



Gardiner Middle School

OREGON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Executive Summary

REIMAGINING THE MIDDLE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

The Power of Student Voice

Oregon City's new Gardiner Middle School represents the District's commitment to reimagining the middle school experience. From their approach to curriculum development to the design of their learning environments, the District set out to assert that sixth, seventh, and eighth grade would be more than just stepping stones along the path from elementary to high school.

It would be a time to genuinely invest in the multitude of mental, physical, and emotional changes that students experience as they begin to embrace their young adulthood. A time to cultivate joy through learning and celebrate exploration and self-discovery. A time to center students and their voices in conversations around education and engagement.



Centered around the core theme of *By Students, For Students*, the new school environment was designed to amplify student autonomy and inspire a sense of belonging among learners, empowering them to be active co-creators of their middle school experience.

Through an inclusive, student-centered design process, students championed dynamic

solutions alongside District leaders, educators, and designers that promote collaboration, wellness, and exploration. From the Learning Neighborhoods to the central and multi-faceted Timber Hall, Gardiner Middle School celebrates opportunities for students to grow as individuals, build relationships with their peers and their teachers, and flourish in community.

SCOPE AND BUDGET

The new Gardiner Middle School is a comprehensive replacement of the existing single-story facility on the same site. Dating back to the 1950's, the middle school campus has been a cornerstone for the surrounding community for more than

sixty years. Gardiner's redesign served as an opportunity to deepen those connections and pave a path to make new ones. The updated site design supports a welcoming environment that aligns with contemporary school safety needs.

Grades Served

6 - 8

Student Capacity

1,000

Occupancy Date

Summer 2021

Building Area

150,000 Sq Ft

Site Area

19.5 Acres

Project Budget

\$79,000,000

Community and School Engagement

Oregon City's connection to its pioneering history and its dynamic natural landscape continue to shape the community's shared identity.

OREGON CITY COMMUNITY

A Community Rooted in Connections

Pioneering Spirit

Established in 1829 at the convergence of the Willamette and Clackamas Rivers, Oregon City is the oldest incorporated city west of the Rocky Mountains and has always been one of Oregon's most famous hubs of trade, politics, urban activity, and innovation. From lumber, flour, and paper mills to shipbuilding and other industrial enterprises, Oregon City has fostered innovation for almost two hundred years.

Oregon City's rich history is an ongoing source of community pride; residents steward multiple cultural centers and museums that preserve and celebrate Oregon City's pioneering spirit.

Nature's Bounty

Oregon City is home to Willamette Falls, Canemah Bluff, and Promenade Park. The city is a distant neighbor to other dynamic landforms like Mt. Hood. From recreation to conservation, the community's proximity to rivers, mountains, and forests has shaped Oregon City's identity as a prime example of the natural bounty that life in the Pacific Northwest can offer.



CHALLENGES AND ASSETS

Challenges

Addressing Common Student Anxieties

- Length of passing time between classes
- Difficulties navigating crowded corridors
- Lack of supervision, especially in restrooms
- Transitioning from one grade level to another

Understanding Student Experiences in the Existing Physical Space

- Crowded spaces create / exacerbate anxieties
- Students felt physically and emotionally unsafe

Assets

Oregon City School District's Spirit of Innovation

- Commitment to learning from others
- Desire to build upon lessons learned
- Willingness to push boundaries

A Trusted Design and Delivery Team

- Gardiner's design team leveraged the same architects and planners who led the District's long-range planning, visioning, and bond planning initiatives. Their long-standing relationship was an invaluable source of mutual trust.

THE OPPORTUNITY OF A LIFETIME

Reimagining Teaching and Learning

The new Gardiner Middle School is so much more than just a building. It represents Oregon City School District's genuine commitment to reimagining the middle school experience for the entire Oregon City community.

ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS Leveraging Continuous Learning to Inform Gardiner's Design Process

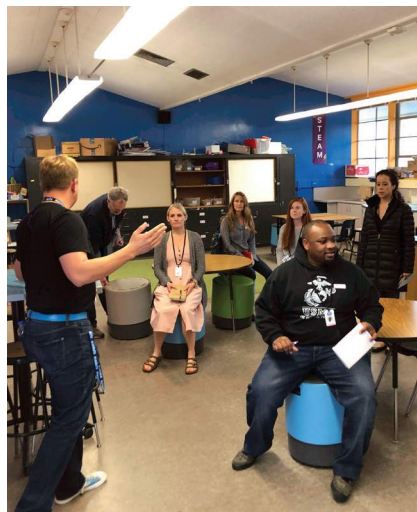
Following the triumphant passing of their \$158 million bond in November 2018, Oregon City School District sought to champion a design process that leveraged the momentum they had built throughout their extensive pre-bond community engagement initiatives. In order to lead a design process worthy of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, the District prioritized research, collaboration, and innovation.

The Gardiner Design Committee made a concerted effort to learn firsthand from other districts who had implemented innovative academic programs and facility designs. The cornerstone of the Committee's research was a series of facility tours of both local and national campuses.

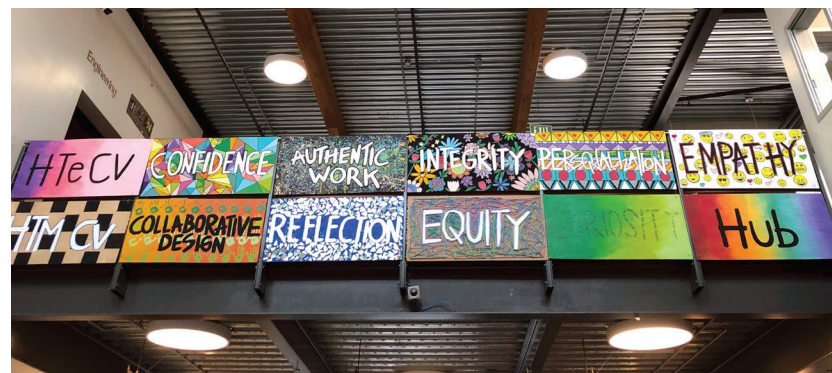
From school to school, Committee members experienced learning environments that:

- Prioritized student needs
- Created a strong sense of belonging
- Responded to students' anxieties
- Drove engagement by creating environments that students wanted to be in

These tours proved that innovative ideas could succeed when District leaders and educators committed to putting student needs first. Empowered by their new insight, the Design



**THE GARDINER
DESIGN COMMITTEE
TOURED OVER
10 SCHOOLS**



Committee directly engaged students throughout the entirety of the design process. The committee ensured that student voices were weighted equally alongside those of

the adults on the team. Together, the Design Committee would create a new definition of what student-centered spaces could be.

BY STUDENTS, FOR STUDENTS Centering Student Experiences

Oregon City School District recognized that gaining an authentic, first-hand understanding of how students viewed their middle school experience would be the key to reimagining traditional middle school education. Motivated to make the most of this special opportunity, the design team worked with District leaders

to convene a Design Committee that included 12 middle school students. This significant committee representation empowered students to contribute fully to design discussions and share their perspectives as the ultimate building users.

Outside of committee sessions, students helped conduct “empathy interviews” with elementary and high school students to understand the

elements of excitement and anxiety they felt before and after middle school, respectively.

Through these interviews, the Design Committee’s student members became advocates not only for themselves, but for future generations of Gardiner students. Through their contributions, Gardiner Middle School is truly by and for the students it serves.

Composition of the Design Committee

4 District Leadership

9 Instructional Staff

2 Principals

12 Students



44% of the committee was students

PROVEN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Including students in the design process is critical to creating environments that reflect student interests, inspire meaningful engagement, and create a sense of belonging. The Design Committee positioned students to contribute in profound and impactful ways, then leveraged their ideas in tangible design solutions.

- 1 There is strength in numbers**
Include a significant number of students in decision making groups. Students gain confidence when their peers and friends are at the table.
- 2 Remove participation barriers**
Hold design committee meetings during the school day. Provide transportation for students and invest in substitute teachers to ensure educators, mentors, and administrators can participate fully.
- 3 Facilitate tours and research**
Help expand students’ perspectives and knowledge. Access to diverse models and visual examples allow them to imagine what could be. In-person tours are especially valuable.
- 4 Prepare students to engage**
Preview meeting materials with students before committee meetings, giving them time to reflect.
- 5 Trust their voice**
Middle school students are insightful and eager to work for the benefit of students who will come after them.
- 6 Position adult advocates**
Help adults understand that their role is to make space for student voice rather than speak for students.
- 7 Re-structure Interactions**
Ensure engagement strategies empower students to contribute. Implement multiple communication methods to neutralize existing power dynamics between students and adults.
- 8 Create forums for reflection**
Make space for students to engage peers in problem-defining activities and interviews. Dedicated time for them to reflect and digest feedback.

“As a sixth grader, helping design something that was so huge that was going to be here for so many more generations, it was so cool to make such a big impact [while] being so young.”

GARDINER STUDENT



“We knew that we needed a strong student voice involved in our design process equal to the voices of the adults that were in the room.”

DESIGN TEAM LEADER



“When you start to put [ideas] on sticky notes, you don’t know if it’s a child or the superintendent who wrote that sticky note—they all create that same value. All those values came together and that really pushed our vision to make this happen.”

DESIGN COMMITTEE MEMBER

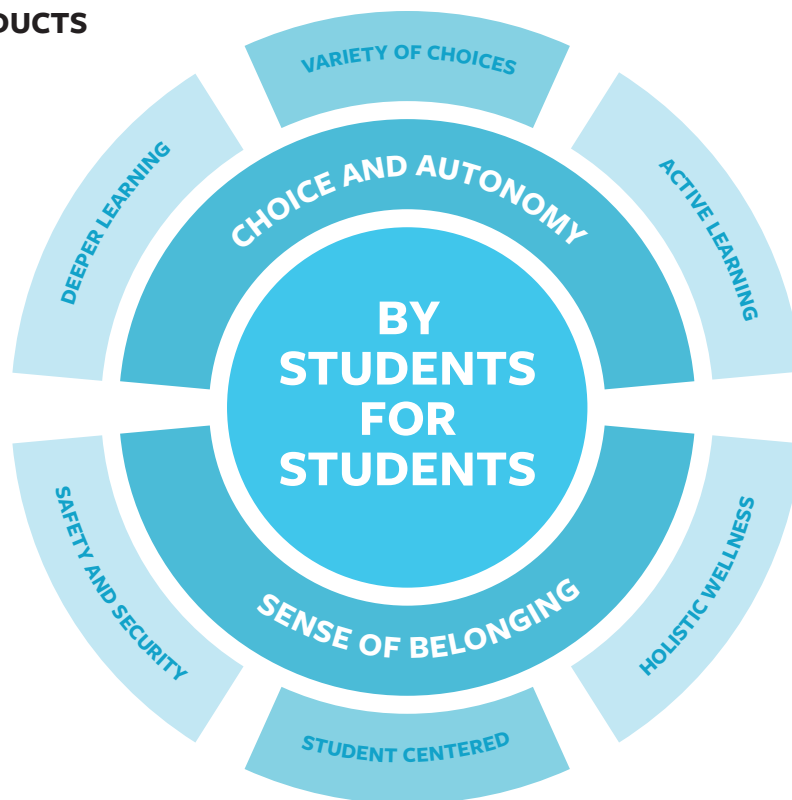


VALUE-DRIVEN PROCESSES AND PRODUCTS

Capturing Committee Values in Design

A well-defined set of six values—largely inspired by the Design Committee’s student members—shaped development of the Gardiner design process. These values represented key differentiators and non-negotiables in the desired experience at Gardiner, establishing the baseline upon which all potential ideas and design solutions were tested and assessed.

These unifying values naturally yield three distinct core concepts captured within Gardiner’s physical design. Throughout the school, spaces of various purpose and scale promote Access to Choice as well as a Sense of Belonging.



Offering students abundant opportunities to exercise autonomy and grow community in a variety of different ways throughout the space serve as tangible solutions to the stressors, anxiety triggers, and challenges the Design Committee identified at the outset of the project.

The ultimate thread that runs through both the engagement process and the physical environment – the very heart of Gardiner Middle School – is the core belief that this school was created
By Students, For Students.

Student Belief Statements

We believe in **CONNECTING TO NATURE** and the **WORLD AROUND US**

Outside spaces encourage us to relax, feel healthy, and understand how our actions impact not only our community but the world as well. Spaces inside our school should bring the outside in, with beautiful natural views and light, so that when we are learning, we are reflecting and being productive.

We believe our environments should represent all students in developing **ACTIVE BODIES, MINDS, AND SOULS**

Spaces should allow us to be still, to move, and help us to be engaged and actively learning. Spaces need to support all our needs with flexible seating and common spaces. School spaces should feel like student spaces and should accommodate our social needs and reflect our interests and work. We want opportunities to share who we are and connect with those that we love. We should feel safe and secure in our community with open sight lines, secure entrances, safe areas, and the ability to transition without stress.

We believe that our programs and areas of study should promote an **UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WORLD**

We want to **TAKE CONTROL** of our own learning through real-world experiences. We need to connect with mentors and trusted adult advisors that share their passions and assist us both in pursuing our interests and developing our future goals.

Educational Environment

The District's educational vision and their commitment to putting students first informed every aspect of Gardiner's design. The school's physical environments amplify its educational goals.

EMPOWERING FUTURE READY-LEARNERS **Educational Vision, Goals, and Curriculum**

The District engaged in a "Portrait of a Graduate" visioning exercise, an effort happening at school districts throughout the country that focuses on defining aspirational goals for the K-12 experience by identifying the 21st century skills that every student should develop during their K-12 educational journey that will support success in their future after high school.

Oregon City's vision acknowledged that middle school and early adolescence is an extremely important time in the development of a child. They desired to create spaces where students could courageously become whoever they're going to be, feel a deep sense of belonging, collaborate and think critically, work on projects with real-world significance, reflect upon their mistakes and use that learning to improve their work, and learn to care for themselves, for others, and for their community and the world around them.

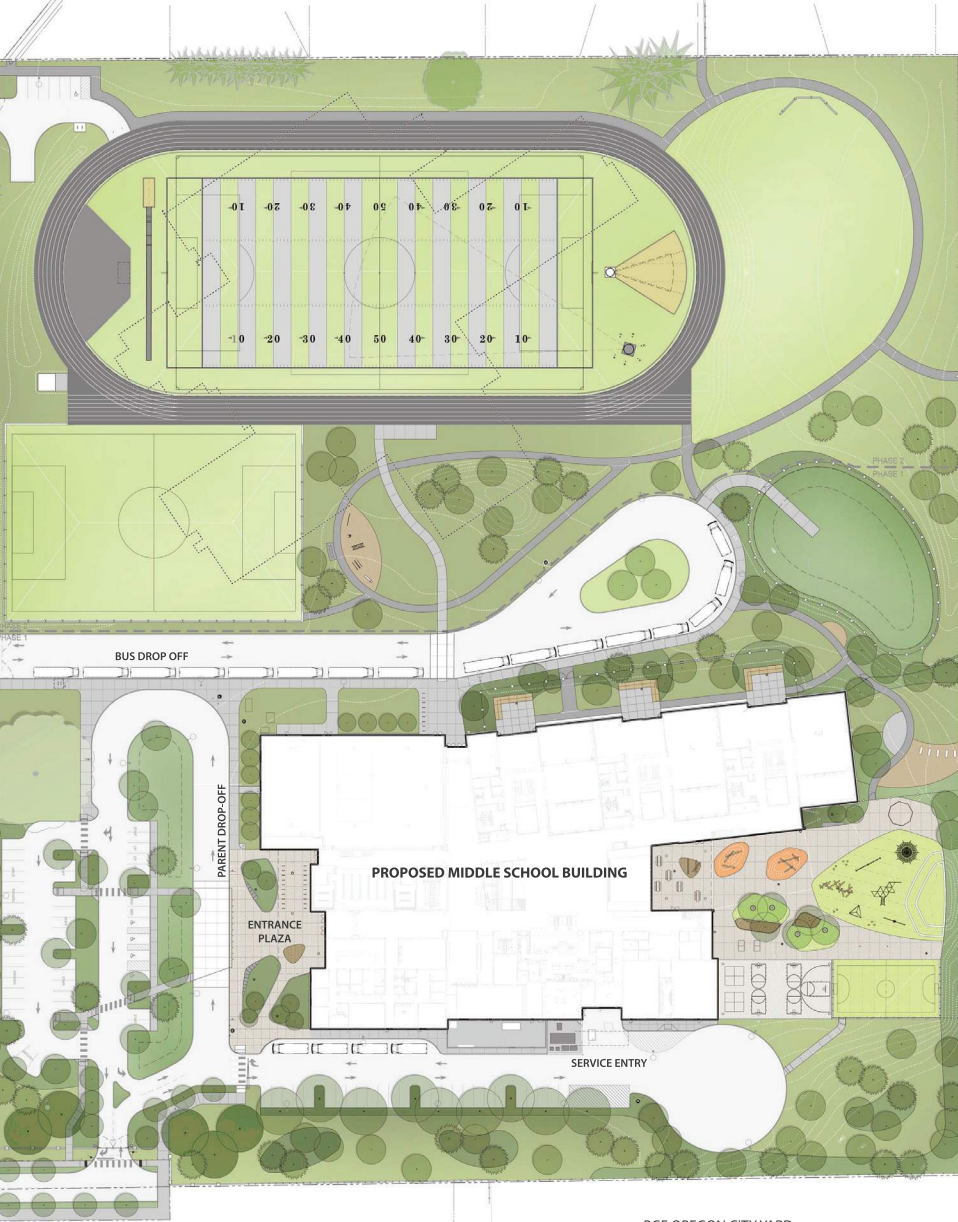


This future vision helped define the desired educational experience for Gardiner, which transitions to a new way of learning that focuses on helping students be future-ready rather than test-ready. This guided the design team to create physical changes in the school building that bring focus to individual students in ways that inspire them and help them fully develop their potential.

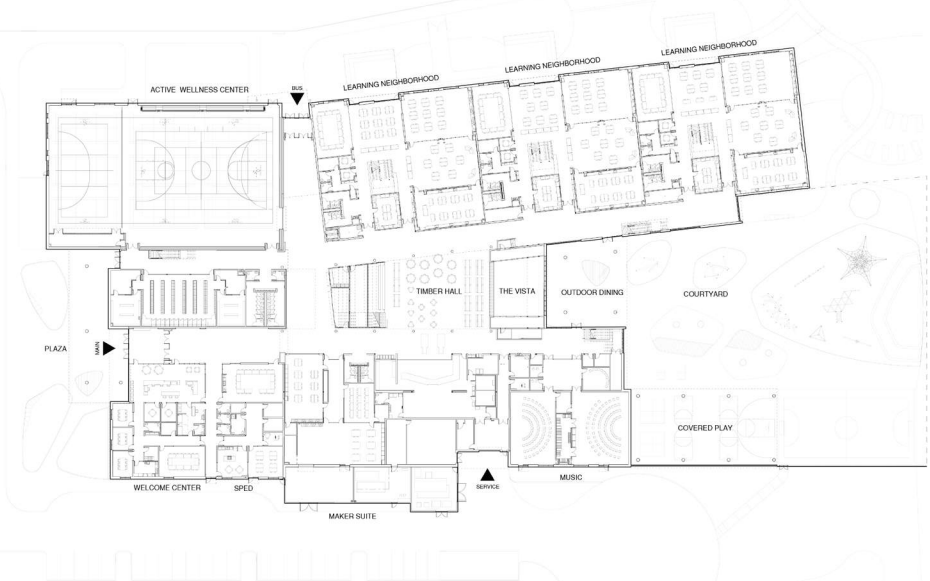
A multidimensional team including architectural designers, community college leaders, District board members, students, educators, and parents collaboratively decided that achieving the District's Portrait of a Graduate vision would require a school environment designed around the educational experience. The groups used a framework of universal design learning (UDL)

to rethink the middle school environment, leveraging the premise of UDL to reduce barriers, provide choice, and enable students to work with content that is relevant, that requires critical thinking, and forms culturally relevant connections between what students learn in school and their background knowledge, life experiences, and culture. The goal was also to incorporate design thinking and problem-based learning that allows students to engage with their community, think about real-life issues, and use empathy and engagement to solve real problems.

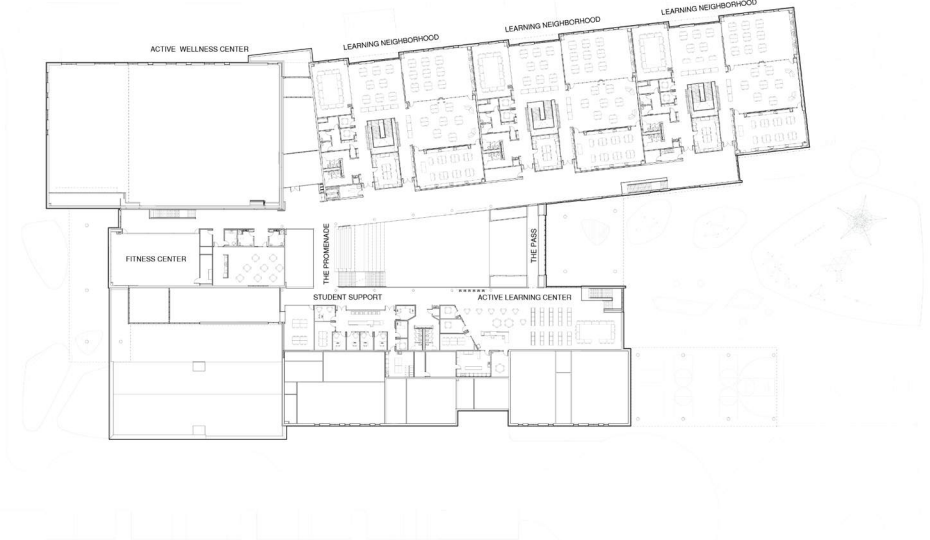
The resulting building includes some extremely unique and innovative learning environments for middle school students.



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



BY STUDENTS, FOR STUDENTS

Celebrating Student Voice through Design

Gardiner Middle School was created by students, for students. Students on the Design Committee envisioned, researched, and articulated thoughtful solutions that directly responded to their experiences as well as the insight they sought out from their peers.

Learning Neighborhoods

Full height teaching walls comprised of tack surface, markerboard, and video monitors are a consistent feature in the various labs, studios, and collaboration zones throughout the Learning Neighborhoods. Students were eager to implement tools that would allow them to engage with their lessons on a tactile level.

Active Learning Space

From its name and location to the spaces and features inside, students played a major role in shaping all aspects of the Active Learning Center. This dynamic library and collaboration space allows students to engage with peers and trusted adults as well as work independently while remaining connected to the larger Gardiner community. It features:

- Large group instructional area with full-height markerboards
- Project labs of various sizes for group collaboration
- Counter-height seating area overlooking Timber Hall designated for individual study
- Dedicated club room for student-owned groups



Maker Suite

The iterative nature of learning and design is celebrated in the Maker Suite through fluid connections between design, documentation, making, and refinement. During the design process, students adamantly expressed their desire to showcase completed work alongside in-progress projects in active display cases. The Maker Suite's proximity to the Welcome Center allows students to showcase their project-based learning opportunities.

Fitness Studio

The rock-climbing panels as well as the audio system for dance and fitness classes are two examples of Fitness Studio features influenced by student committee members. Students championed design features that celebrated the connections between movement, physical and mental wellness, and fun.

BY STUDENTS, FOR STUDENTS

Timber Hall - Gardiner's Heart

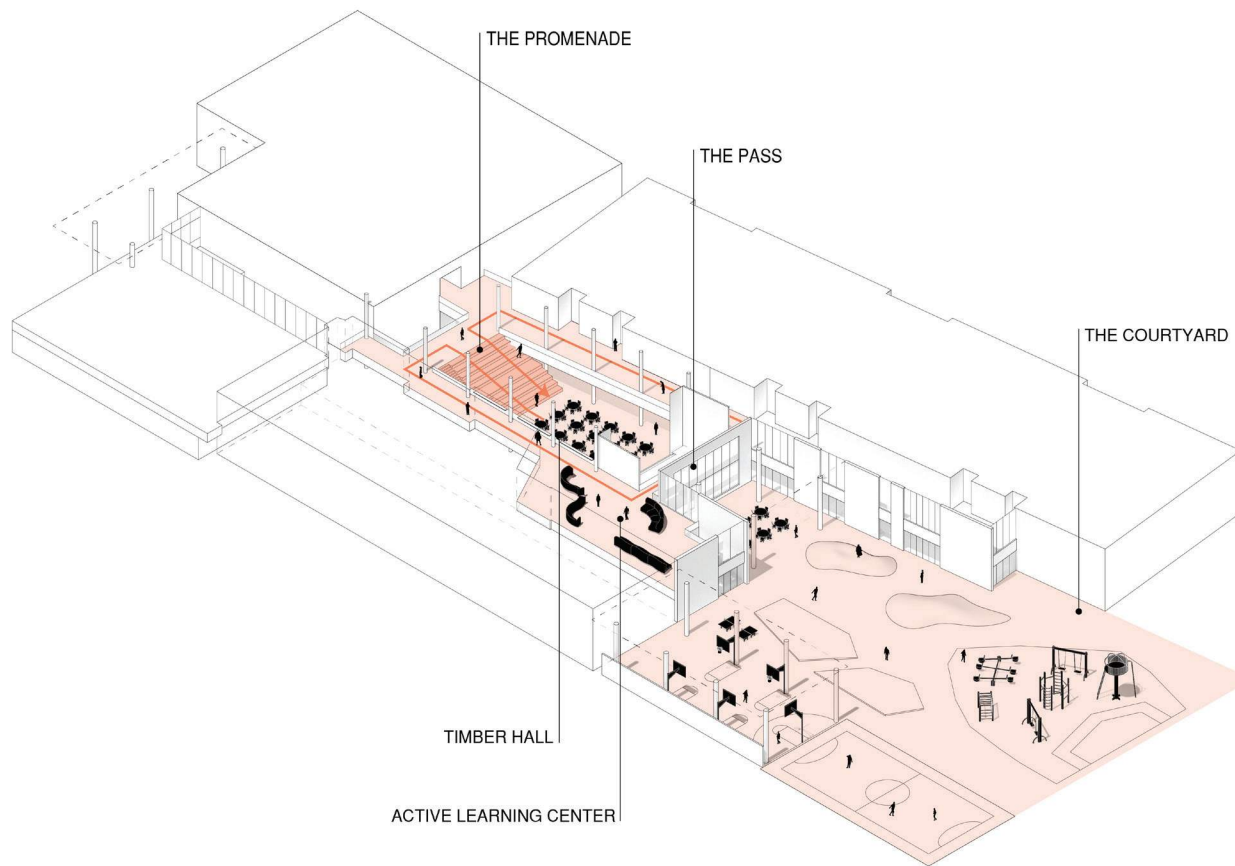
Students on the Design Committee dreamt about a central space that would enable the whole school community to come together; a space that would offer different environments to align with diverse student needs. They collaborated alongside District leaders,

teachers, and designers to develop a dynamic hub that represents Gardiner's new student-centered focus. Timber Hall, which was named by students, is Gardiner's comprehensive social and community gathering space, performance venue, and extended education space.

Located prominently near the main entrance, Timber Hall allows students to embrace a sense

of agency as they navigate the diverse spaces and utilize the areas that suit their changing needs, from gathering and socialization to decompression and quiet study.

The design features highlighted below represent solutions championed by students on the Design Committee and their peers.



The Vista

Gardiner's performing arts stage was designed to support student gathering. Pivoting walls secure performance apparatus, enabling the space to be used on a daily basis for dining and gathering.

The Vista's name was inspired by the rear glass wall that acts as a viewfinder, framing views to the courtyard and Mt. Hood.

The Pass

The Pass is a walkway that crosses over the back of the stage. It typically connects Learning Neighborhoods to the Active Learning Center. For performances, it becomes a mezzanine over the stage and can be incorporated into set designs and productions.

Food Service

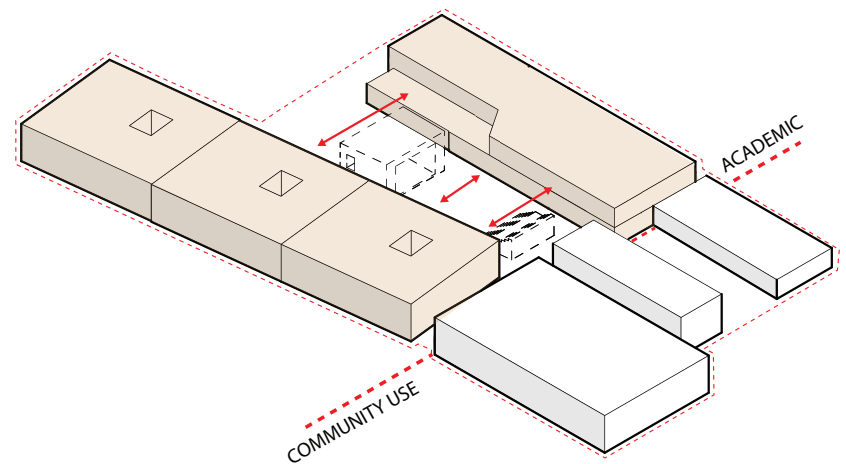
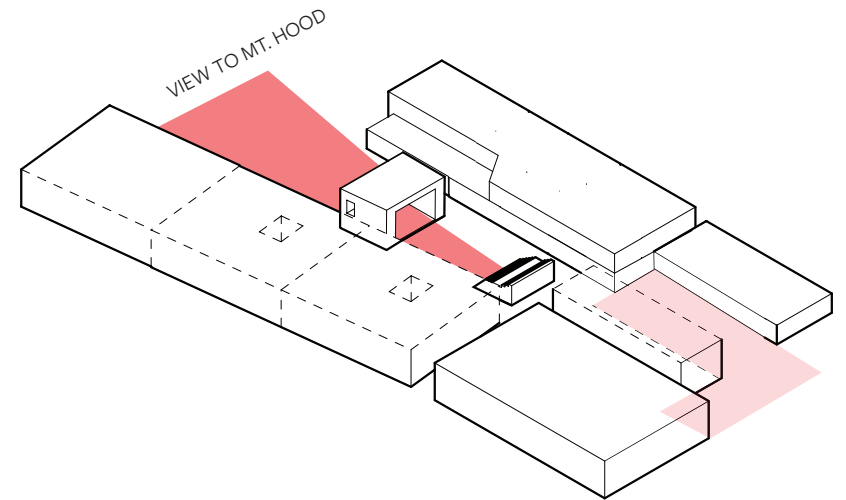
Strategically located food stations, along with "grab-and-go" options, promote student choice and reduce bottlenecks that limit timely food delivery.

Courtyard

Natural log scrambles, net climber, trinet climber, swings, turf play mounds, built-in benches and tiered seating, ping pong tables, basketball courts, and a futsal court are all examples of social and play options championed by students.

Environmental Graphics

The massive tree graphic that stands boldly at the top of the Learning Stairs is the culmination of the forest and tree themes featured throughout the building. Students loved this motif for its ability to promote curiosity and discovery and highlight connections to the natural world.



CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING

Affirming Identities, Relationships, and Community

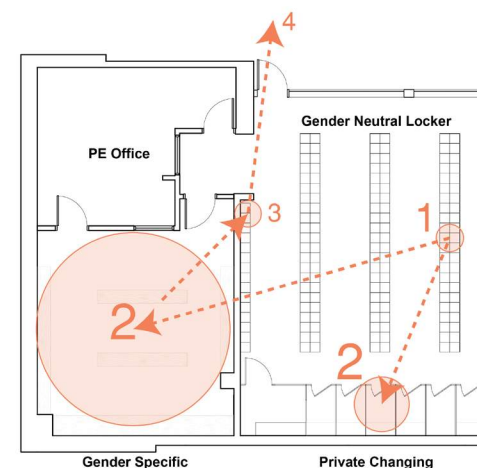
Middle school is a time marked by transition. While the mental, physical, and emotional changes students experience as they embrace their young adulthood can be overwhelming, the District recognized the potential for joyful self-discovery to be part of this journey, too. Opportunities to grow individually, build relationships, and flourish in community all foster a sense of belonging throughout Gardiner.

Athletic Prep

Located on the first floor across from the Wellness Center, the Athletic Prep features individual student lockers as well as multiple changing areas designed to empower students to get ready for their fitness classes in ways that affirm their identities and align with their personal comfort levels.

- Private, gender-neutral changing stalls
- Private, gender-specific changing rooms
- Rows of dedicated small lockers for uniforms and larger lockers for storing street clothes during class

The full-height glass wall at the front of Athletic Prep enables supervision of the locker storage area, establishing a sense of safety and managing privacy expectations in this gender-neutral area. Similarly, a gender-specific staff office is connected to each of the gender-specific changing rooms, allowing trusted adults to supervise these spaces.



1. Students enter the Athletic Prep space and retrieve their PE clothes from their individual, gender-neutral lockers. **2.** Students can choose to use the private, gender-neutral changing stalls or the gender-specific changing rooms to get ready for their fitness class. **3.** After they've changed for class, students store their street clothes in a larger locker. **4.** Prepared for class, students exit the Athletic Prep space.

Student Support

Gardiner's Student Support suite was located and designed to destigmatize the process of seeking mental health support and encourage students to feel comfortable engaging their counselors. The Student Support features a high level of visibility and accessibility with its large glass entry and its proximity to both Timber Hall and the Learning Neighborhoods. Once inside, acoustically isolated private offices reinforce a sense of privacy to promote safe, authentic conversations between students and trusted adults.

Special Education (SPED)

Gardiner's SPED wing was intentionally located near the Welcome Center and is a prominent part of the school's circulation. Its proximity to the entry serves to reinforce Gardiner's belief that every student deserves to experience a sense of belonging, regardless of their needs and abilities. In addition to accessibility and visibility, the SPED wing features the same design language and lab-type spaces as all the other learning environments in the school, effectively affirming the SPED community's relationship to the larger Gardiner community.

CREATING A SENSE OF BELONGING Fostering Community in Learning Neighborhoods

Gardiner's Learning Neighborhoods are dynamic spaces shaped collaboratively by Oregon City students and their teachers. They support the District's deeper learning philosophy and encompass a variety of spaces to accommodate different education and social needs. By removing typical sources of anxiety, Learning Neighborhoods empower students to take ownership of their learning

Environmental Graphics Each Learning Neighborhood has its own unique color palette and environmental graphic. Beyond aesthetics, these design components serve as placemaking tools that foster a sense of identity and belonging.

Gender-Neutral Restroom Facilities All of Gardiner's Learning Neighborhoods have their own gender-neutral restroom facilities. In addition to convenience, accessible restrooms serve to reduce anxiety and help students feel more comfortable by meeting their needs within their learning communities.



Student-Centered Spaces

Learning Neighborhoods are student-centered. Unlike traditional classrooms where teachers "own" the space and students move from room to room, Learning Neighborhoods were designed for teachers and students to negotiate spatial needs, matching needs to the appropriate space. This intentional shift in emphasis amplifies each students' sense of belonging.

Storage Cubbies Insight from the Design Committee's Empathy Interviews revealed that traditional lockers were a major stress point for students – especially for elementary students preparing to transition into middle school. Gardiner's use of cubbies ensures that students can safely store their belongings within their learning spaces, effectively strengthening their belief that their Learning Neighborhood is their home base.

Centralized and Integrated Design The Learning Neighborhoods support the District's new project-based teaching and learning approach and empower students to take ownership of their learning spaces by removing typical sources of middle school anxiety.

Educational Environment



STUDENT CHOICE AND AUTONOMY

Empowering Students to Grow their Sense of Agency

Throughout the design process, students on the Design Committee advocated for spaces that would allow them to exercise choice and autonomy throughout their day. They recognized that their ability to navigate the school and its resources in a way that was authentic to their individual needs would foster self-confidence and help build positive adult-student relationships. Thoughtful adjacencies and strong lines of sight support student safety and passive supervision, all without making students feel like they're being scrutinized.

Food Service and Dining

In response to student input, the design team prioritized choice in dining and food delivery spaces through the use of a food court style servery, easy tray return locations on both the upper and lower floors, and multiple indoor and outdoor eating areas.

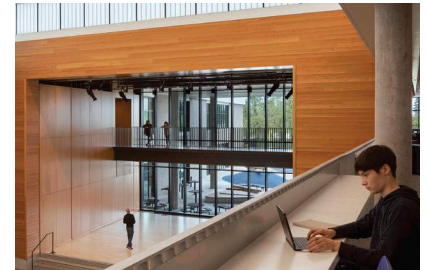
Timber Hall features tables of various sizes as well as the **Learning Stair**, both of which allow students to choose how and where they'd like to gather and eat after exploring the food services options.

Daily access to safe outdoor spaces was critically important to students on the Design Committee and their peers. **The Courtyard's** outdoor dining area acts as an extension of



Timber Hall, allowing students to enjoy their meals outside on all but the most inclement days.

The Vista's (stage) flexible and adaptive design allows students to enjoy this dynamic space on a daily basis. A variety of soft seating options on the stage provide students with additional choices for gathering and eating during the lunch period.



Students can also choose to eat lunch at the counter-height seating area in the **Active Learning Center** that overlooks Timber Hall, ensuring they stay connected to the larger community even as they seek independent work spaces.

STUDENT CHOICE AND AUTONOMY

Empowering Students to Grow their Sense of Agency

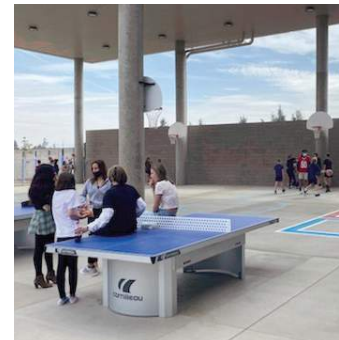
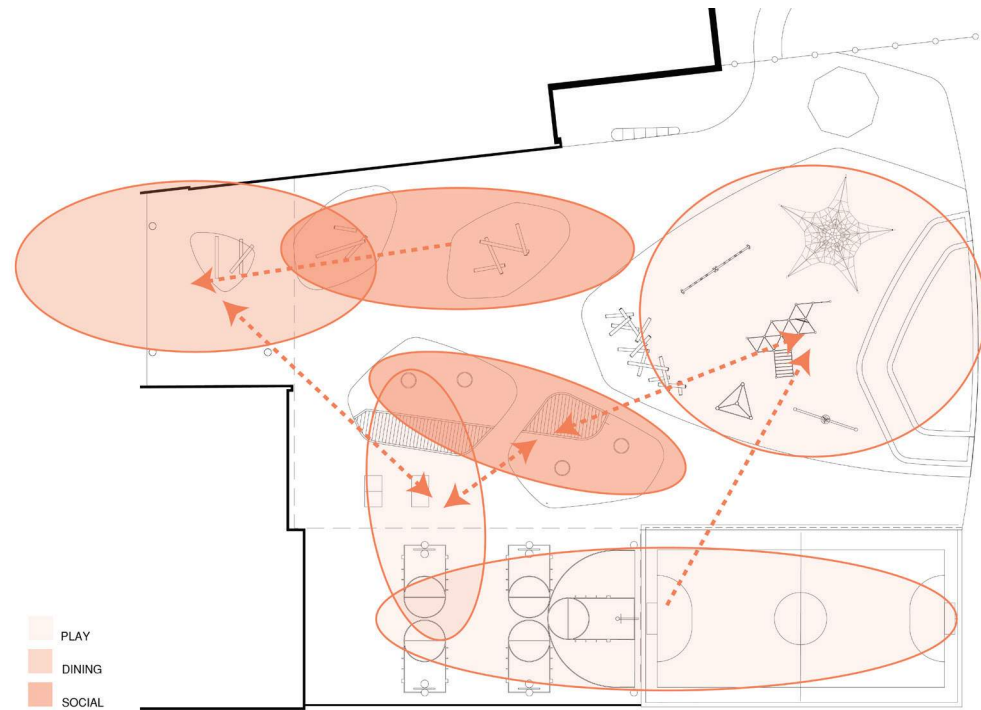
Play and Socialization

Like Timber Hall, the outdoor Courtyard is a dynamic space designed to support multiple activities and diverse student needs. Its composition allows students to effortlessly and independently transition between eating, playing, and socializing. Spatial solutions that enable passive supervision allow staff to monitor student activity in a way that affirms the students' autonomy.

The Courtyard responds to the fact that interests vary greatly between sixth, seventh, and eighth graders. While younger students typically gravitate toward the play structures, older students may utilize areas designated for hanging out with friends. From active play spaces to gathering areas, the Courtyard supports a full spectrum of recreational and social needs.

Flexible and Versatile Learning Environments

Student choice is just as prevalent inside Gardiner as it is outside. Within the Learning Neighborhoods, a broad collection of flexible, adaptable, and versatile solutions empowers students to choose how they want to experience their learning environments. Students have daily opportunities to utilize spaces designed for gathering as well as



individual study, based on their how their needs relate to their studies. Similarly, break out labs off the open collaboration spaces as well as mobile furniture serve as tools through which students can strengthen their sense of independence.

Meanwhile, passive supervision strategies allow teachers to ensure that their students are making safe, responsible choices without undermining their autonomy.



RETHINKING SPACES FOR TEACHERS

Supporting Educators in Student-Centered Spaces

As Gardiner's Design Committee championed a student-driven design process that would ultimately yield a student-centered middle school, one of the biggest concerns was whether or not this approach would come as a detriment to teachers' success. Would they get left behind? District leaders were quick to assure stakeholders that Gardiner's design

would indeed promote productivity, wellness, and connection among the school's educators.

Gardiner's Learning Neighborhoods feature dedicated Teacher Collaboration Spaces that are designed to support preparation and planning near, yet away from, regular instructional spaces.

Within the Learning Neighborhood's teaching and learning areas, various scales of gathering spaces promote team teaching and allow

teachers the flexibility to break free of typical 1:30 teacher-student ratios. This level of flexibility serves to optimize teachers' ability to tailor their lessons.

Beyond the Learning Neighborhoods, teachers have access to a lounge on the second floor near Timber Hall and the student game room. While the lounge's amenities ensure teachers have the resources they need to recharge throughout the day, its proximity to student spaces promotes teacher-student connections outside of their immediate learning environments.

Physical Environment

The power to inspire and motivate were drivers in both the process of developing Gardiner from bond through design, and in the end result of the new school.

PROMOTING INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION

A Sustained Emphasis on Engagement

Oregon City Community

The Oregon City School District had not passed a bond since 2000 and was determined to change that in 2018. The District, along with countless volunteers in the community, worked tirelessly to think creatively and drive publicity to excite the community and convey the value of investing in these schools. The \$158 million bond was successfully passed with 60.8% of the vote.

Design Committee

Early on, the Design Committee committed to entirely rethinking the middle school experience, motivated by the premise that middle school students could and should be more engaged in their education than anyone assumed possible. Recovering these “forgotten years” and maximizing the potential of this time in students’ lives drove the Design Committee’s thinking at every stage. Members of the committee toured multiple schools to find inspiration for integrating a project-based



learning model at the new school and finding ideas for how the physical environment would support this educational experience.

Gardiner Students

The *By Students, For Students* concept was a guiding factor in the development process. Fully integrating and honoring student involvement in the Design Committee enabled students to contribute fully and see the results of their input at every stage of design and in the final product. Reflecting on their Design Committee experience, one student member shared, “With this, we felt like we got to contribute. We got to be a part of something. I think future

students coming here, knowing that students got the opportunity to provide input, will really boost themselves and be like, *Hey I can have a difference, too.*”

Driven by the *By Students, For Students* concept, the new school environment is designed around motivating choice and autonomy and a sense of belonging for students, inspiring them to be active and present in all aspects of their middle school experience by giving them options around how they learn, how they engage, and how they develop into healthy, well-adjusted young adults.

SCALES OF GATHERING FOR STAFF AND STUDENTS

Meeting Needs through Spatial Design

Supporting Curriculum

The catalyst at the center of Gardiner's design was the District's implementation of a collaborative, project-based approach to middle school education. Not only would this innovative curriculum begin to shift how students interacted with each other throughout the day, but it would also transform the typical teacher-student dynamic to reflect a more

equitable, relationally driven partnership. As a result, it was imperative that Gardiner's physical spaces anticipate and accommodate the various scales in which students and teachers gather in this new, inherently collaborative approach to teaching and learning.

Providing Scales of Gathering

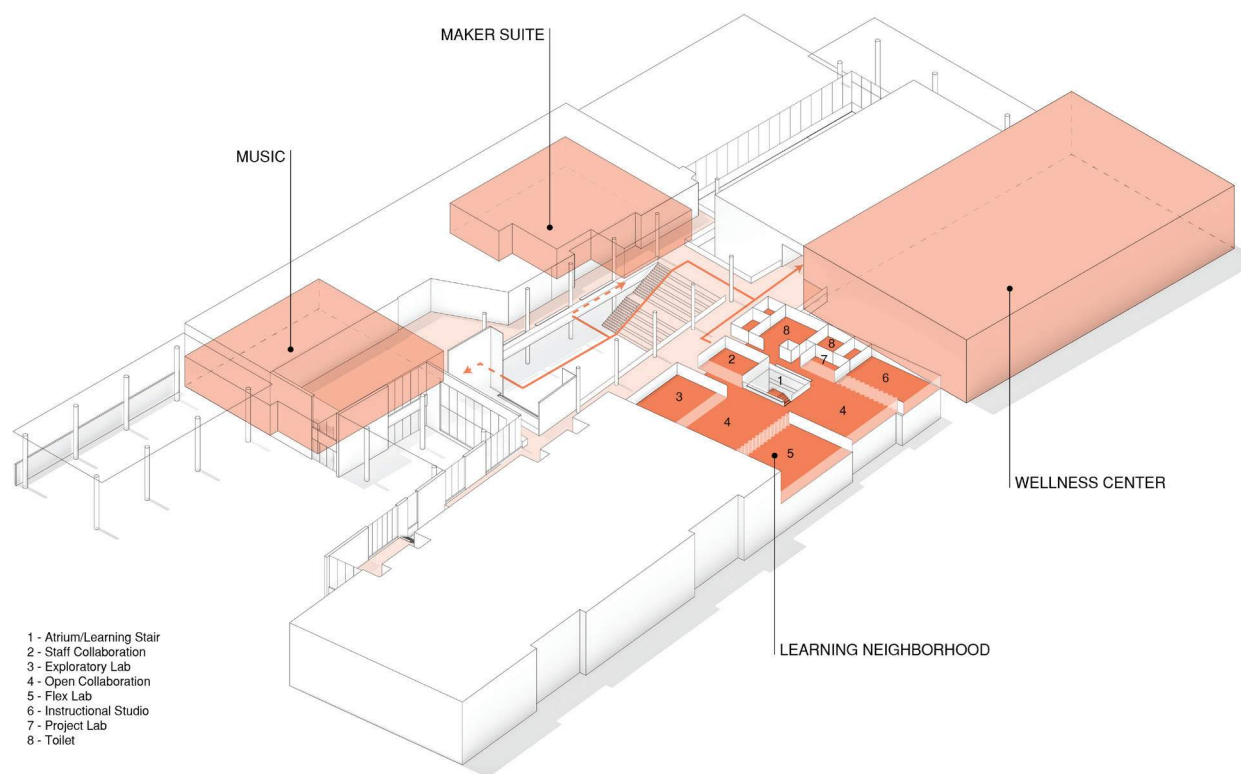
From one-on-one instruction to entire grade-level meetings, Gardiner was designed to accommodate a variety of teacher and student gatherings. Gardiner's six Learning Neighborhoods foster opportunities for

individual study as well as small- to mid-size group collaboration, and are designed to comfortably accommodate grade level-specific team meetings. Learning neighborhoods can also accommodate brief assemblies comprised of the entire grade level. In other words, for a short period of time, the entire sixth grade could meet in a single learning neighborhood. Teachers can also convene entire grade levels in Timber Hall to effectively facilitate longer, more involved meetings.

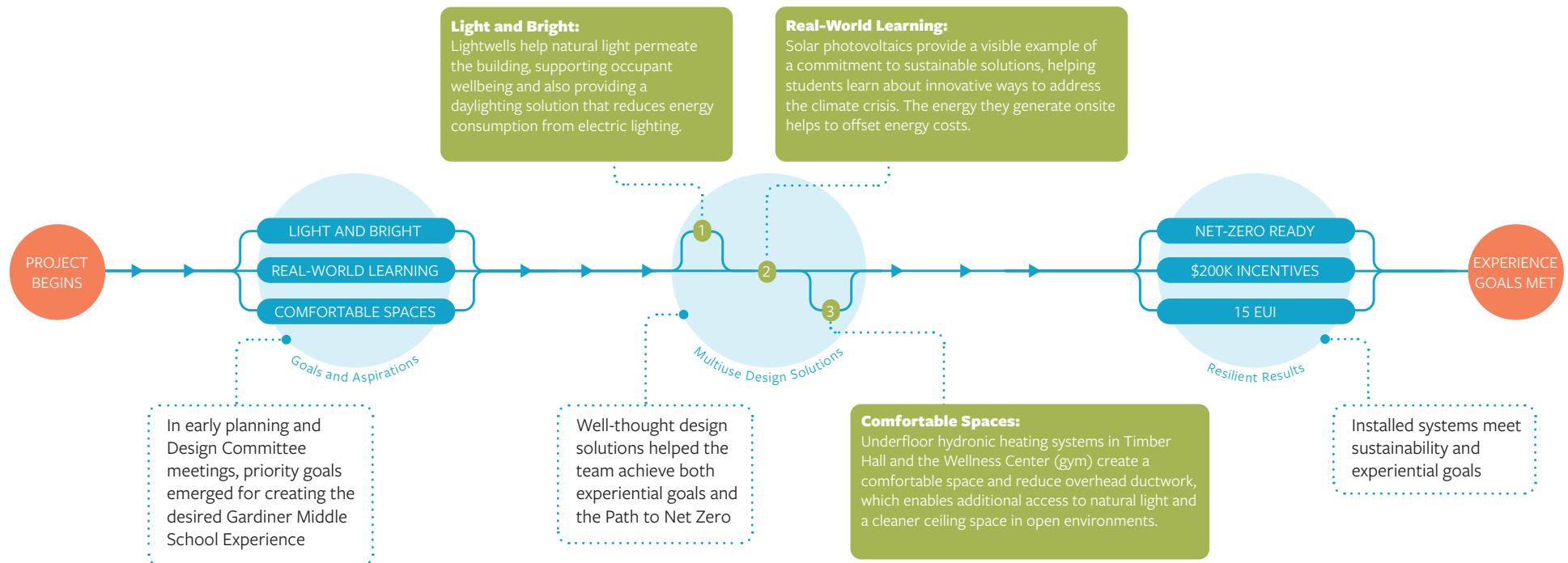
Creating a Home Base and the Rhythm of Returning

Gardiner's Learning Neighborhoods were created to feel like a home base for its students. Despite their dynamic and versatile nature, the Learning Neighborhoods maintain a sense of safety, comfort, and familiarity through their comprehensive and integrated design. Almost everything that students and teachers need are housed within each Learning Neighborhood, and students are empowered to seek out other spaces within the school that support additional needs and activities.

This continuous rhythm of leaning into, leaving, and then returning to the Learning Neighborhood is unique to the Gardiner experience. It promotes critical thinking and exploration as students and teachers work together to identify the learning spaces and resources that best suit their objectives.



The Path to Net Zero + Achieving Aspirations



FINDING THE PATH

At the outset of the project, the design team gathered with District leaders and stakeholders to identify all of Gardiner's key objectives. From pedagogy to efficiency and the student experience, capturing the District's priorities allowed the team to effectively build a process around what they valued. Achieving Net Zero at Gardiner wasn't the District's top priority, but potentially achieving it while also achieving higher priority targets was always a key factor in decision-making.

DEVELOPING A DIRECTION

While achieving a Net-Zero energy building was not an explicit District priority, the design team used the Energy Trust of Oregon's Path to Net Zero program as a guide. This gave designers and engineers a contextual lens to identify sustainable design solutions that aligned with other project objectives, where implementing these ideas would enable the project to achieve experiential and sustainability goals simultaneously. The design team was always cognizant of how design decisions could achieve multiple goals, and looked intentionally for further opportunities that supported them.

INVESTING IN SUCCESS

Designers and engineers collaborated closely to implement solutions that maximized the value of the District's investment in renewable energy and high-efficiency systems, mandated to be at least 1.5% of the budget. The resulting design included many systems that supported energy efficiency and resilience. The project also earned \$200,000 in incentives from the Energy Trust for including energy efficient solutions. Gardiner successfully achieved Net Zero readiness as well as its education and physical environmental experience goals.

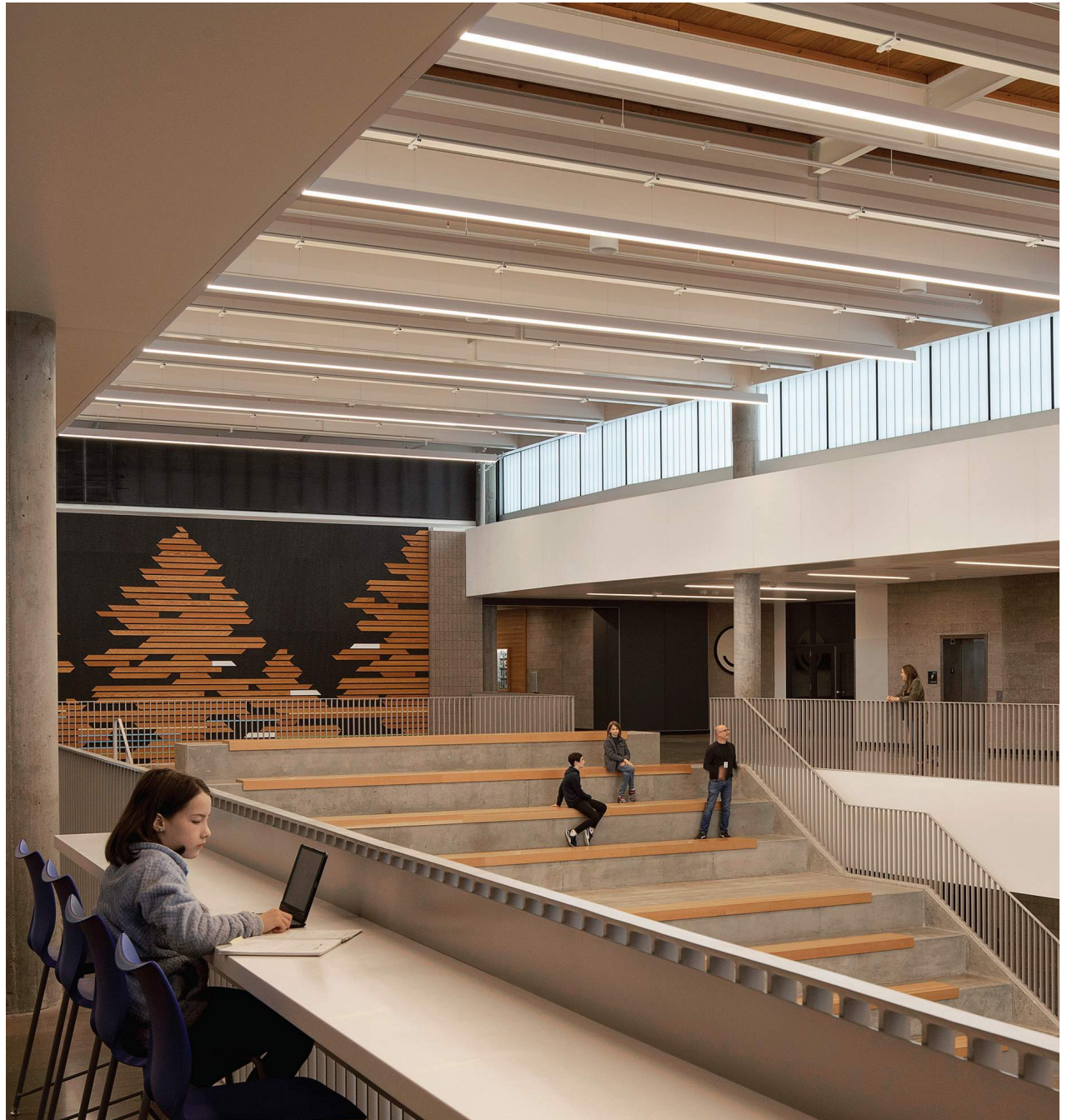
BUILDING COMMUNITY IDENTITIES **Environmental Graphics and Building** **Materials**

Gardiner's Tree Motif—a Tool for Placemaking and Exploration

The physical environment reveals the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest, with a sense of discovery integrated into the experience. The environmental graphics feature a tree motif that builds upon itself as users move through the space—partial elements of the tree are found on walls and on interior glazing, gradually adding additional portions of the tree until users reach Timber Hall, where the full tree graphic is revealed in the space. This buildup of the imagery from partial elements to the full tree represents the process of discovery that is part of a student's educational experience, and also reinforces the importance of Timber Hall as a central hub—all paths lead to Timber Hall.

Intentional Use of Wood

Wood is a featured material used strategically and meaningfully throughout the building to convey a sense of importance and help users understand the building. Like other graphics throughout the building, the use of wood elements builds as users move through the space, culminating with significant expressions in Timber Hall.



REDUCING ANXIETIES WITH INTENTIONAL DESIGN

Safety and Security

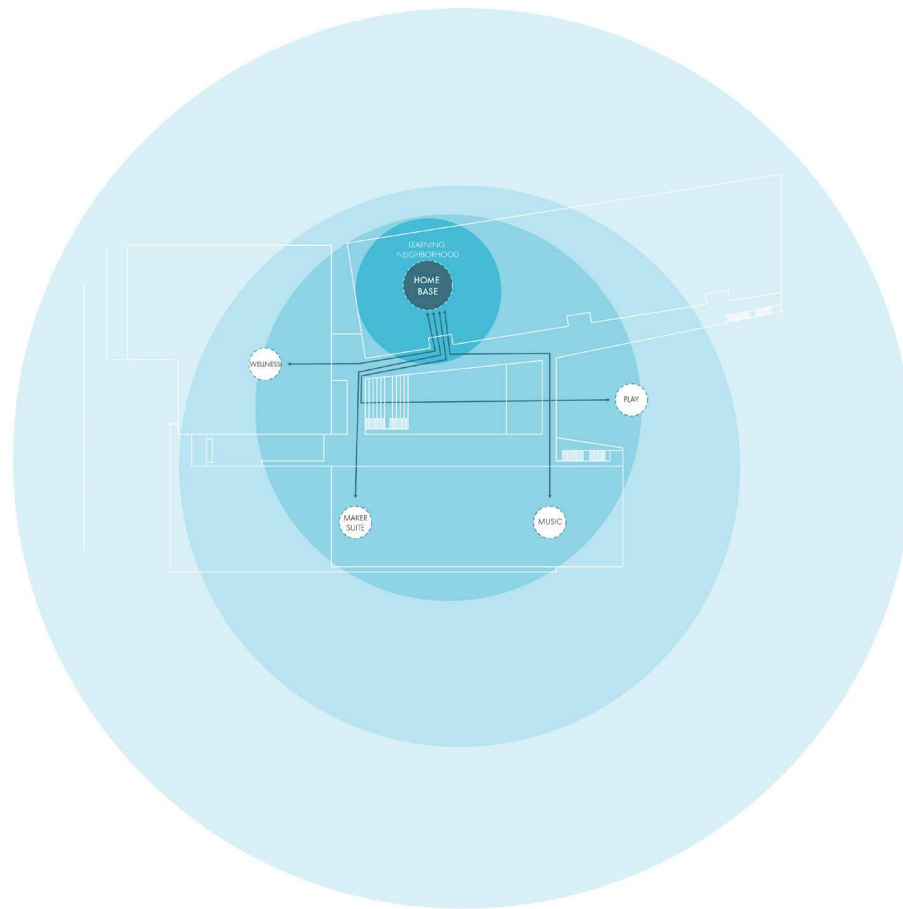
A Nuanced Approach to School Safety

A high level of safety and security features are present in the school, subtly integrated into the environment so that they are unobtrusive and don't detract from the educational experience and the character of the space. The entry Welcome Center includes many integrated safety features while maintaining an environment that is welcoming to students, families, and the community. The Welcome Center is designed as an outward community-focused space rather than an inwardly-oriented administrative hub. Students and visitors enter through a secure vestibule that unobtrusively incorporates standard District technologies, such as video intercoms and card swipe access systems. There are small, medium, and large meeting spaces where families can meet with administrators, fill out forms, etc., rather than private administrative offices.

The design team sought student input about their anxieties in the school environment, with the goal being to identify and implement safety and security measures that could reduce these anxieties and help students feel safe. Students shared anxieties related to transitions between spaces, around lockers, and in restrooms. Prioritizing lines of sight and passive supervision resulted in solutions that removed or reduced these situations from common environments.

Lockers and toilet rooms are located within each Learning Neighborhood, and most transitions occur in these spaces as well. Toilet rooms provide choice between gender-neutral or gender-specific facilities, there is no space for gathering in restrooms, and hand washing stations are visible and easily supervised. The Learning Neighborhood environments are by design a "home base" for students, enabling the comfortable nature of these spaces to help

offset higher anxiety situations. When students move outside their Learning Neighborhoods, they circulate through and around Timber Hall, eliminating the conflicts and congestion associated with navigating through narrow corridors and accessing lockers. Overall, Gardiner's organization creates a more open environment while also supporting passive supervision throughout the building.



WELCOMING THE COMMUNITY

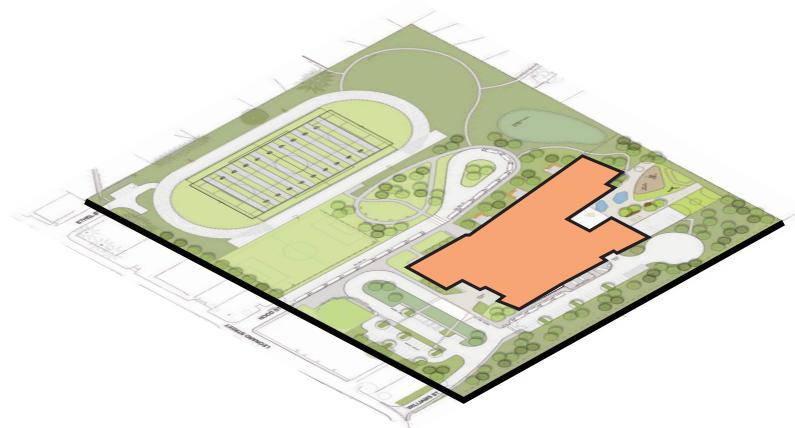
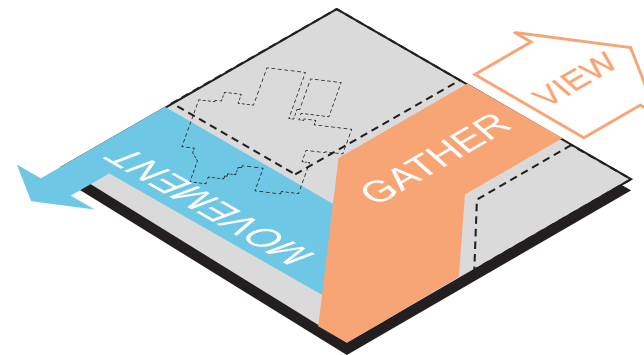
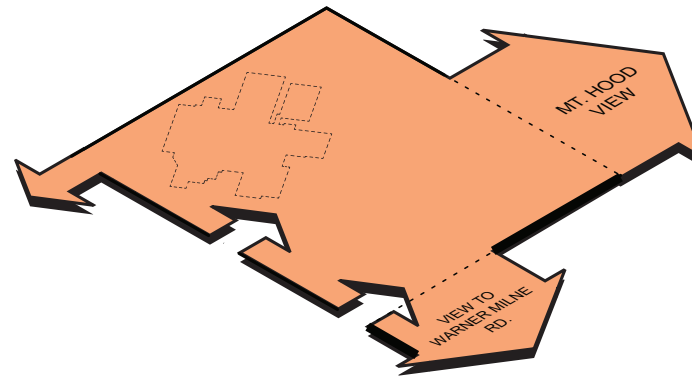
Aligning with Community Context

Welcome Center and Community Room

The school's Welcome Center entryway features many elements that invite users into the thematic environment of the school, with natural lighting from clerestory windows, bright colors, environmental graphics, flexible spaces, and no individual offices. It is designed to evoke a "you are welcome to be here" sentiment for all who enter. Adjacent to the Welcome Center is a community room space that supports appropriate community use of school facilities while maintaining a secure school environment. The rentable space features a separate entrance as well as amenities and resources that support a variety of community uses.

The Neighborhood's Backyard

The school site creates a balanced connection with the surrounding neighborhood that promotes intentional community usage. The school is set back and scaled to respect nearby homes while school grounds are open and available for community use after school hours. Gardiner feels like a private and safe space, but also one that is welcoming and inclusive. This balance creates a space much like an extended backyard for neighbors and the community.



Results of the Process and Project

Gardiner Middle School epitomizes the transformative value of leveraging lessons learned and celebrating the journey of discovery.

OPENING THE DOORS

Welcoming Students and Staff

Preparing Resources for Students

As Oregon City School District prepared to welcome everyone to the new Gardiner Middle School, supporting students and staff during this time of transition was critical to the school's success. Printed resources, like the one pictured to the right, were created to introduce incoming students to all of Gardiner's spaces and features. The message below is an excerpt from the student brochure:

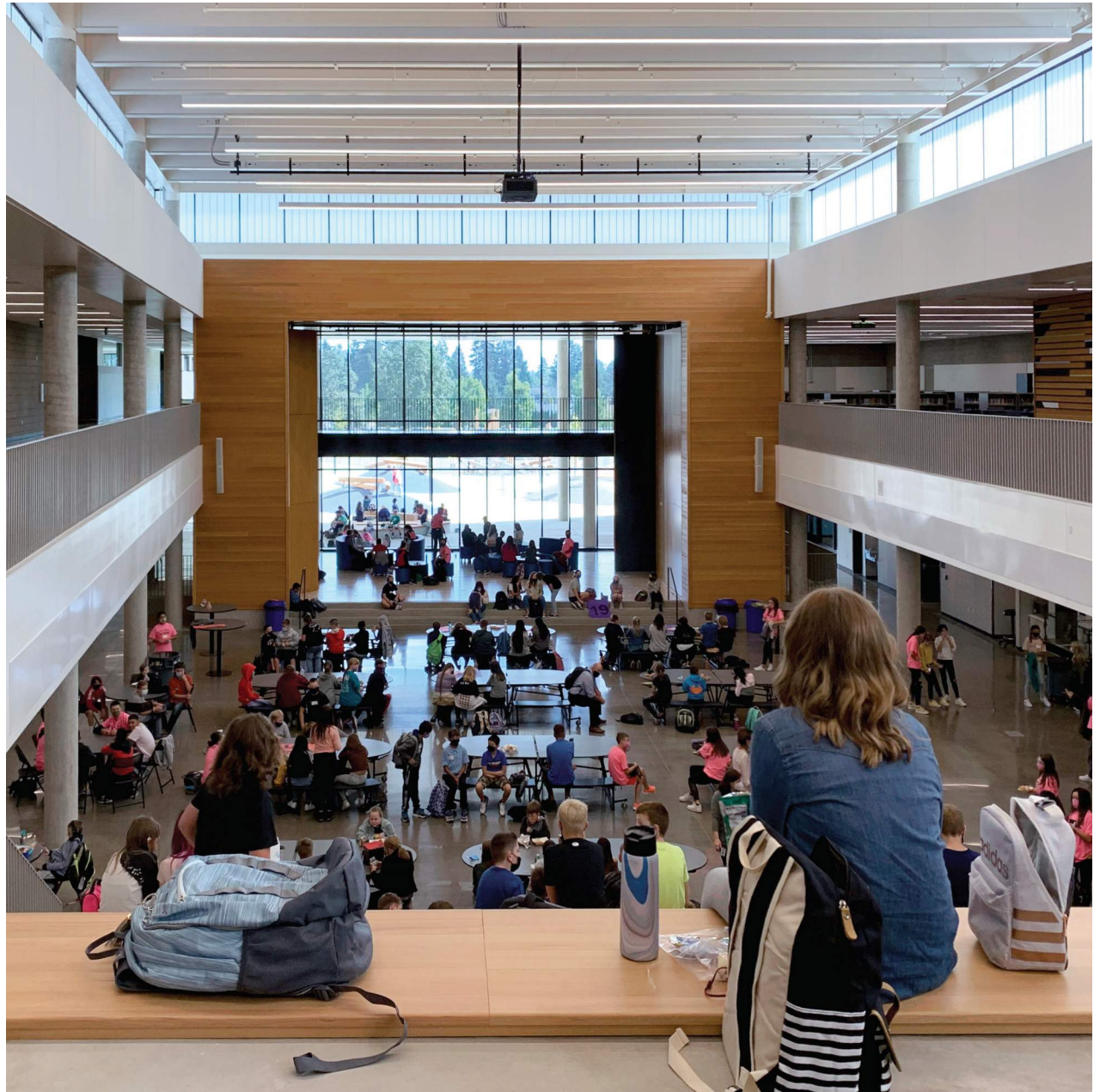
Welcome to your new school!

Your new space is nearly complete! The new Gardiner is a re-imagined middle school experience. It's a school where light-filled spaces are shared, and shaped, by teachers and students, alike. Where teaching and learning is collaborative, flexible, and engaging.

It's a place that supports wellness, and where developing independence is just as important as building supportive, meaningful relationships.

It's a school designed by students, for students.

And it's yours!



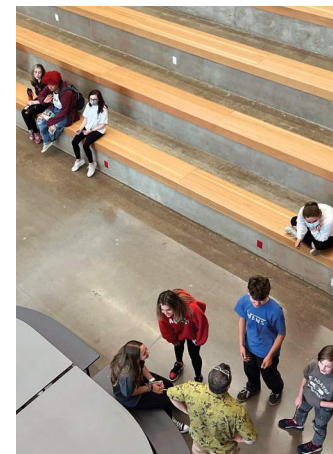
“My main things that I wanted to contribute to the conversation were natural lighting and active space. I think both of those have been achieved in a great way.”

GARDINER STUDENT



“I really like how open the spaces are and it’s not as confined and there’s so much natural lighting.”

GARDINER STUDENT



“At first it was like, we’re just sixth, seventh, eighth graders; we don’t even know who we are ourselves. To give input on something that’s going to affect the whole population of this school was a big thing.”

GARDINER STUDENT



“We need natural light because we didn’t have a lot of it [before]. It’s just nice to see and it provides an environment that isn’t necessarily just school and bricks and lockers, you know?”

GARDINER STUDENT



“With this, we felt like we got to contribute. We got to be a part of something. I think future students coming here, knowing that students got the opportunity to provide input, will really boost themselves and be like, *Hey I can have a difference, too.*”

GARDINER STUDENT



Results of the Process and Project

EMBRACING A NEW WAY OF THINKING

Process Reflection

Tailoring the Design Process to Align with the Nature of the School

Early on, the Design Committee determined that Gardiner needed to be unlike any other existing school environment in order to support the fully reimagined educational experience that the Design Committee aspired to create, one that implemented a project-based/deeper learning approach, incorporated design thinking, and provided students with choice and autonomy in different ways.

To create an unprecedented school building required an unprecedented school design and project management approach characterized by ongoing trust and teamwork. The key factor in this approach was buying as much time as possible for a deeper engagement process with students and other stakeholders to explore new ideas, gather input, and reach consensus.

In particular, clarity and direction around the design of the Learning Neighborhoods required deeper and more time intensive conversations with educators and students to fully understand the implications of the school's team-based approach to teaching and learning.

Allotting the time to facilitate these conversations required the design team to embrace an uneven approach to design and documentation. While this approach revealed



points of discomfort within the design team, everyone ultimately believed in the value of maximizing the engagement process to fully inform the design.

Design and documentation pushed ahead in certain areas where decisions had been made, while more time was prioritized for deeper conversation and consensus-building before developing other areas. The design team also worked closely with the construction team,



providing clear communication about what was included in milestone drawing sets, what was not, and when documentation updates were to be expected.

Through clear communication and mutual trust, the team was collectively able to make the time needed to explore a new way of thinking about educational experiences, and in turn demonstrate a new way of thinking about what it means to be a design partner.



Photography throughout by Josh Partee and Jeremy Bitterman
Select Graphics on pages 12 and 24 by Travis Nissen