

A4LE 2022 JAMES D. MACCONNELL AWARD

DWIGHT-ENGLEWOOD VILLAGE & MIDDLE SCHOOL





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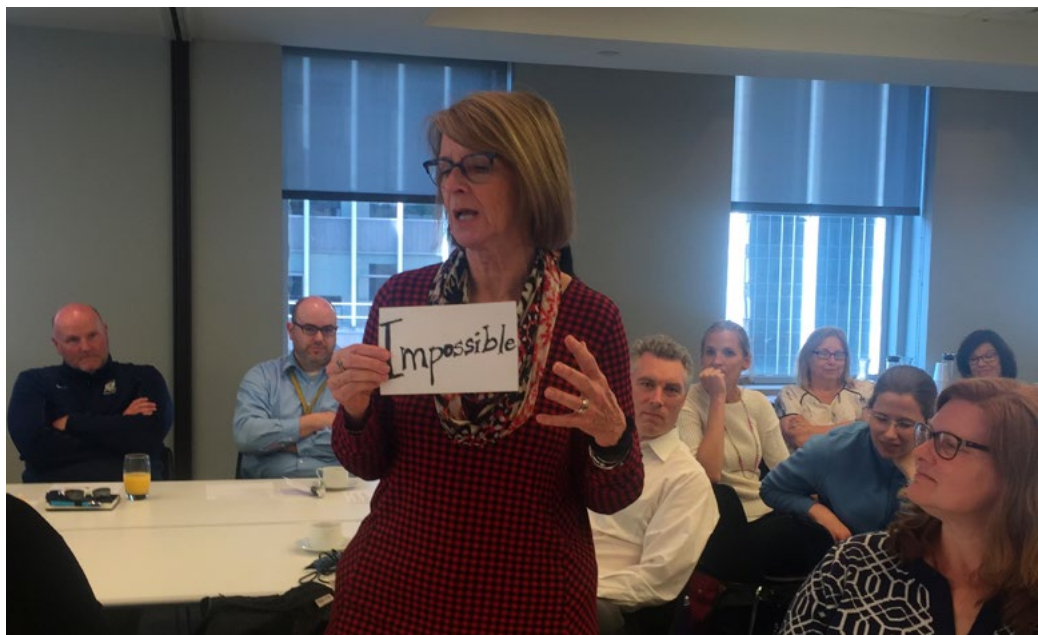
Executive Summary

Maintaining school operations amid the pandemic continues to be of critical importance to getting communities back up and running. Beyond that, there is now an opportunity to shift the paradigm of school design that had started before the pandemic: it is not only about providing equality of design, but equity in design, so that all users can engage in ways most appropriate for their individual needs.

As part of this paradigm shift, The Dwight-Englewood School, a leading independent college preparatory school located in Englewood, New Jersey, sought to reimagine the middle school experience and develop a design that would enable children to learn in a creative and meaningful way. As a part of the firm's decade-long master planning at The Dwight-Englewood School, the middle school creates inclusive educational opportunities that enable multiple pathways for student success.

As seen through Dwight-Englewood Middle School, the school of the future does not ask how it can best support the average learner, but how it can best support all learners. Rather than designing one optimal universal learning experience, it becomes imperative that schools are designed for choice, adaptability, and connectivity – providing multiple pathways to skills development that spark the joy of learning in each student.





School & Community Engagement

As a community of learners, The Dwight-Englewood School strives to foster in each student a passion for life-long learning. It seeks excellence, honors integrity, and embraces diversity in order to develop the skills, values, and courage to meet the challenges of a changing world and make it better.

The Dwight-Englewood School is a coeducational, independent school of approximately 1,000 students, serving a seamless education experience for students in preschool through Grade 12. Comprised of three divisions – the Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools – each with their own distinctive personality, Dwight-Englewood is the most ethnically-diverse school in Bergen County with students who represent over 80 communities in New Jersey and New York. The school is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools and the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools, and is a member of the National Association of Independent Schools.

The impetus for the new middle school arose out of a 15-year planning process that embraces its mission. It seeks to elevate the campus experience as a whole through a variety of improvements that aim to enhance academics and campus life. The process engaged every aspect of the campus community, including faculty, students, administration, and trustees. This inclusive process has led to consensus within the community as to the priorities and aspirations of each project.





Education Environment

The Dwight-Englewood School seeks to provide students with an experience that fosters their development into mature, knowledgeable, and energetic citizens of the 21st century. It encourages students to be aware of the issues that society faces and interested in engaging them. The school wants them to have confidence, based on their extensive academic, intellectual, physical, and socio-emotional growth, to go into the world ready to live healthy lives and become leaders in their fields. And, most importantly, Dwight-Englewood wants its students to grow as people and develop into responsible adults.

The school has identified eight traits that it deems important to the long-term success of each student, whether it is in the classroom, in business, or in life – Organization, Engagement, Critical Thinking, Collaboration. Daily Preparation, Creative Thinking, Perseverance and Risk Taking.

To get a deeper understanding of how the school distinctively approaches these traits, the firm facilitated a workshop with the school's faculty, administration, and the firm's Education strategists, which set the framework for student profiles and strategies that informed the design by defining how the middle school experience could be transformed.

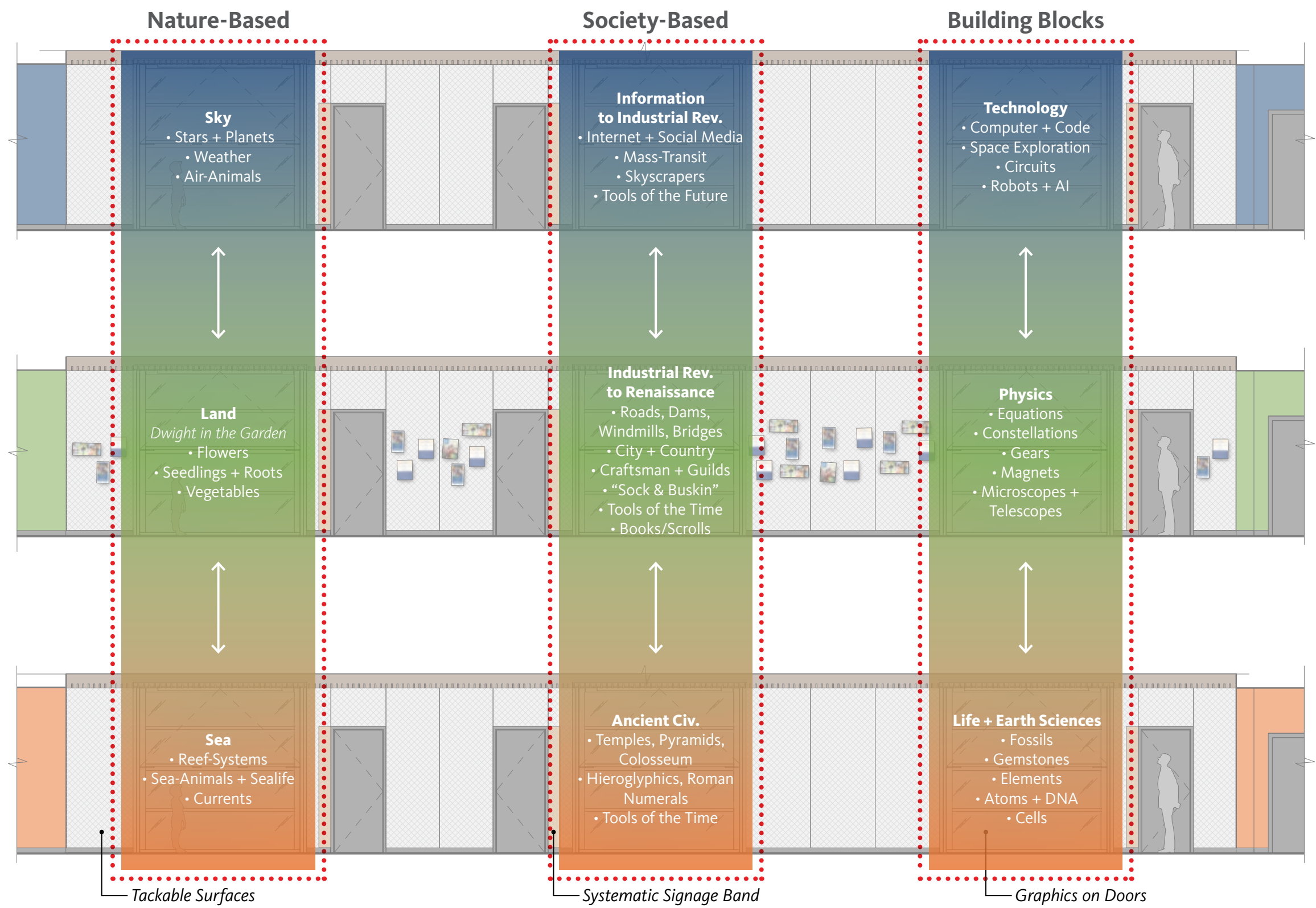
The findings were summarized into ten aspirational ideals that were continuously revisited as the design progressed to ensure that all aspects of the project's goals were met:

10 BIG INSIGHTS* + EXTRA CREDIT

Keep reading for extra credit

- 1 Our children are transforming every day, so our school should too.
- 2 The range of growth between 6th and 8th grades is vast, but they're all still just children.
- 3 Retaining the benefits of grade-affiliation is crucial in the move toward project- and discipline-based work.
- 4 Middle school is the "starting point" - when you begin to become who you will be (as an adult).
- 5 Let's leverage technology's ability to provide 2-way conversation, and a 'push-out' / 'pull-in' dynamic.
- 6 We still need places for quiet - and spaces for personal, sometimes sensitive conversations.
- 7 Aim to create a facility that encourages parents to "let go."
- 8 Access to nature is a "need to have," not a "nice to have."
- 9 A happy faculty means happy students.
- 10 And, don't lose what's good.

Education Environment: Didactic Messaging – Vertical Integration



Grade 8

GUIDING THEME
Aspiration/Launch

Grade 7

GUIDING THEME
Growth

Grade 6

GUIDING THEME
Foundation





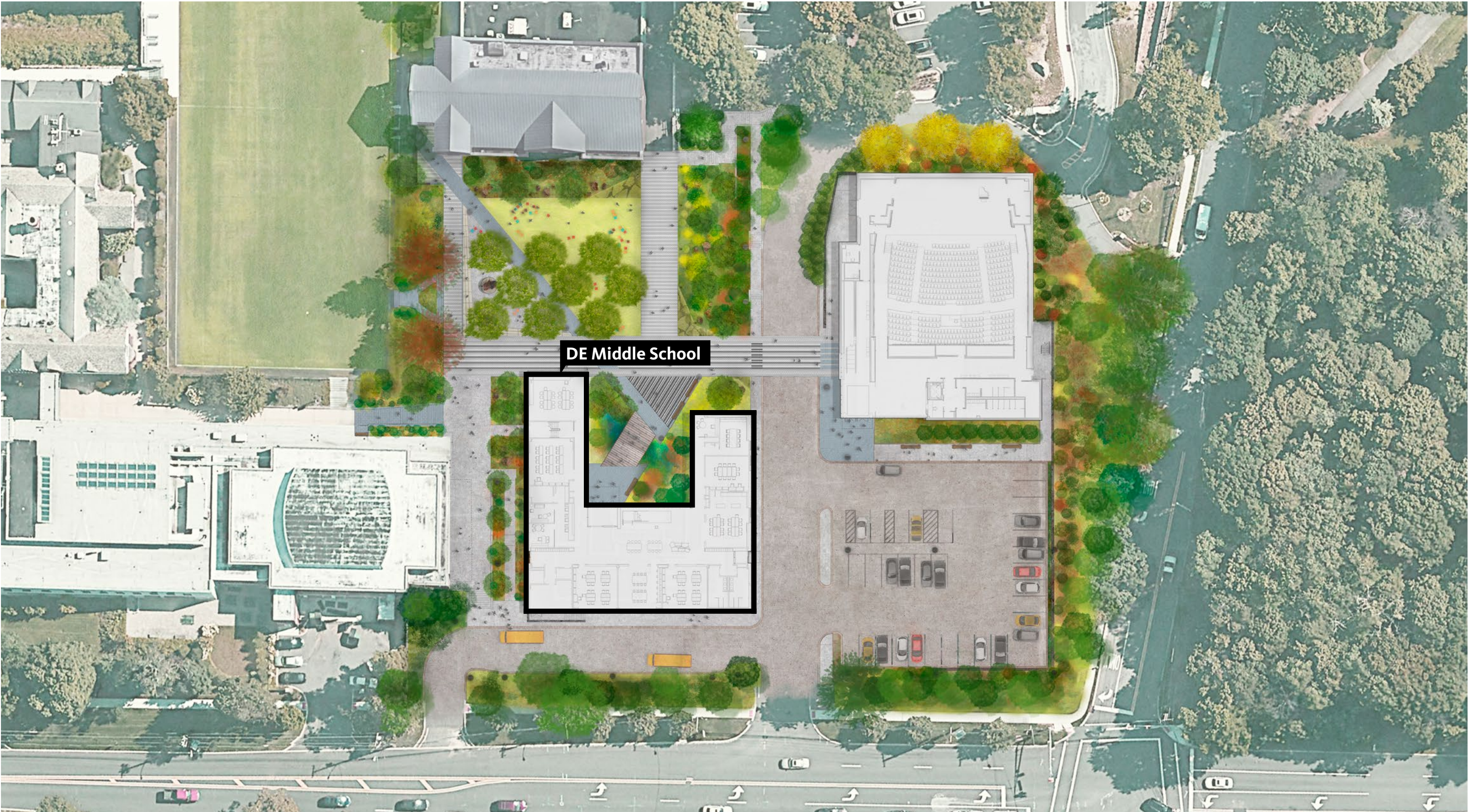
Physical Environment

Engagement is a critical component of learning, and motivation is critical to engagement. Deci and Ryan’s self-determination theory of human motivation identifies three innate needs that framed the firm’s approach to designing the post-pandemic school: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In the built environment, we translated these needs to design opportunities through the ideas of connectivity, adaptability, and choice, exemplified by the specific features of the middle school.

Environmental graphics are integrated into the interior design and contain curriculum-inspired content, driven by guiding themes per grade level, creating engaging, teachable stories connected across the front porches and vertically through the building stack. A whimsical ceiling mobile greets those ascending the interconnecting staircase. Learning extends beyond the building to The Grove, a series of dynamic outdoor environments that connect the middle school with the adjacent buildings.

The 35,000 square-foot LEED Silver accredited building is subdivided by grade level, with the 6th grade on the lowest floor, 7th grade in the middle, and 8th grade on the uppermost floor, all linked by an open interconnecting stair. The primary feature of the building is the “front porch” on every floor, a technology-enhanced multi-purpose space with a variety of furniture that serves as a meeting, social, and project space. Classrooms adjacent to the porch feature bifold doors, which allow activities within the space to seamlessly flow together and give the faculty total flexibility. The organization of the building allows each grade’s Dean to “live” with the students rather than be in a centrally located office. This conveys a sense of safety and transparency to the students.

Physical Environment: Site Plan – Outdoor Integration



Physical Environment: Floor Plans – Horizontal Integration



First Floor:
Grade 6



Second Floor:
Grade 7



Third Floor:
Grade 8





Results of the Process & Project

The design of the three-story school heavily incorporates these findings, which established that the middle school years are a critically formative period in a student's life—where they grow socially, emotionally, and academically faster than any period in their schooling. The goal of the facility was to become an ever-evolving space that leverages technology and creates a meaningful place for students, faculty, and parents. The school's comprehensive approach to providing a unique learning environment has not only allowed students to safely return in 2021, but will also stand the test of time long after the pandemic has ended.

The flexible and innovative design of the school enabled immediate COVID-19 responsive solutions that allowed the school to open in accordance with CDC guidelines. With reconfigurable furniture in classrooms, enhanced technology that creates an equitable learning experience for remote students, and operable windows that circulate fresh air, the building gives way to a hybrid model for both in-person and remote learning opportunities.