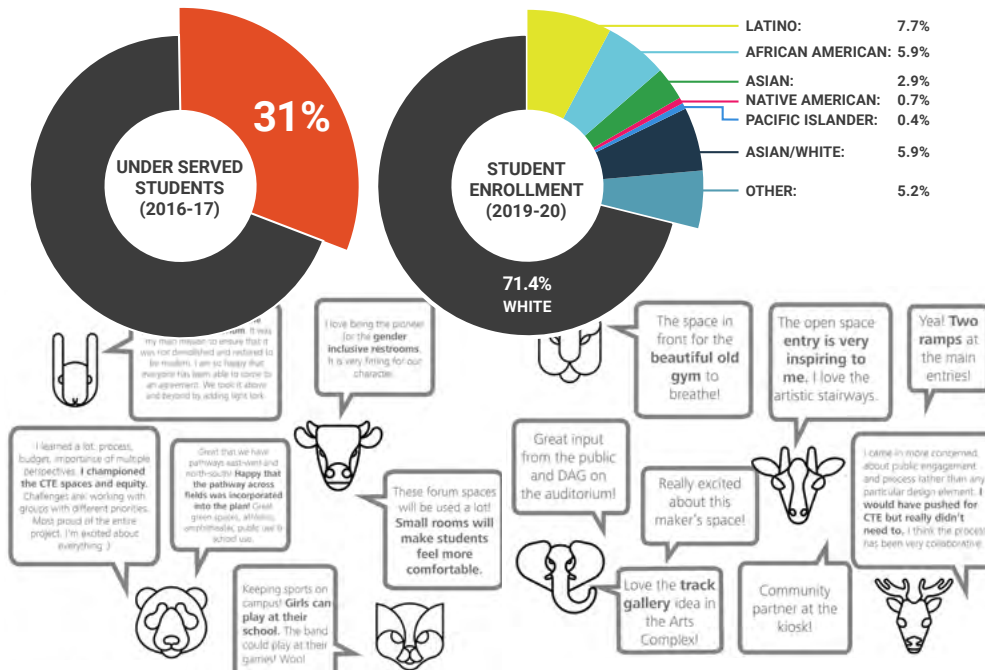
Project assets included:

- Grant Park
- An existing historic structure
- An active community and student body
- An engaged school leadership team
- A strong social justice curriculum and focus
- A desire to re-imagine with the rebuild



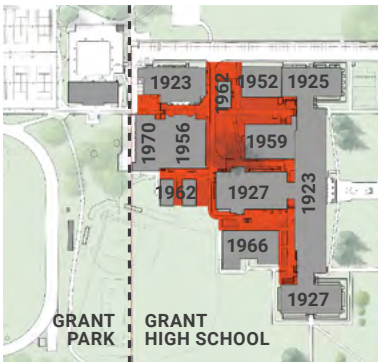
RACIAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC DIVIDE

The original cafeteria was located in the basement and carried decades-old, unwanted legacies of social inequity as students on free or reduced meals were sent to the dark and dreary basement, while students that could afford it were eating upstairs, outside, or off-campus at will.



“The lowest levels were taught in the basement and the higher levels were taught in the upper floors...**one of the things you see between those two classes is a huge socioeconomic rift.**”  
**DYLAN LEEMAN,**  
GRANT HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER

“I’m always the one bringing it up, and I’ve asked people... ‘Why don’t you eat in the cafeteria?’...we all know the real reason...**it’s an ugly truth that people don’t want to really think about.**”  
**ZACH LEONARD,**  
CLASS OF 2017



**VALUE OF PROCESS AND PROJECT TO COMMUNITY AT LARGE**  
With the school mission “**Every Student Matters, Every Student Succeeds,**” the passionate and involved community called for the modernization of the school to address legacy inadequacies for the students furthest from educational justice.







# Educational Environment



## EDUCATIONAL VISION AND GOALS

By drawing on individual strengths of all participants, the community of practice surrounding Grant kindled designing for equity, inclusion, and social justice from initiation to completion, in support of Grant's goal to see improved learning outcomes and a positive school climate.

As a school, Grant believes their students should **LEAD**: **Live** to learn, **Engage** with purpose, **Advocate** for self and others, **Demonstrate** with passion; and they hold all members of their school community, as well as their building, to these expectations.

### Further project goals included:

- Sustain a student-centered approach, where all learners feel connected by celebrating diversity and inclusion.
- Design a building to inspire learning and serve as a place of possibility.
- Support the educational mission of Grant with a variety of flexible study and project spaces.
- Accommodate diverse teaching and learning styles to facilitate strong relationships.
- Create state-of-the-art facilities for all disciplines.
- Focus on college and career readiness, preparing students to enter the workforce as positive contributors of society.
- Blend indoor and outdoor spaces to enhance quality of learning environment and deepen our connection to nature.
- Rebuild the school as the heart of the community through services, opportunities, and recreation.
- Provide a variety of spaces to gather, eat and hangout throughout the campus.
- Honor the history of Grant by preserving architecturally and culturally significant features, without continuing legacies that should end.





# THE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS THE CURRICULUM

Originally designed in the typology of a double-loaded corridor, the design team added a 30-foot, three-story bay to the west side of the historic structure, removed or connected all the basements, and sculpted the ground plane to reveal new exterior courtyards that allow Grant Park to flow seamlessly onto campus.

When these elements combine, the resulting design fluidly connects all spaces and places, removes isolation, and replaces the existing double-loaded corridor arrangement with a **Collaboration Core** of modern learning spaces that are varied, day-lit, open, or acoustically enclosed, single, and multi-story, and have become collaborative resources for every learner and educator.

In addition, the design intentionally responded to the legacy of division. The once disjointed, inter-connectivity between the upper floors and a separate, dark stairwell to the submerged lower level has been replaced with a **three-story, open stair**, dramatically carved out of the center of the existing building. Tiered, multi-story gathering spaces flank the stair, and rise into **collaboration forums at either end**, further connecting all levels. This has transformed a school that had struggled with 30% of its learning environments in five disparate basement levels, into a unified, collaborative, cohesive, light-filled environment that serves all, with equity.

Not one, but **two commons** now serve food; further reducing the need for students accessing reduced-fare food to be limited to any one location. Campus is now filled at lunch, full of life, laughter, and has successfully brought students of all socioeconomic means back to the heart of campus, to eat and learn together.

Furthermore, CTE programs are not isolated but are instead integrated and distributed throughout campus. This creates opportunities for both curriculum and program expansion with better programmatic integration, while elevating and equalizing new, exciting pathways to career.

**HOW THE ENVIRONMENT SUPPORTS A VARIETY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES;**  
**HOW THE ENVIRONMENT IS ADAPTABLE AND FLEXIBLE**  
Descriptions and illustrations are represented on the following pages.



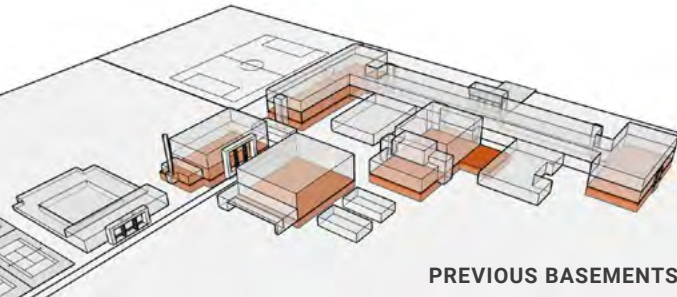


# REUNITING WITH GRANT PARK

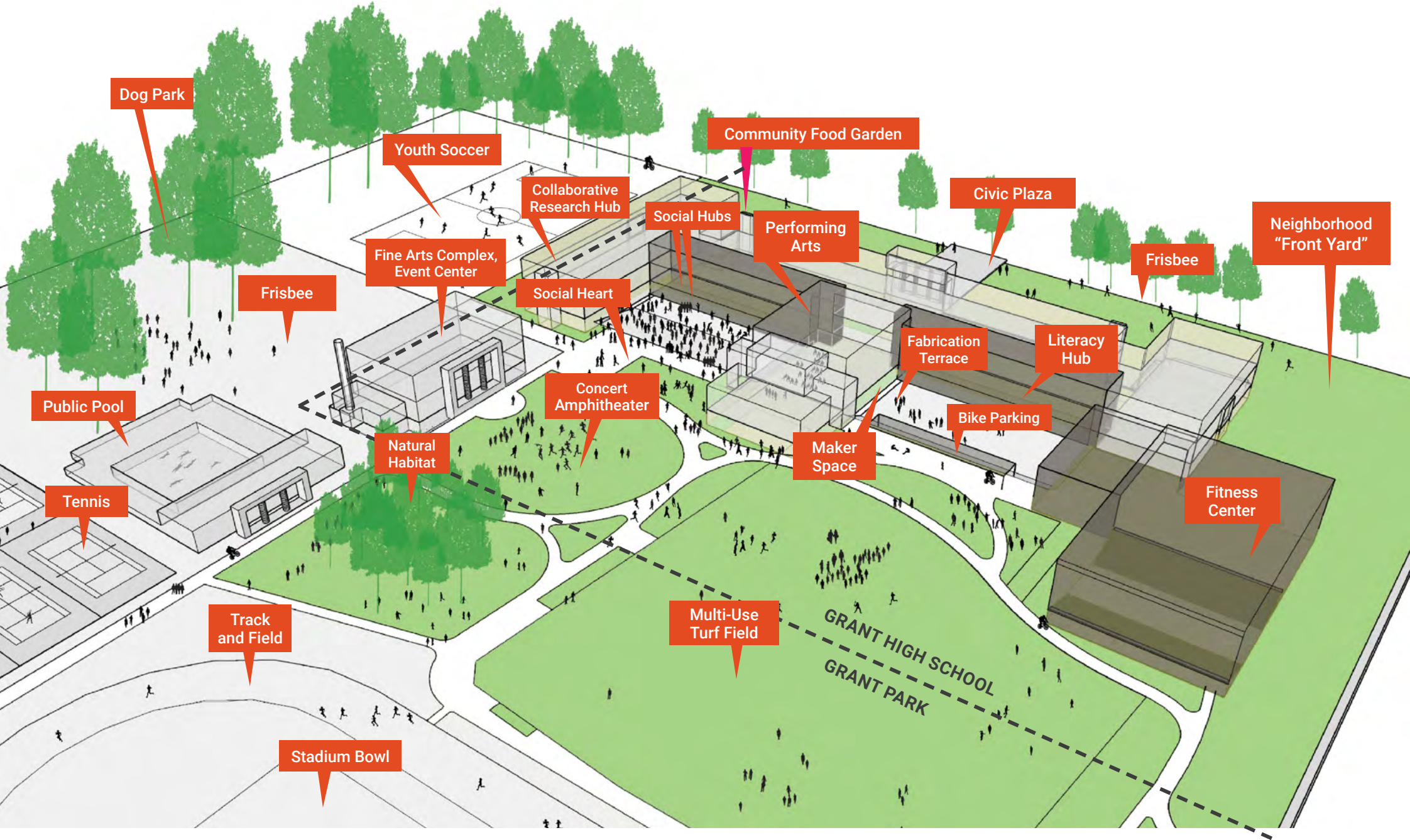
There was a community-wide call to eradicate the boundary and buildings that had, over time, infilled the space between the school and the park and severed the connection between the two public institutions.

The new campus design erases the line between where the park stops and the school begins. Replaced instead with cross-park connectivity, the design creates a new outdoor experiential framework; path, pool, sport, field, event space, art, public recreation, amphitheater, education and green space have become the new heart of the “park” and gem of the neighborhood.

While cues and ground-plane changes create clear definitions of what is public versus private during the school day, there are no fences or lockable gates to discourage activation, use, cultural events or community gathering.



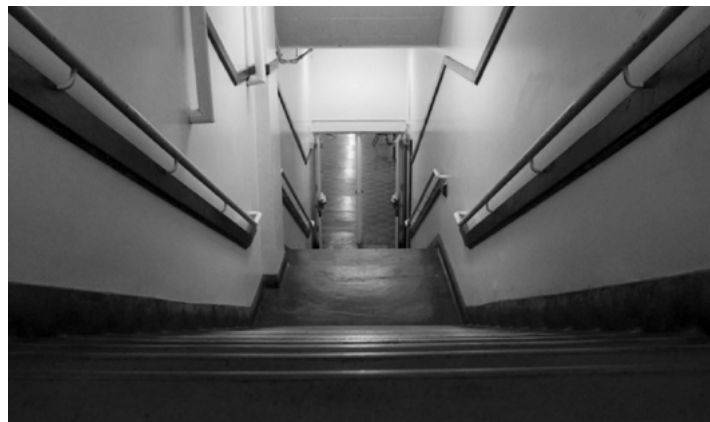
PREVIOUS BASEMENTS





## CONNECTIVITY BETWEEN ALL LEVELS

The lack of connectivity between the upper floors and a separate, dark stairway to the submerged lower level has been replaced with a 3-story, grand central stair, dramatically carved out of the center of the existing building.

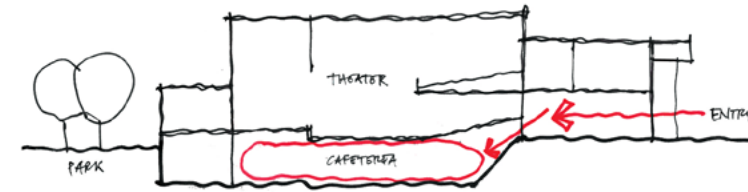




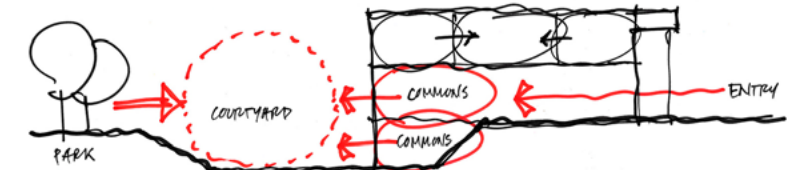
## TWO NEW COMMONS AND A COURTYARD

The original cafeteria was located in the daylight deprived, lowest level for students who received free or reduced price meals, while those who could afford it were eating upstairs, outside, or off-campus. Two new commons now provide a choice for students.

Created by excavating and sculpting the land, the lower level commons is a bright, daylit area for all to eat, socialize, and study, and it connects to the exterior courtyard where students can spill out to have lunch and hang out. The upper level commons overlooks the courtyard and Grant Park, and is connected to the park by way of a new, elevated walk.



PREVIOUS BASEMENT CAFETERIA



NEW LOWER AND UPPER COMMONS





## BRINGING IN THE LIGHT

Once a stately building, the exterior was in disrepair and the top 1/3 of the original, double-hung windows were infilled with solid panels. Bringing natural daylight back into all interior spaces was a high priority for the students and staff.

The design team brought back the grandeur of the original windows with energy-efficient and operable replicas of the original design. Energy-efficient light fixtures, along with new systems, equipment, and technology also help create a comfortable and modern learning environment.





## COLLABORATION FORUMS

Enclosed stairways, solid hallways, and no sense of connectivity between the three floors had contributed to a dark and isolating environment.

Acoustically separated “forums” were created at both ends of the historic building by cutting out the existing floor plate to create a transparent double-height learning environment. Highly adaptive, they have been designed to flex between large group learning, social hangout, and presentation spaces, while also providing a visual connection between floors, cross corridor, and the outdoors.



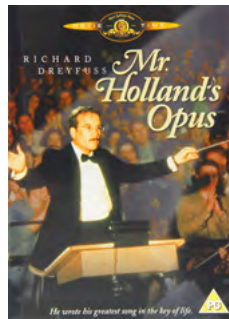


## COMMUNITY THEATER

Recognizable as the set from the 1995 film, *Mr. Holland's Opus*, the community successfully campaigned the school district to restore and improve the historic theater.

Originally built in 1927, the auditorium had a capacity to hold 1,650 people in cramped, uncomfortable seating – too small to fit the entire student body for assemblies, but much larger than the 500-seat performance space required by the district's Ed Spec.

The auditorium was also lacking in stage height, depth, proscenium width, technical support, lighting, and suffered from poor acoustics. State-of-the-art improvements, including seismic upgrades and comfortable seating for 900+ people, created a new home for the local performing arts scene, for both community driven performances and school events, increasing the efficiency of use and ultimately the district's and the taxpayer's return on investment.



### FUN FACT

*Mr. Holland's Opus* was filmed in and around Portland, Oregon, with many exterior and interior scenes taking place at Grant High School, showcasing both the auditorium and the choir room.





## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

# FROM ATHLETICS TO ARTS

Too small to be used as an auxiliary gym, the original 1923 gymnasium building has been transformed into the new home for the Fine and Visual Arts programs.

Art studios flank a double-height gallery space at the center of the building which showcases student artwork, facilitates large group activities, and becomes rentable event space after-hours. A second-level floor floats around the central gallery, encouraging cross-disciplinary exploration.

The gallery floor was refinished with the salvaged wood gym flooring – complete with the previous gym's Generals script font. To bring in more light, windows were punched through solid masonry walls, and a new 43-foot-long skylight replaced the leaky original skylight over art gallery spaces below.







# Physical Environment



## HOW THE ENVIRONMENT INSPIRES AND MOTIVATES

On the first day of school, as students entered their new building, there was an atmosphere of surprise, awe, and gratefulness.

Students were smiling and Grant's Principal, Carol Campbell (now retired), reported hearing many students comment that they "couldn't believe this was their school." She also heard students say, "it looks like a community college." And most critically, in an interview with the local media, a previously disenfranchised student commented, "I feel like someone really cares about us."

The modernization created teaching spaces that promote collaboration and allow students and teachers to access modern technology. The **Arts Complex** highlights the emphasis on electives and creativity that has always existed at Grant, and students who saw all the new **CTE spaces** for the first time signed up for classes they otherwise would not have considered.

So many students are now choosing to eat together on campus that **the commons, both upper and lower levels**, are packed, and who is receiving free or reduced lunches is undetectable.

The **all-user restrooms** have eliminated the safety concerns related to having large restroom areas behind closed doors. Students and adults are saying that the individual toilet rooms are private and safe. Other schools and businesses who are remodeling have visited to see the restroom design.

Once skeptical teachers have embraced the **small instructional spaces** and are finding ways to enhance instruction through group work and project-based activities. The **flex areas** provide "break out" space for classes, wall space for gallery walks, and spaces for students to socialize and study together.

The **two collaborations forums** are used for a myriad of events such as guest speakers, student presentations, music performances, and club meetings.

The building design provides a variety of spaces that appeal to the diversity that exists in a large comprehensive high school. Students are finding their niche and new ways to use the spaces for learning.





HOW THE FACILITY FITS IN THE LARGER CONTEXT OF THE COMMUNITY

Grant High School models what social justice in educational buildings can look like for the larger Portland community.

The graceful way the project now seamlessly knits together Grant Park with the school grounds as a wholly integrated, vibrant, and safe public-use facility challenges the building of walls and fences between schools and their neighborhoods.

As the heart of the Grant Park community, Grant High School enrollment continues to increase, students are transferring in from private schools, graduation rate is 94% (the highest in Portland Public Schools), and future forecasting numbers indicate students are very excited to enroll at the modernized school.

#7

in Oregon High Schools

#6

in Portland, Oregon Metro Area High Schools

#1

in Portland Public Schools High Schools

SOURCE: US News and World Report





# THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

In the early 1920's, northeast Portland was a fast-growing community, building Grant High School in 1923, with additions added in quick succession from 1925-27.

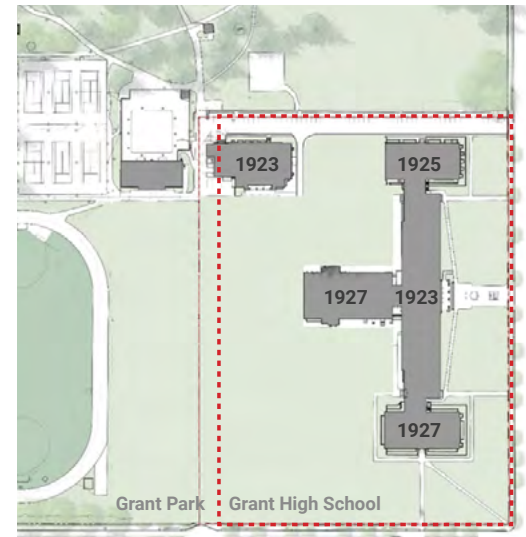
By the 1950s and 1960s, the courtyards had been filled with one-story additions which turned the campus into a maze of outdoor passages between buildings, and then the school went on to suffer from 50 years of deferred maintenance. The buildings were seismically deficient, had accessibility barriers, and contained a variety of hazardous materials. Furthermore, the educational environment suffered from outdated systems, deferred maintenance, and lack of amenities often found in more modern high schools.

## REDUCING CARBON BY PRESERVING HISTORY

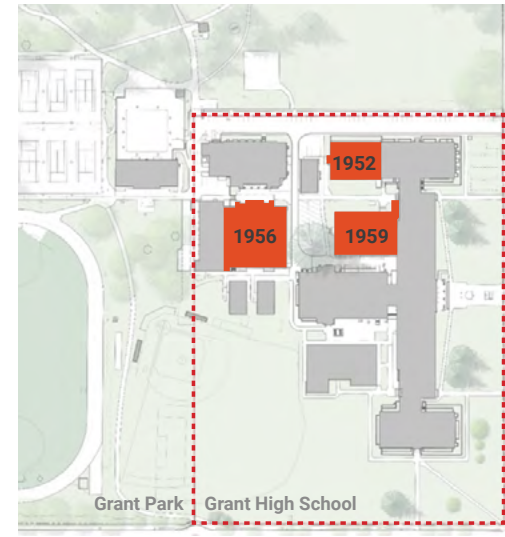
**The historic buildings were beloved by community members, many of whom had roamed the school's hallways over the generations.** The modernization included removing some of the additions that were considered non-contributing and consolidating program into a tight, three-story bar at the back of the original school building. Courtyards were dug out to bring more daylight into spaces formerly buried in basements and allow for the addition of three stories onto what reads as a two-story school without needing to rise above the height of the original school.

The design team provided connection both vertically and horizontally between formerly disconnected basement spaces. The new gymnasium is sized to accommodate the entire student body by excavating and lowering the floor, so it did not exceed the height of the rest of the school. **The fully modernized school now sits in 70% renovated space and 30% new construction.**

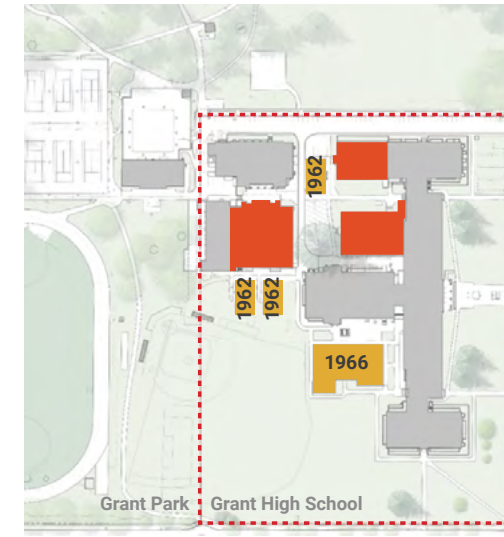
In addition to preserving the cultural significance of the original buildings, this decision had a positive impact on the embodied carbon footprint and provided a framework for the team's decision-making throughout the project.



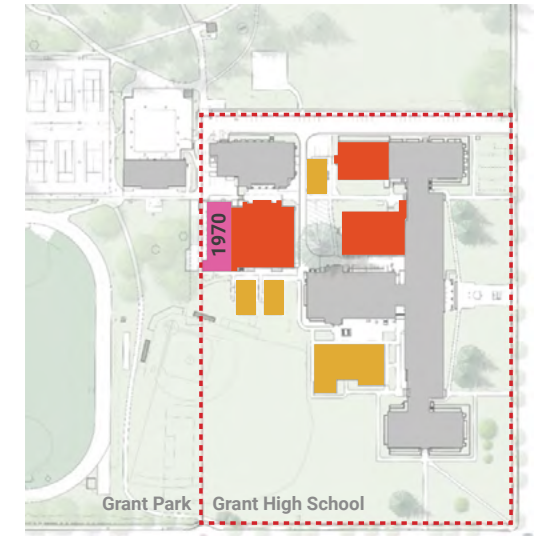
1920s ORIGINAL BUILDING AND ADDITIONS



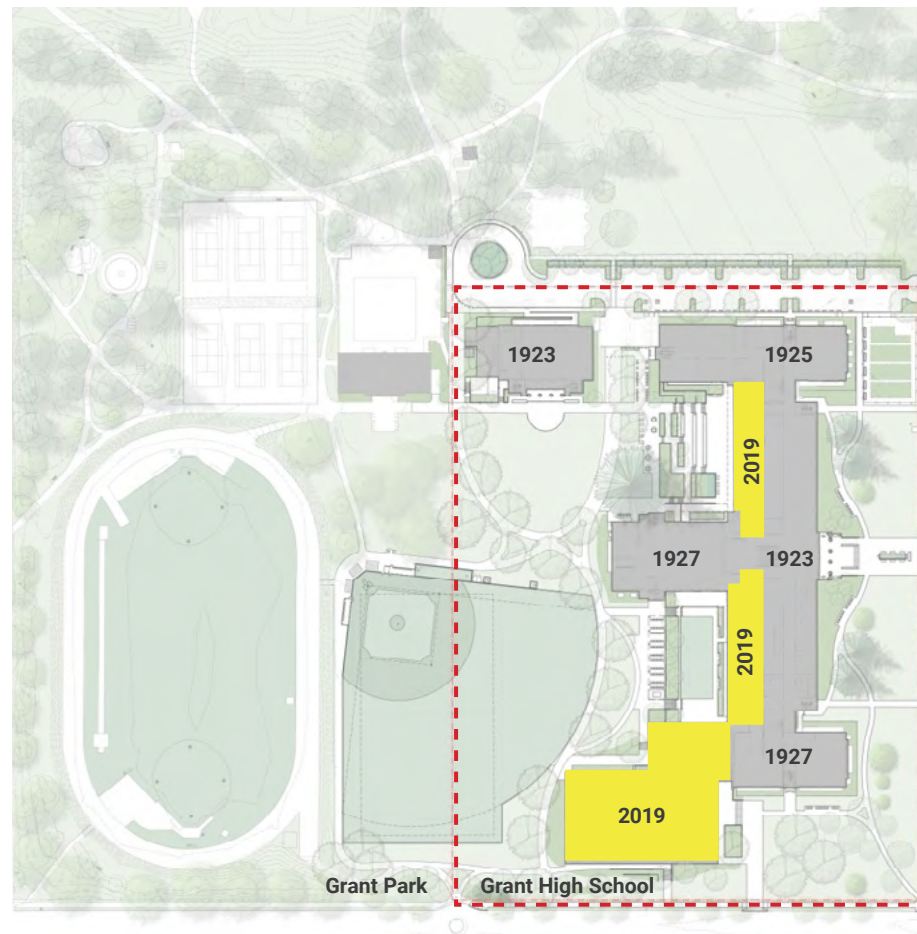
1950s ADDITIONS



1960s ADDITIONS



1970 ADDITION



2019 MODERNIZATION



AERIAL OF 2019 MODERNIZATION



# HEALING THE DIVIDE

Several poorly considered additions had blocked students from accessing the adjacent park. The courtyards had been filled with buildings and portables that turned the campus into a maze of outdoor passages between buildings.

With the removal of a 1950's gym building, the portables and library additions, the north courtyard is now the primary point of connection between the school and Grant Park. From the new multi-level commons and a new, elevated walkway, the view and physical connection to Grant Park has been restored, as promised.



**FUN FACT**  
The majority of Beverly Cleary's children's novels, including her famous *Ramona Quimby* series, are set in the Grant Park neighborhood where Cleary grew up. Grant Park celebrates her legacy with the installation of the Beverly Cleary Sculpture Garden.

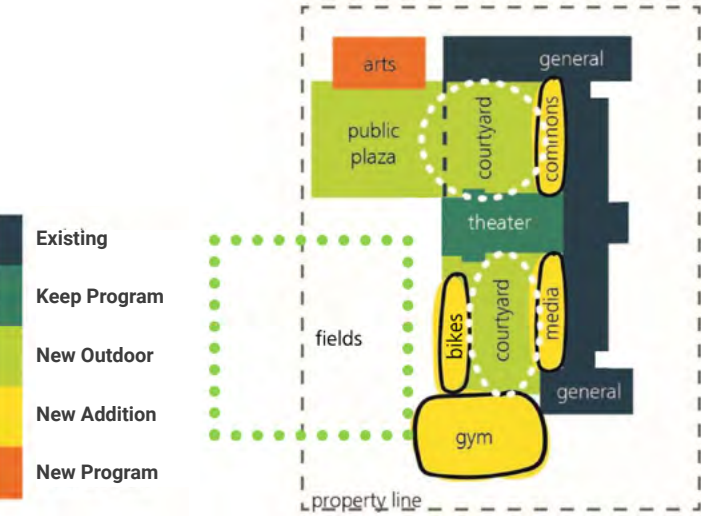




# OUTDOOR FITNESS COURTYARD

A previous subsurface teaching space was removed and a fitness courtyard was created by digging out the site to provide connectivity and natural light to the lowest level.

The fitness courtyard is directly connected to the new gymnasium and weight room. The all-weather turf surface ensures year-round outdoor exercise opportunities for students. Located directly above the courtyard is a solar panel covered bike shelter.





## CONNECTING TO THE PAST

The wood floor in the 1950's gymnasium, with its bold GRANT letters, was salvaged and re-purposed at the entrance to the new gymnasium as a prominent wall graphic.

2,300 SF of wood bleachers and 4,300 SF of maple wood gym flooring from the same gymnasium are now used throughout the building as ceiling and wall panels to create a warm environment.

Additionally, the new gym, which is large enough now to fit the entire student body, is sunken into the site to respect the surrounding neighborhood scale while providing views to Grant Park.



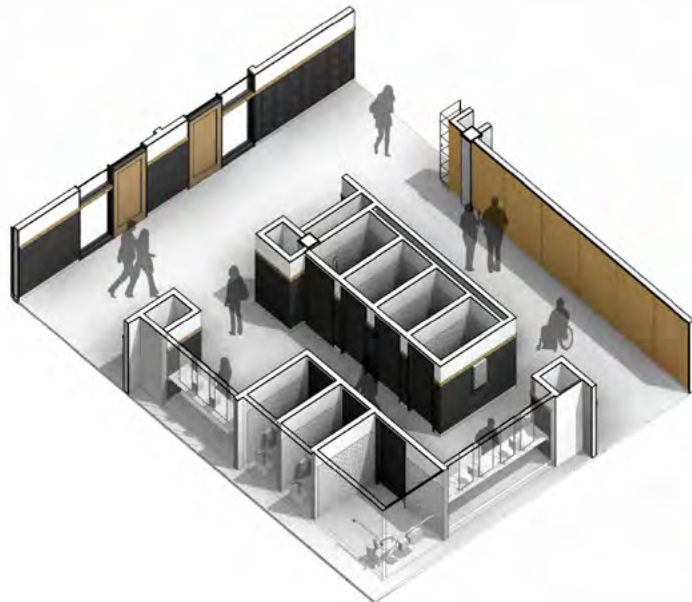


## ALL-USER INCLUSIVE DESIGN

Early in the engagement process, staff and students revealed to the design team that Grant was home to openly transgender students, and asked that we address the bias of the male/female segregated bathrooms.

To help combat bullying and the real risk of drop-out due to a perceived lack of safety, the design replaced existing "gang-style" bathrooms with 100% individual toilet rooms. Full walls and doors open to a shared space for wash basins and drinking fountains. As a pass-through space with multiple ways in and out, the design limits entrapment and allows passive supervision.

Placing equity and human dignity at the center of design conversations, the solution removes the need for students, staff, and visitors to associate themselves with a male/female label when choosing a restroom.







# Results of the Project



# THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

When Grant High School reopened in the Fall of 2019 following two years of construction, the grand opening drew an unprecedented crowd of over 2,000 community members to its public grand opening celebration.

Occupants who experienced Grant both before and after the modernization reported that the physical changes in creating connections translated directly to **improvements in the social environment**.

Students appreciate the combined lower floors which reduces transition time between classes and **increases opportunities for social encounters**.

Students also commented on the collaboration forum stairs which connect floor levels at strategic points in the main building and allow students to **change levels in inviting social spaces** which also function as presentation style learning settings.

An increased level of internal transparency throughout the school adds visual connections between enclosed classrooms and open flex spaces in the center. **Students reported that they felt safer and more connected** to others while circulating through the modernized buildings.

Educators gained the ability to **supervise alternative learning spaces and hallways** from their classrooms. The new organization of inclusive restrooms received positive feedback.

Staff have noticed an **increase in the number of students eating lunch on-site**, which was attributed to the re-envisioned cafeteria as a two-level space with physical and visual connections to Grant park, a variety of seating options, and better integration into the school’s circulation patterns.

**The Grant High School modernization exemplifies how the reuse of an existing structure can result in an effective high school learning environment that is not compromised, but instead enriched by its historic structure and character; propelling Grant High School into the future while embracing and honoring its past.**



“My whole team broke down in tears when they first walked in. We just couldn’t believe that we get to teach here. **It is powerful design for social justice, and we are grateful!**”  
CAROL CAMPBELL, FORMER PRINCIPAL, GRANT HIGH SCHOOL

“We’re welcoming over 1,800 students to a newly modernized school, with incredible teaching and learning environments, tech enabled classrooms, safety and security features, and brand new athletic facilities.”  
GUADALUPE GUERRERO, SUPERINTENDENT, PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS



“I feel like someone really cares about me!”  
GRANT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT





## AN INCLUSIVE & FLEXIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Beginning in 2007, the Facilities Vision and Education Specifications were developed by Portland Public Schools (PPS) as they anticipated their bond passage in November 2012. Through various community-wide visioning initiatives came a collection of key planning and design characteristics for PPS facilities.

The Comprehensive High School Educational Specification (Ed Spec) described the desired organization characteristics, interrelationships of space, overriding themes and values preferred, and specific room requirements. In essence, it is a living document meant to be revised and updated as new information is discovered and education programs evolve. The Ed Spec is intended to be broad enough to accommodate flexibility for site-based design decisions that are tailored to the specific school communities they serve.

**The qualities, personality, and values of the Grant community resulted in a number of unique, spatial characteristics specific to Grant High School. Highlights include:**

- **Inclusion of All-User Restrooms:** The all-user restrooms located throughout the school are the result of a student led effort which spotlighted the desire for safer, more private, individual, non-gendered restrooms for all.
- **Modernization of the Historic Auditorium:** Although the Ed Spec called for a 500-seat theater, the Grant community valued their larger, historic theater with greater seating capacity. Consensus was built to renovate rather than replace the existing theater. This conclusion was based on an understanding of community desires gained through a series of studies and sessions with students, teachers, administrators, and the community.
- **Focus on the Arts:** In addition to the theater, the historic choir room (also featured in *Mr. Holland's Opus*) was also modernized. The robust Fine, Visual, and Performing Arts programs at Grant resulted in a dedicated Arts building, with its many specialty art classrooms and an open 2-story display gallery converted from the original 1923 gymnasium.



Portland Public Schools seeks to be the best urban school district in this country. In the 21st century, learning takes place everywhere, all the time, and **buildings play a critical supporting role in ensuring all of our students emerge as lifelong learners ready for the world that awaits them.** We seek to create learning environments that nurture, inspire and challenge all students, regardless of race or class. We aspire to provide safe, healthy, joyful, beautiful, sustainable and accessible school environments that foster productive relationships year-round for all children, families, staff and their communities. We promote public confidence through strategic engagement and investments that support student achievement and reduce operating costs.

**PORTLAND PUBLIC SCHOOLS FACILITIES VISION STATEMENT**







ULYSSES S. GRANT HIGH SCHOOL

2245

ULYSSES S. GRANT HIGH SCHOOL