



Gardiner Middle School

OREGON CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Executive Summary

REIMAGINING THE MIDDLE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

By Students, For Students

Motivated by the premise that middle school students could and should be more engaged in their education than anyone assumed possible, the Oregon City School District sought to reimagine the middle school experience and reposition sixth, seventh, and eighth grade as more than just steppingstones along the path from elementary to high school.

Rather, these “forgotten years” are a time to support students as they navigate adolescence and experience mental, physical, and emotional change. 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.

With a bond-funded opportunity to replace the 60+ year old Gardiner Middle School, the District embarked on an inclusive engagement, planning, and design process—guided by a By Students, For Students

central theme—that enabled students to champion dynamic design ideas alongside District leaders, educators, and designers to imbue collaboration, wellness, and exploration in curriculum development and in the educational and physical environment of their school.

The Gardiner Middle School Replacement project successfully achieved all of its primary goals: the District achieved bond priorities to reduce overcrowding, improve safety and security, and increase energy efficiency. Educationally, the new school supports the District’s goal of implementing a project-based, student-centered curriculum and learning approach. Experientially, the new environment effectively reduces student anxiety and stress, a priority identified through early student engagement, and fosters equity and inclusion for all students, especially those with non-dominant lived experiences.



Timber Hall is a dynamic social and community hub with a “learning stair,” gathering spaces, a performance venue, and extended education spaces. It is used for lunch periods and so much more.

GARDINER’S IMPACT

New Gardiner has been operational for nearly two years. Despite coming online during the COVID-19 pandemic in the midst of distance learning, the new school has already impacted students, teachers, school leaders, and the community in positive and significant ways. Feedback solicited in December 2022 and May 2023 from District leaders, Gardiner leaders and educators, students, and parents revealed that:

- ⬇ Student anxieties have decreased.
- ⬇ Attendance and tardiness issues have decreased.
- ⬇ Discipline referrals have decreased.
- ⬇ Regressive actions are about half to a third of what Gardiner leaders have experienced at other middle schools.
- ⬆ Collaboration has increased between students, between students and adults, and between teachers.
- ⬆ Teacher collaboration has accelerated teacher learning.
- ⬆ Collaboration opportunities where all students in a grade level can engage concurrently are now possible.
- ⬆ Teacher reading and research has increased.
- ⬆ Community demand for and use of the school building and grounds has increased.

Executive Summary

Connecting to Core Values

Gardiner Middle School deeply embodies A4LE's core values **Learners First**, **Respect**, and **Innovation**. From the Learning Neighborhoods to the central hub Timber Hall, the school centers opportunities for students to grow as individuals, build relationships with their peers and their teachers, and flourish in community. It amplifies student autonomy and inspires a sense of belonging among learners, empowering them to be active co-creators of their middle school experience.

The research and engagement strategies used by the District and design team anchor the project in the core values of **Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion** as well as **Collaboration, Collegiality, and Connection**, prioritizing deep listening, valuing all ideas, and engaging in continuous learning and improvement. The results of the project, and the experiences of students, teachers, and District leaders, are proof of the value that **Place Matters** and becomes the difference in experience for all.



Learners First



**Justice, Equity,
Diversity, Inclusion**



Innovation



**Collaboration,
Collegiality, Connection**



Respect



Place Matters



Several Design Committee students were participants in the Gardiner's bilingual program.

Gardiner Middle School was first submitted for the 2022 MacConnell Award. This dossier has been updated and revised with additional content, including input from additional Gardiner leaders, educators, students, and parents.



Project of Distinction, 2023
A4LE PNW Region's Pinnacle Award



Project of Distinction, 2022
A4LE Planning and Design Award

SCOPE AND BUDGET

The project replaced the existing single-story Gardiner Middle School with a larger and modernized facility, which alleviated overcrowding (the existing school was operating at 140% of its original capacity) and addressed

deficiencies in learning spaces, air quality, safety, and exterior integrity. The new school was built on the same site while the existing school remained operational.

Grades Served

6 - 8

Building Area

150,000 Sq Ft

Student Capacity

1,000

Site Area

19.5 Acres

Occupancy Date

Summer 2021

Project Budget

\$79,000,000

Community and School Research and Engagement

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 been a hub of trade, politics, urban activity, and industrial innovation for nearly 200 years. This 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.

In addition, the community's proximity to rivers, mountains, and forests has also shaped Oregon City's connection to the natural bounty of the Pacific Northwest, from recreation to conservation.

Oregon City features a diverse, multilingual population. Unique among schools in the Oregon City School District, Gardiner Middle School offers a Spanish-English bilingual program. Additionally, all signage in the school is provided in English, Spanish, and Russian, with attention given to ensuring that translations from English reflect the specific intent and nuance of naming conventions used in the school.



Source: Downtown Oregon City



Gardiner Middle School is named in memory of **Thora Benson Gardiner**, a civic leader and active member of many community organizations during her lifetime. During the 21 years Mrs. Gardiner was on the School Board, she served as Chair for three terms and was instrumental in building the former Oregon City High School on 12th Street, Barclay School, and Eastham School. She also helped lead the consolidation of the Park Place School District with Oregon City School District.

Community and School Research and Engagement

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Pre-Bond Community Involvement: Building Momentum

In Oregon, local capital improvement bonds are the only means of funding facility upgrades and new construction, leading to a wide range of facility conditions from one community to the next.

While neighboring communities had approved bonds and executed upgrades, Oregon City had not passed a bond in nearly 20 years 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 schools. A kickoff rally at Oregon City High School, which had been built with funds from the last bond passed in 2000, reminded the community of what they could achieve by believing and investing in an educational vision.

The event featured representation from city officials and a performance by the high school marching band, evoking a celebration to reinvigorate the community with hope and a dream for change at the middle school level.

“Investing in a building is a message to the community about the value of education.”

DR. SARA DEBOY
Assistant Superintendent

Galvanized by campaign efforts, the community passed the \$158 million bond with 62% of the vote, paving the way for much needed upgrades at several schools.

Originally built in 1954, Gardiner Middle School has been a cornerstone of the Oregon City community for nearly 70 years. It was one of two middle schools slated for complete replacement as part of the bond promise.



Source: Oregon City High School
Oregon City High School Marching Band

Project Stakeholders

- Current and future Gardiner students
- Educators
- School and District administrators
- Parents
- Community groups and athletic clubs that frequently make use of school facilities
- The Oregon City community at large

CHALLENGES AND ASSETS

Understanding Current Student Experiences and Anxieties

In early “empathy interviews” with former, current, and future Gardiner students, students shared openly about their experiences with the existing school’s physical space and the anxieties created and exacerbated by it. These included anxieties related to crowding, the length of passing time between classes, difficulties navigating crowded corridors, a lack of supervision in certain areas—especially restrooms, and transitioning from one grade level to another. Ultimately, students expressed feeling physically and emotionally unsafe in their school.

Balancing Deep Engagement with Project Progress

The project team prioritized as much time as possible for a deeper engagement process with students and other stakeholders to explore new ideas, gather input, and reach consensus around the implications of the school’s team-based approach to teaching and learning.

At times, this created points of discomfort and uncertainty, especially for the design and construction teams bound by schedule and budget requirements. 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 trusted project partners.

Team Continuity and Trust

The project team included the same architects and planners who led the District’s long-range planning, visioning, and bond initiatives. This long-standing relationship and mutual trust supported an unprecedented project management approach that supported the deeper engagement process.

Community Connections

Outreach and engagement during bond planning and predesign revealed that Gardiner’s amenity spaces were often used as a resource by community groups and athletic clubs. Maintaining and augmenting community-facing spaces became a priority in Gardiner’s program to uphold these connections.

Community and School Research and Engagement

ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Pre-Design Research: Informing Planning through Continuous Learning

The District prioritized the value of Collaboration, Collegiality, and Connection to leverage a professional network and learn from its peers across the West Coast. Key members of the project's Design Committee toured both local and national K-12 campuses to inform new approaches to teaching and learning and how physical spaces support them. Oregon City School District leaders and teachers learned firsthand from other districts that had implemented innovative academic programs and facility designs, then built on those lessons learned with a willingness to push boundaries and try new models of curriculum development and educational design at Gardiner.

In each of the schools that the Design Committee toured, they experienced learning environments that prioritized student needs, created a strong sense of belonging, responded to students' anxieties, and drove engagement by creating environments where students wanted to be. These tours proved that innovative ideas could succeed when District leaders and educators committed to the value of Learners First.



Gardiner's Design Committee Toured Over 10 schools

"[Touring other schools was a] barrier buster in creative problem solving to **ignite ideas and break down assumptions** about what was even possible."

LARRY DIDWAY
Former Superintendent



ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Pre-Design Engagement: Community Involvement

The District engaged in a "Portrait of a Graduate" visioning exercise, an innovative 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.

This strategic planning effort included community forums to introduce the concept and gather feedback from parents and other community members. One of these forums featured a screening of the 2015 documentary, "Most Likely to Succeed," which explores the shortcomings of traditional education methods and innovative new approaches.

The screening was followed by a panel discussion with community and local industry representatives

discussing what the film's themes meant for Oregon City students. The results of this and other forums heavily influenced the subsequent Design Committee's work.



ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

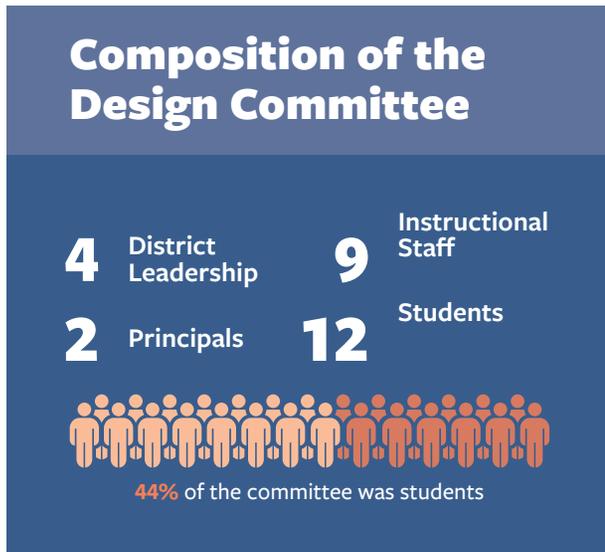
Pre-Design Engagement: Engaging Student Voices to Center Student Experiences

“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.”

MARISA EIDAM
Student Design Committee Member

Representation

The project’s Design Committee included 12 middle school students, representing 44% of the committee, which also included District leaders, instructional staff, and principals. This significant presence empowered students to contribute fully to design discussions and share their perspectives as the ultimate building users. Several Design Committee students were participants in the school’s bilingual program.



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 with a Learners First lens.

Engagement

Students were directly engaged throughout the entirety of the design process. The Design Committee approach ensured that student voices were weighted equally alongside those of the adults on the team, supporting an approach that valued Respect as well as Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion.

Advocacy

Outside of committee sessions, Design Committee 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. The empathy interviews empowered the Design Committee’s student members, and they became

confident advocates not only for themselves, but for future generations of Gardiner students and those with non-dominant lived experiences. Students expressed feeling a great responsibility to speak for their peers with different lived experiences, such as being visually impaired or neurodivergent.

“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.”

MICHAEL SWEETEN
Director of Operations and Capital Projects



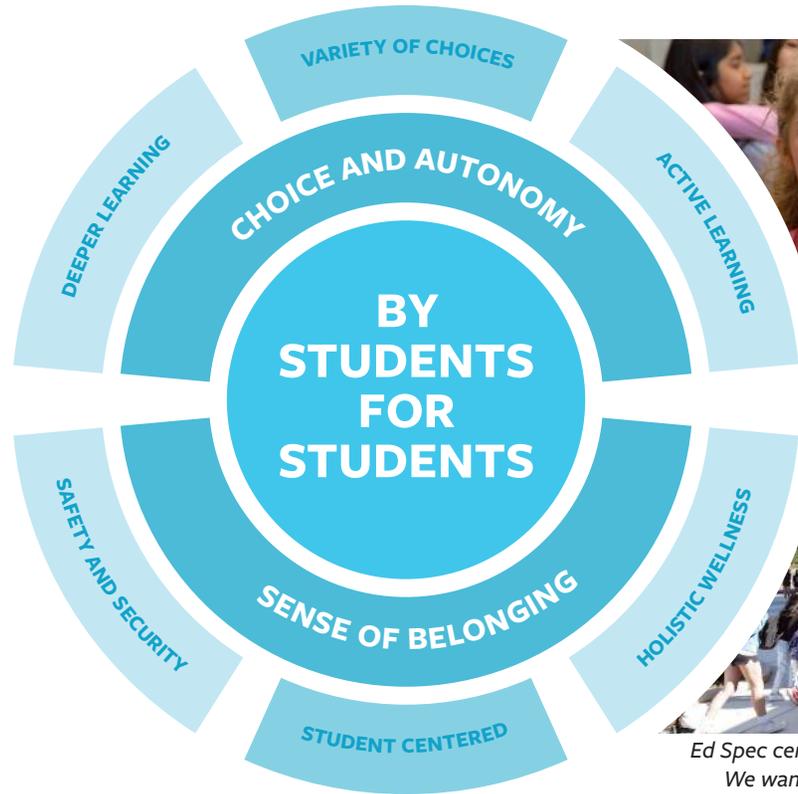
The Design Committee approach ensured that student voices were weighted equally alongside those of the adults on the team.

Community and School Research and Engagement

Values

Early student engagement included an A4LE SchoolsNEXT team comprised of Gardiner Middle School students, who engaged in conjunction with the design process. The developed a vision and model for their ideal middle school, emphasizing a theme of “Promote and Support Healthy Lives”. This, and other student engagement, culminated with documenting student belief statements and core values that guided the project planning and design approach.

These values are reflected in spaces of various purpose and scale that promote access to choice as well as a sense of belonging. Enabling students to navigate the school and its resources in a way that is authentic to their individual needs and grow community in a variety of different ways provides tangible solutions to the stressors, anxiety triggers, and challenges the Design Committee identified at the outset of the project.



Ed Spec centers students' vision: "We want to move. We want to play. We want to learn. We want to make. We want to love our school!"

Student Belief Statements

These belief statements are incorporated into Oregon City School District's Education Specifications.

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.

Community and School Research and Engagement

COMMUNITY VALUE AND IMPACT

A Dream Fulfilled

New Gardiner is the fruition of the community's dream to reset middle level education. Students, educators, district leaders, and parents all see and feel the impact of the By Students, For Students core value and approach.

“Empowering kids with the license to express what they wanted to see, share the ideas for the environment they wanted to learn in—it significantly shifted what came out of the process. It’s fun to go through the building now and see the things we heard from kids early on.”

LARRY DIDWAY
Former Superintendent

Physically, the new building is a stunning new presence in the community, instilling a sense of civic and community pride, and a sense of wonder in students: “This is for us?”

New Gardiner has become an effective venue for District sponsored events and programs. The school recently hosted a Dia del Nino event where the entire elementary school bilingual program student body and staff came to Gardiner and joined with their middle school program peers for a celebration of folklore, dancing, and outdoor festivities while middle school operations continued. Another recent event featured 36 guest speakers during College and Career week.

It has also been used for elementary student music performances, the middle school spring musical, spring track and field, a recent “Band-o-rama” middle and high school band event, and professional trainings. Oregon City high schoolers even elected to have their homecoming dance in the Gardiner gym!



Source (all): Oregon City School District
Clockwise from top left: AVID elective night, homecoming, Dia del Nino bilingual program event

“Many people walk by and say, ‘Oh my gosh, I went to this school in the 70s; the new building is just beautiful...’

And elementary students who come in, they see the school and are dreaming forward, saying, “This is going to be my school some day!”

DR. SARA DEBOY
Assistant Superintendent

“It has a unique identity but is also part of the district as a whole.”

JON ARCHER
Gardiner Assistant Principal

“Parents and community members are just blown away by the difference and feel of the school.”

ERIN LEININGER
Gardiner Instructional Coach

Educational Environment

EDUCATIONAL VISION AND GOALS

Empowering Future-Ready Learners

The “Portrait of a Graduate” vision acknowledged that the early adolescent middle school years are an extremely important time in a child’s development. It is a time marked by transition. At times overwhelming because of the mental, physical, and emotional changes students experience as they embrace their young adulthood, the District recognized the potential for joyful self-discovery to be part of this journey, too. This future vision helped define the desired educational experience for Gardiner, which transitions to an innovative way of learning that focuses on helping students be future-ready rather than test-ready and brings focus to individual students in ways that inspire them and help them fully develop their potential.

With Gardiner, 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.



The Maker Suite features numerous hands-on learning opportunities and showcases both in progress and completed student work.

The educational experience and environment are based on a universal design learning (UDL) framework, 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 project-based learning that allows students to engage with their community, think about real-life issues, and use empathy and engagement to solve real problems.

“We’re teaching kids how to be problem solvers, how to think for themselves, to create and design. I want kids to leave here having enjoyed their time in the building and being prepared for high school and beyond.”

CASSIDY WHEAT
7th Grade Language Arts Teacher at Gardiner

Educational Environment

EDUCATION SPECIFICATIONS - KEY EXCERPTS

Centering Students' Vision

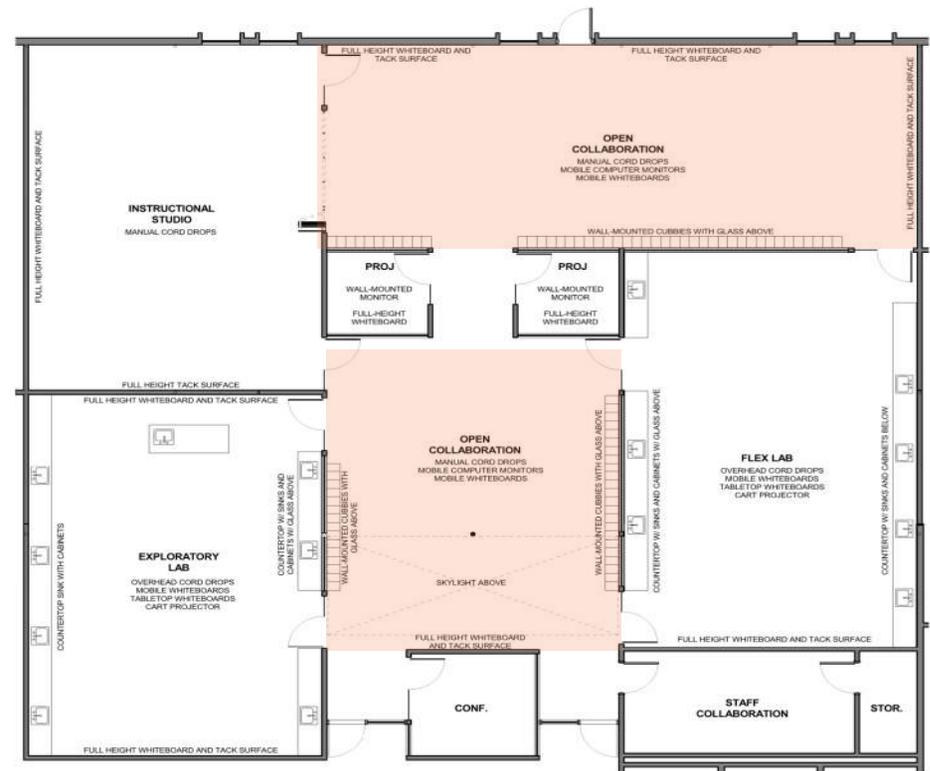
Profile of the Middle School Student: What we Hear from Students

- We want to live healthy lives.
- We want to gather together to learn, study and socialize.
- We want to be in control of our own learning.
- We want to learn “real world” life skills in school.
- We want to create our own world.
- We want less stressful transitions.
- We care about promoting inclusion and ending bullying.
- We define success by whether people are happy and having fun.
- We believe that successful schools:
 - Support access to healthy food and exercise.
 - Have access to natural daylight and exterior views.
 - Make students feel safe.
 - Support students’ academic, social and emotional lives.

Guiding Principles for Middle School Education

- Create Opportunities to Explore STEM, CTE, and Arts Activities at the Middle School Level
- Provide Flexible and Agile Learning Environments that Support Fluid Transitions between Spaces and Activities
- Provide the Resources and Support Structures for Differentiated Instruction
- Support the Socioemotional Health and Wellbeing of Middle School Students
- Instill an Ethos of Inclusivity and Connectivity within the School
- Support a Culture of Collaboration among Teachers and Students
- Support the Unique Developmental Needs of Middle School Students
- Create Engaging Environments that Manifest Real Life Applications of Educational Concepts
- Design Middle School Programs and Facilities that Serve as an Enduring Source of Pride for Oregon City Students, Teachers, and Community Members

Spatial Characteristics of a Gardiner Learning Neighborhood



Spatial Characteristics

Open Collaboration Area

- Open area for small group collaboration, pull-out activities, individual study, and informal social interactions.
- Connect instructional areas through a shared community-owned space.

Features

- Easily supervised from surrounding areas.
- Supports student autonomy and choice.
- Promotes informal interactions between students and teachers.
- Provides circulation space between instructional and support areas located within the learning neighborhood.

Adjacencies

- Collaboration areas are situated between studios and lab spaces.

FF&E

- Monitor with touchscreen on wheels.
- Overhead power via cord reels.
- “Z” rack mobile white boards.
- Full-height wall-mounted white boards.
- Flip-top white board tables.
- Flexible seating options

ALIGNING PEDAGOGY TO ARCHITECTURE 53

Educational Environment

SUPPORTING CURRICULUM WITH INNOVATIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Making Space for Project-Based Learning

The District used the opportunity to replace and reimagine the school environment as a catalyst to implement a collaborative, project-based approach to middle school education that was not possible in the original school's configuration. 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.

Learning Neighborhoods

Gardiner's six Learning Neighborhoods feature a broad collection of flexible, adaptable, and versatile solutions that empower students to grow their sense of agency and choose how they want to experience their learning environments, while enabling educators to tailor their lessons. Breakout labs off the open collaboration spaces as well as mobile furniture serve as tools through which students can strengthen their sense of independence. Various scales of gathering spaces promote team teaching and allow teachers the flexibility to break free of typical 1:30 teacher-student ratios.

From one-on-one instruction to entire grade-level meetings, the educational environment accommodates the various scales in which students and teachers gather in this new, inherently collaborative approach to teaching and learning.

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 areas with full-height teaching boards comprised of tack surface, markerboard, and video monitors, project labs, studios, and collaboration zones of various sizes,



Gardiner features a variety of innovative spaces that support choice and autonomy as well as collaboration and exploration.

counter-height seating area overlooking Timber Hall designated for individual study, and a dedicated club room for student-owned groups. Students were eager to implement tools that would allow them to engage with their lessons on a tactile level.

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.

“When students can see what each other are doing and accomplishing, it creates a culture of, Hey, I can do this, I don't have to be afraid to try.”

WES ROGERS
Former Bond Manager and OCSD Director of
Capital Projects and Operations

Educational Environment

SUPPORTING A VARIETY OF LEARNING AND TEACHING STYLES

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 spaces.

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.

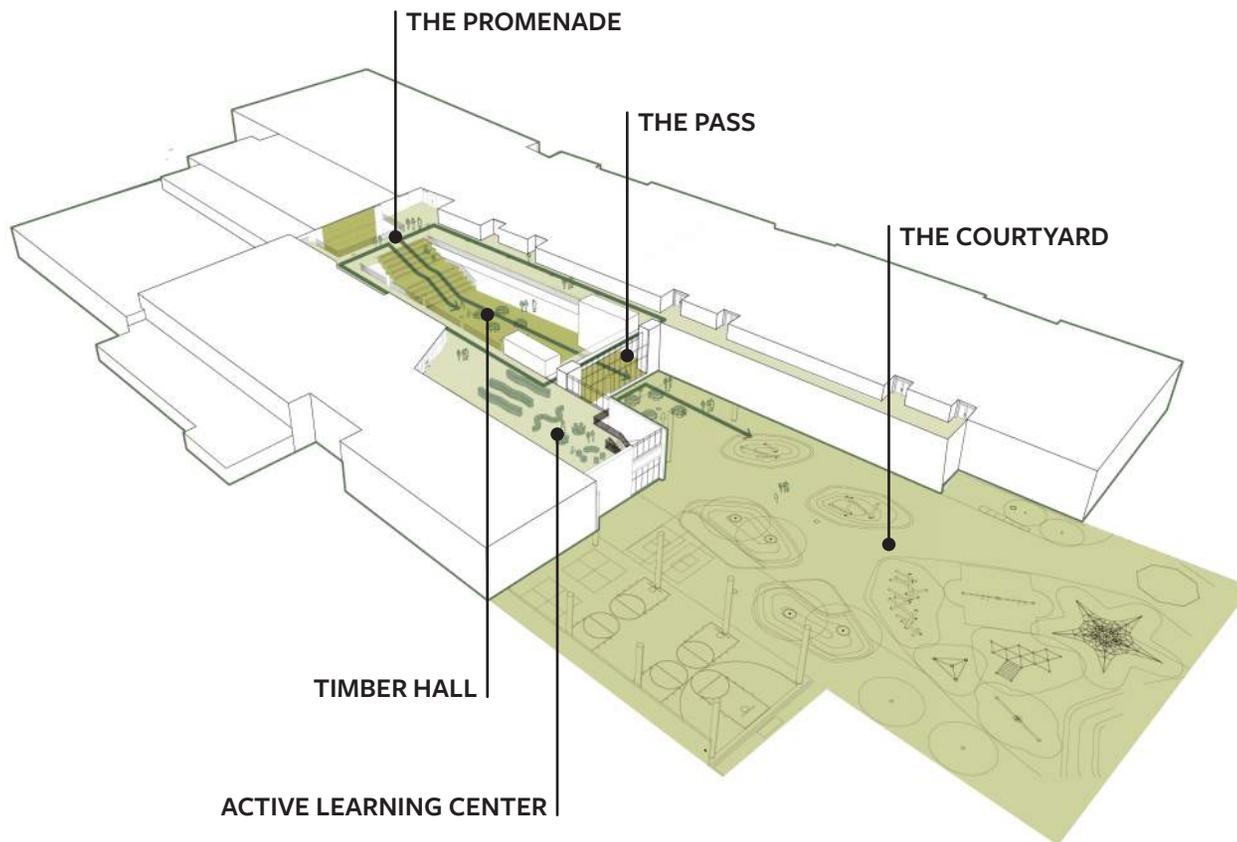
Educational Environment

ADAPTABLE AND FLEXIBLE ENVIRONMENTS

Timber Hall - Gardiner's Heart

Students expressed a strong desire to have options from which to choose and shape their experience. The fullest embodiment of this vision at Gardiner is Timber Hall. Located prominently near the main entrance, Timber Hall is a dynamic social and community hub, with gathering spaces, a performance venue, and extended education spaces.

Student members of the Design Committee and their peers championed several adaptable environments that can flex to diverse and changing student needs, from gathering and socialization to decompression and quiet study. Such options enable students to embrace a sense of agency as they navigate the diverse spaces.



Timber Hall naturally connects indoor and outdoor spaces with views, multiple access points, and a variety of different environments to align with student needs.

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. A variety of soft seating options on the stage provide students with additional choices for gathering and eating during the lunch period.

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 and Dining

Timber Hall dramatically changed the lunchtime experience from the traditionally crowded and confined environment of the cafeteria, considered one of the worst school experiences by students and school leaders alike, to a far healthier and more humane experience. Multiple indoor and outdoor eating areas with tables of various sizes, plus the Learning Stair, allow students to choose how and where they'd like to eat, socialize and interact, and recharge. The space also allows educators to both socialize with and supervise students in a more natural way. Upon seeing how Timber Hall has changed the lunchtime experience, a retired principal remarked, "I never would have retired if I'd known it could be like this."

Courtyard

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.

Educational Environment

ADAPTABLE AND FLEXIBLE ENVIRONMENTS

Supporting Educators in Student-Centered Spaces

As the 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. 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

“There is more collaboration between staff as well as between students. Staff have shared collaboration space and we designed the schedule so that each neighborhood of teachers has shared prep time and opportunity for collaboration to make learning connected and meaningful.”

JON ARCHER
Gardiner Assistant Principal



Source: Oregon City School District



Source: Oregon City School District



Teachers and students are better served by Gardiner's reimagined facilities.

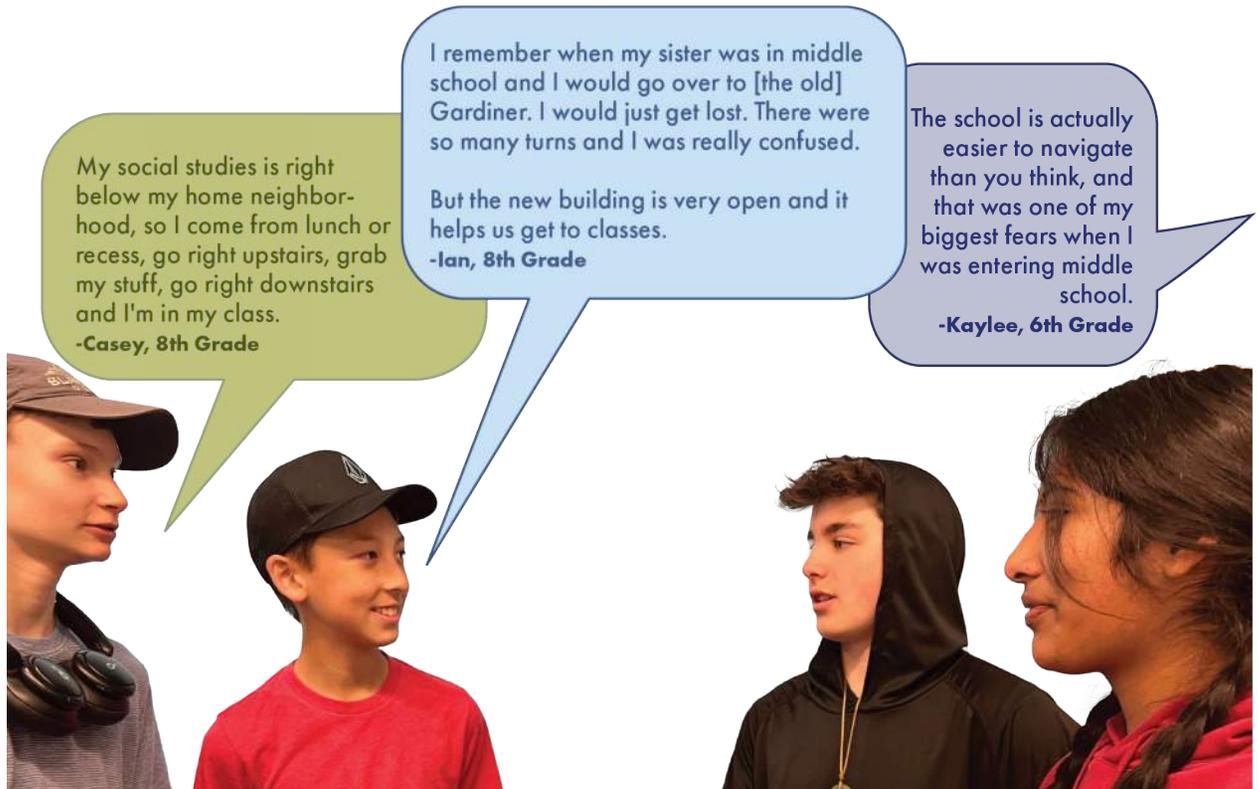
Results of the Process and Project

ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Implementing Collaborative Project-Based Learning

Educationally, the District's goals were implementing a universal design learning framework and a project-based curriculum and learning approach. These goals are embodied and experienced at Gardiner most notably in the multi-faceted and collaborative Learning Neighborhoods, Maker Suite, and the multi-functional Timber Hall. These environments have catalyzed a new approach to learning and teaching, with proven results.

The project team constructed a mockup of the new learning environment in old Gardiner's gym, with hopes of giving both educators and students and opportunity to experience the space and explore the new ways of interacting that would be possible once the new school opened. The pivot to distance learning required by the pandemic prevented use of this mockup to its fullest potential. However, teachers who were able to experience the mockup incorporated some elements of the new model into their online teaching, including some of the project-based and interdisciplinary learning models that the new environment would support.



My social studies is right below my home neighborhood, so I come from lunch or recess, go right upstairs, grab my stuff, go right downstairs and I'm in my class.
-Casey, 8th Grade

I remember when my sister was in middle school and I would go over to [the old] Gardiner. I would just get lost. There were so many turns and I was really confused.
But the new building is very open and it helps us get to classes.
-Ian, 8th Grade

The school is actually easier to navigate than you think, and that was one of my biggest fears when I was entering middle school.
-Kaylee, 6th Grade



STUDENT FEATURE

Current Gardiner Students Share their Thoughts

Q: What kinds of experiences have you had at Gardiner that feel connected to the real world?

"The maker suite. I like using machines, because my dad is a construction worker. Right now he's building a hospital and it's fun using his tools."
Ian, 8th Grader at Gardiner

Q: How does it feel to access your counselors and support spaces?

"When you go up there [to Student Services], it's less like a punishment and more like something you need. You can go there for help."
Kat, 6th Grader at Gardiner

"I love it there. I use it every time I'm stressed, overwhelmed, or super energized."
Casey, 8th Grader at Gardiner

Results of the Process and Project

“...the amount of community that has been built here because of the [learning] neighborhoods, **I’ve never experienced this before either as a teacher or an administrator...** There’s a feeling of ‘our kids in our neighborhood’ not ‘your students’ and ‘my students.’ It promotes those interactions between students and adults, who become trusted adults.”

REBEKAH BECK
Gardiner Principal



“We have been able to do exciting things with project-based learning and deeper learning...”

We can celebrate the whole child, not only their math growth, for example, but all the things that make them who they are...

We’re trying to let this place be their place, not just a place for adults where they have great classrooms and technology, but something kids feel like they own, where they see themselves in all the spaces of the building.”

REBEKAH BECK
Gardiner Principal



“The Learning Neighborhoods are the biggest impact. **It’s truly a community, and students feel that.**

They promote positive interactions between students and students, students with adults, and between teachers.”

JESS BARCHUS
Dean of Students



“[The new building] **makes us more collaborative as a teaching group** than before.”

MEGAN MCCORMICK

6th grade Science Teacher, Technology Coordinator, AVID Coordinator



“For all our neighborhoods, you can definitely **be flexible** with where you go and how much time you spend on something.”

IAN
8th Grader at Gardiner



Results of the Process and Project

ACHIEVING DISTRICT GOALS

Meeting the Bond Promise with Value and Financial Stewardship

The District's 2018 bond set out to improve safety and security, upgrade and update schools, and reduce overcrowding. Replacing Gardiner Middle School was a signature effort in the bond promise, and the project was delivered on budget, on schedule, and exceeding sustainability goals with a path to Net Zero.

ACHIEVING COMMUNITY GOALS

Making a Real-World Impact

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.



Impacts of the New Gardiner Middle School

The new school has led to a **DECREASE** in...

- ↓ Student Anxiety
- ↓ Attendance Issues
- ↓ Tardiness
- ↓ Discipline Referrals
- ↓ Regressive Actions



The new school has led to an **INCREASE** in...

- ↑ Collaboration between Students
- ↑ Collaboration between Teacher
- ↑ Collaboration between Students and Adults
- ↑ Teacher Reading and Research
- ↑ Teacher Learning / Professional Development
- ↑ Community Use of School Building and Grounds

“I was a little nervous when I first joined the design committee because I didn't think I'd be heard. But at the end of the project I saw, for one of the first times, that my opinions had been valued by adults who would help make some of my hopes for this new school into a reality.”

KEELY MERTEN
Student Design Committee Member

Though the students who participated in the Design Committee would graduate from Gardiner before the new school opened, and would never directly experience the end results of their input, each student showed a remarkable care, empathy, and engagement, thinking deeply about what they desired for the students who would come after them and experience the Gardiner that they envisioned.

“The ownership of [Design Committee] students was pretty amazing. We have created opportunities to bring them back to see the influence they had as a middle schooler, the impact they will have on lots of generations. ‘I remember when we talked about that and it's here!’ [they say]. That's cool to see.”

MICHAEL SWEETEN
Director of Operations and Capital Projects

Physical Environment

COMMUNITY CONTEXT

The Heart of the Community

Placemaking and Exploration

Gardiner's physical environment embodies the Place Matters value. It reveals the natural beauty of the Pacific Northwest, with a sense of discovery integrated into the experience. Wood is a featured material used strategically and meaningfully throughout the building to convey a sense of importance and help users understand the building.

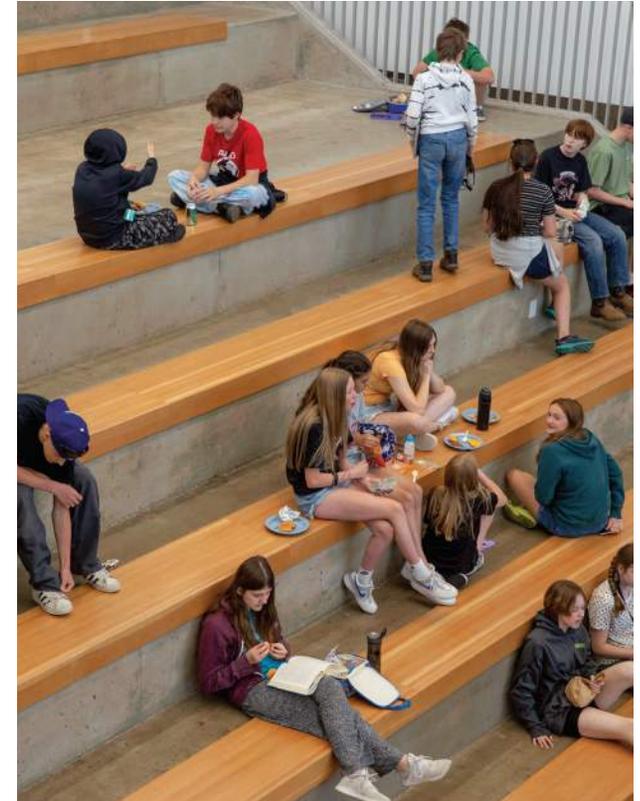
The environmental graphics feature a tree motif that builds upon itself as users move through the space—partial elements of the tree are found on walls and on interior glazing, gradually adding additional portions of the tree until users reach Timber Hall where a massive tree graphic stands boldly at the top of the Learning Stairs. Students loved this motif for its ability to promote curiosity and the process of discovery and highlight connections to the natural world.

Welcoming the Community

New Gardiner is a true community hub and has become a sought-after venue for community use. The neighborhood association and a local non-profit have monthly meetings in the community room, local arts organizations rent the performance space in Timber Hall, the gym is used for community basketball and volleyball after school and is rented every night in the summer, and the outdoor play areas and fields are welcomed in a city that does not have a robust parks and recreation department.



Top: The buildup to the tree motif represents the process of discovery that is part of a student's educational experience.
Bottom: Gardiner's new outdoor spaces are exceptionally popular among community groups.



Students are empowered to choose their experience throughout the building.

“Gardiner has become the heart of the community...There are gates and paths into the neighborhoods, making it really accessible. Before school is even out every day, we have people wanting to use the field, walk the track. We have to say, ‘Wait until school is out at 4:30pm!’ ...Everyday after school, kids are here playing, they skateboard; they’re being safe and making good choices.”

JON ARCHER
Gardiner Assistant Principal

Physical Environment



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.

Welcome Center

The school's Welcome Center entryway is an outwardly-focused community space rather than an inwardly-oriented administrative hub. It is designed to evoke a "you are welcome to be here" sentiment for all who enter. Students and visitors enter through a secure vestibule into the Center with small, medium, and large meeting spaces where families can meet with administrators, fill out forms, etc., rather than private administrative offices.

The Center unobtrusively incorporates standard District safety and security technologies, such as video intercoms and card swipe access systems, while maintaining an environment that is welcoming to students, families, and the community.

Community Room

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.

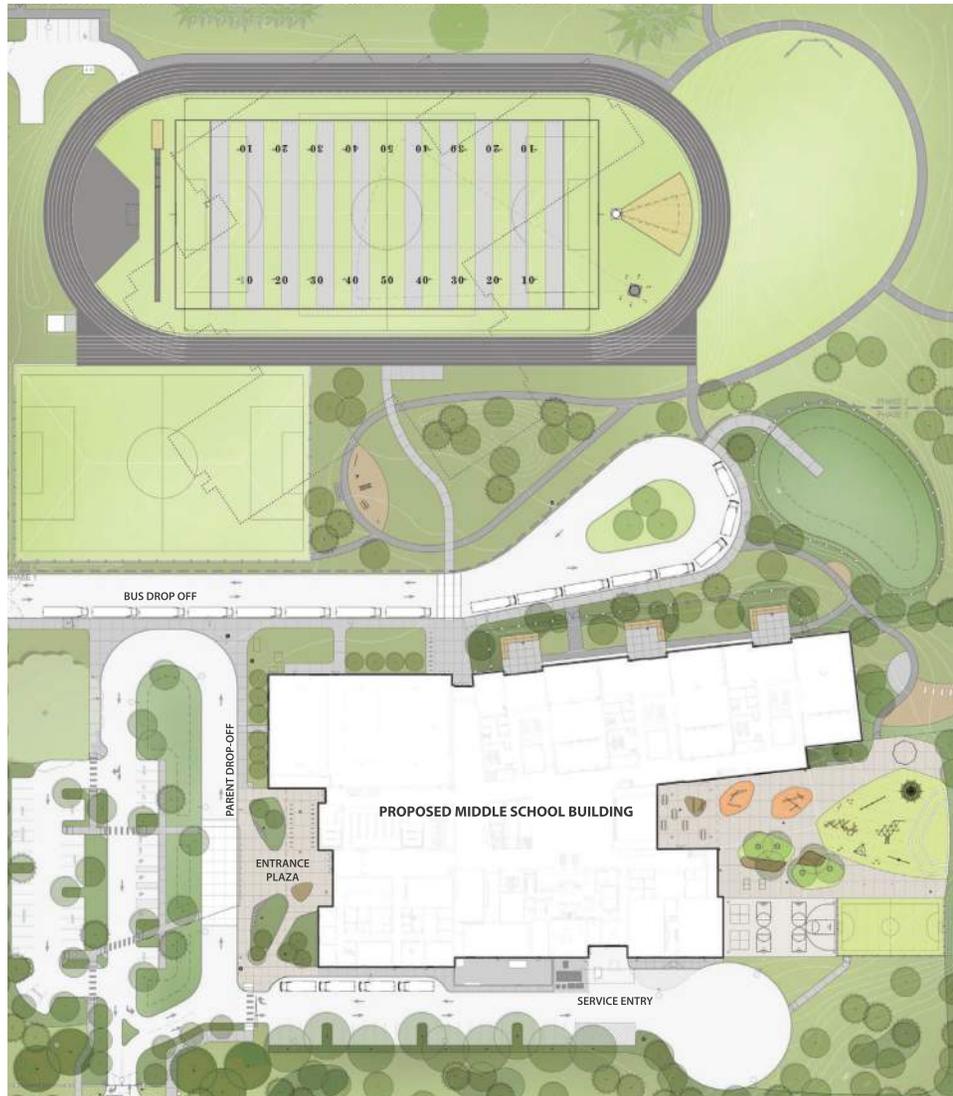
"I love the community room because it's a good space for AVID guest speakers and it's good for projects because it's really multi-purpose."

KAI
8th Grader at Gardiner

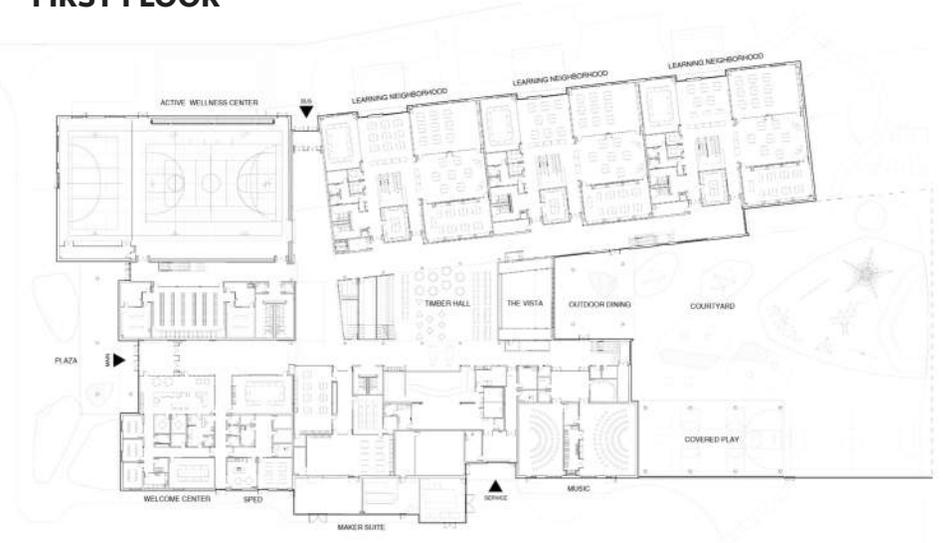
The Neighborhood's Backyard

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.

Physical Environment



FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



Physical Environment

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES AND INNOVATIONS OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Affirming Identities, Relationships, and Community

The physical environment fosters justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion through strategic space layouts and thoughtful adjacencies that promote acceptance and belonging as well as integrated safety and security, allowing teachers to ensure that students are making safe, responsible choices without undermining their autonomy.

Student Support Center

The Design Committee sought to destigmatize the process of seeking mental health support and encourage students to feel comfortable engaging their counselors. The Counselor's office was renamed the Student Support Center, and the suite features high visibility and accessibility with a large glass entry and its proximity to both Timber Hall and the Learning Neighborhoods. Once inside, acoustically isolated offices provide privacy to promote safe, authentic conversations.

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.

Play and Socialization

The outdoor Courtyard is a dynamic space that responds to the different interests 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.



While the mental, physical, and emotional changes students experience as they embrace their young adulthood can be overwhelming, there is potential for joyful self-discovery, too. Facilities foster a sense of belonging throughout Gardiner.

Athletic Prep

Located on the first floor across from the Wellness Center, the Athletic Prep empowers students to get ready for fitness classes in ways that affirm their identities and align with their personal comfort levels. 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.

A NUANCED APPROACH TO SCHOOL SAFETY

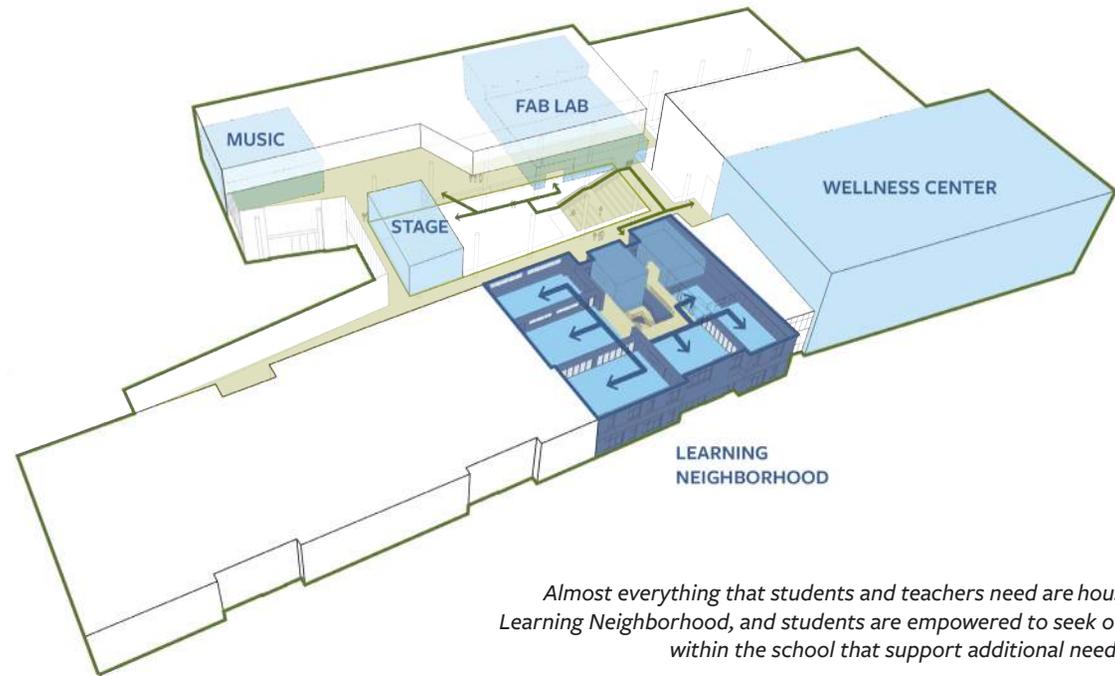
The design team sought student input about their anxieties in the school environment, with the goal being to identify and implement safety and security measures that could reduce these anxieties and help students feel safe. Students shared anxieties related to transitions between spaces, around lockers, and in restrooms. Overall, Gardiner's organization creates a more open environment while also supporting lines of site and passive supervision throughout the building that removed or reduced these situations from common environments.

Physical Environment

INSPIRATION AND MOTIVATION

An Opportunity of a Lifetime

The new Gardiner project was always so much more than just a building replacement. It represented the Oregon City community's genuine commitment to reimagining the middle school experience for both students and educators and making space for student voices. District leaders and project team members were galvanized through challenges complexities by their unwavering commitment to this vision.



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.

Inspiration through Observation

School tours helped District leaders and the Design Committee 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. The Design Committee toured High Tech High, the school featured in the “Most Likely to Succeed” documentary that had been screened and discussed during early community engagement forums.

“The school tours were incredibly helpful, the best decision ever. To get to be in a space that was incredible, it really sparked ideas and thoughts. That part of the experience was amazing.”

LORI MCKENZIE
6th Grade Math Teacher at Gardiner

Creating a Home Base and the Rhythm of Returning

The Learning Neighborhood environments are a “home base” where students have a sense of safety, comfort, and familiarity that helps 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.

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

Choice, Autonomy, and Belonging

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.

“Being able to work independently and go to the councilor’s office, as needed, has helped my student with their mental health.”

GARDINER PARENT/CAREGIVER
Submitted through Anonymous Survey

Sustainability and Wellness

ACHIEVING ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

Path to Net Zero

Finding the Path

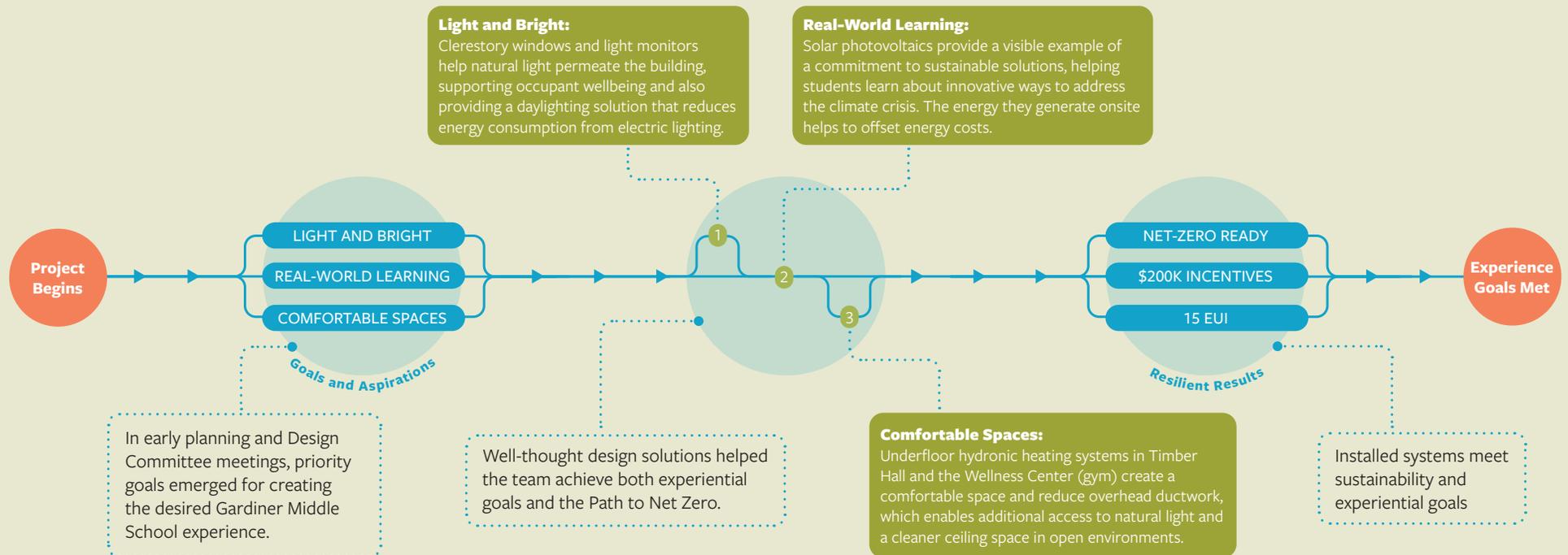
At the outset of the project, the design team gathered with District leaders and stakeholders to identify all of Gardiner’s key objectives. From pedagogy to efficiency and the student experience, capturing the District’s priorities allowed the team to effectively build a process around what they valued. 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.

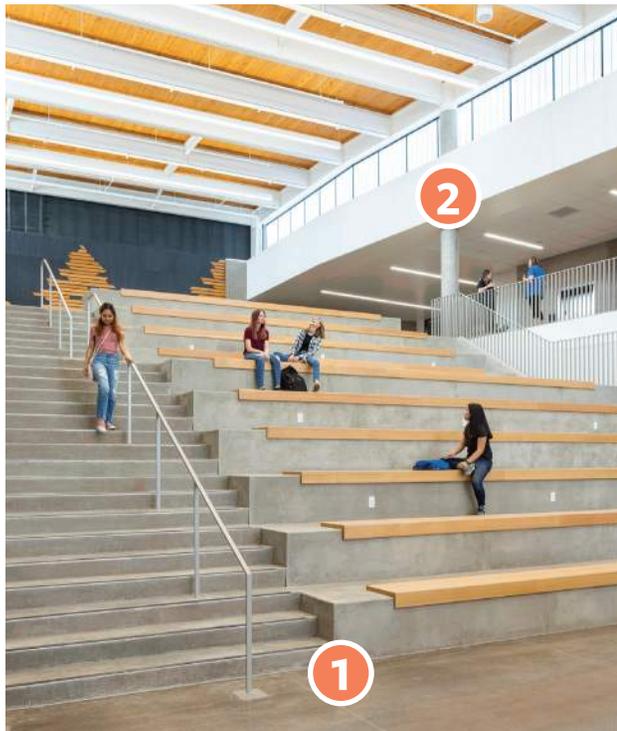
Developing a Direction

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.





Key Sustainability and Wellness Features

- 1. Underfloor hydronic heating systems in Timber Hall
- 2 & 3. Clerestory windows and light monitors in Timber Hall and the Learning Neighborhoods
- 4. Adjustable lighting the in Learning Neighborhoods
- 5. Solar photovoltaics

“It’s so helpful to be able to change the lighting depending on what we’re doing...When we’re using computers, I bring the lights down. I bring the lights down to help calm the kids, too. To have the ability to dim lights, and with like 20 different settings, it’s a huge difference.”

LORI MCKENZIE
6th Grade Math Teacher at Gardiner

“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.”

MARISA EIDAM
Student Design Committee Member

DURABILITY AND MAINTAINABILITY
Ongoing Evolution in Creative Space Use

Leaders and educators are continuing to explore the possibilities and flexibility of the new school and its amenities. A key area of potential relates to the plethora of furniture and seating options, intended to provide more choice that is traditionally available.

The project team intended to have a “furniture fair” where students and teachers could learn more about the options and different usages of furniture, but that was cut short by the pandemic.

“It’s not too late though. The furniture is durable and we can still have trainings, opportunities to share ‘*did you know?*’ information that can help maximize the use of these flexible options.”

MICHAEL SWEETEN
Director of Capital Projects and Operations



Flexible and durable furniture and equipment will adapt to new and creative uses over time.