

# MYRTLE THORNTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

ARLINGTON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT — ARLINGTON, TEXAS



## EMBRACING THE LOCAL HISPANIC COMMUNITY TO CREATE A CULTURAL EXPERIENCE.

### CELEBRATING COMMUNITY AND CULTURE

Situated in a vibrant, highly-involved neighborhood community, Arlington Independent School District's (ISD) new Myrtle Thornton Elementary School is a celebration of culture that balances community, identity, and modern approaches to education. The new school reflects the community's Hispanic heritage, advances STEAM curriculum, and emphasizes hands-on learning. The design of this replacement campus, developed entirely during the pandemic, was driven by extensive stakeholder engagement and a bilingual community visioning process that brought every voice to the table. The pride administrators, teachers, parents, and students expressed in their school inspired a community-oriented design featuring a welcoming entry plaza shaded by existing oak trees preserved on the site, and future-ready learning spaces infused with community identity.

### DYNAMIC SPACES FOR EXPLORATION

The design ties to the tradition of Ballet Folklorico with vibrant collaborative spaces to engage and excite students to learn. Floor-to-ceiling glass floods the library with natural light and highlights terracotta brick and bright accents. Swirling bold colors dance across surfaces like the Ballet Folklorico dancer's ruffled skirts. Rhythmic patterns spark energy and provide wayfinding toward a variety of flexible learning circles, reading nooks, and seating areas for one-on-ones, small group interaction, and independent learning. Forward-thinking spaces elevate education and inspire community involvement – from grade level teacher workrooms to a dedicated parent center offering lessons in English and technology skills.

### NATURE AS TEACHER

The school supports STEAM curriculum with hands-on learning experiences in outdoor courtyards where students can search for fossils, interact with a water table, climb turf mounds, and explore nature and physics. The restorative natural environment provides pathways, sail canopies, and a shaded entry with a striking brick wall tied to a nature-inspired trellis pattern. On the playground, students and teachers can sit on stone walls and other organic stone and log elements to gather and socialize. An abundance of biophilic elements improves health and well-being in this dynamic and interactive environment that connects the community and rejoices in learning by creating a culture of identity and belonging.

## SCOPE OF WORK AND BUDGET

PROJECT SIZE 106,860 SF	STUDENT CAPACITY 950 students	INITIAL BUDGET \$29,600,000
SITE AREA 10.3143 acres	SQUARE FEET PER STUDENT 119 SF	FINAL CONSTRUCTION COST \$29,741,464
GRADES HOUSED PK-5	PROJECT COMPLETION DATE August 2023	COST PER SQUARE FOOT \$278.32



## AN EXTENDED FAMILY

Lovingly referred to in the community as an extended family, Myrtle Thornton Elementary School sought participation and input from students, teachers, parents, district leadership, and the community to create a place that reflects their values, represents their culture, and creates and sense of place and belonging.

## COMMUNITY

Open since 1956, the original Myrtle Thornton Elementary School built a strong legacy, serving as a beacon within the East Arlington community for decades. Located in an urban setting off the main highway, the school serves as a gateway to the neighborhood. Serving the largely Hispanic population, the school's minority enrollment at 97% with 95% of students economically disadvantaged. More than three quarters of students are enrolled in Bilingual and English language learning programs.

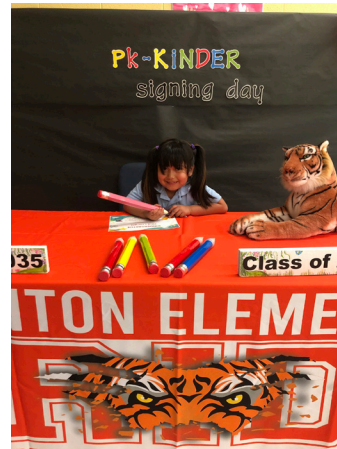
From the beginning of the bond program, when news of the replacement of Myrtle Thornton Elementary School broke, the community was a-buzz with excitement. Long needing facility updates to keep up with modern curriculum and student needs, the replacement school gave the community an opportunity to fulfill their shared vision.

The vibrant, enthused, and engaged community inspired the design team. They sought to translate their history, culture, and vision into this new school, which serves as the cornerstone of the community's identity, and shows their deep commitment to helping parents, students, and teachers succeed.

## STAKEHOLDERS

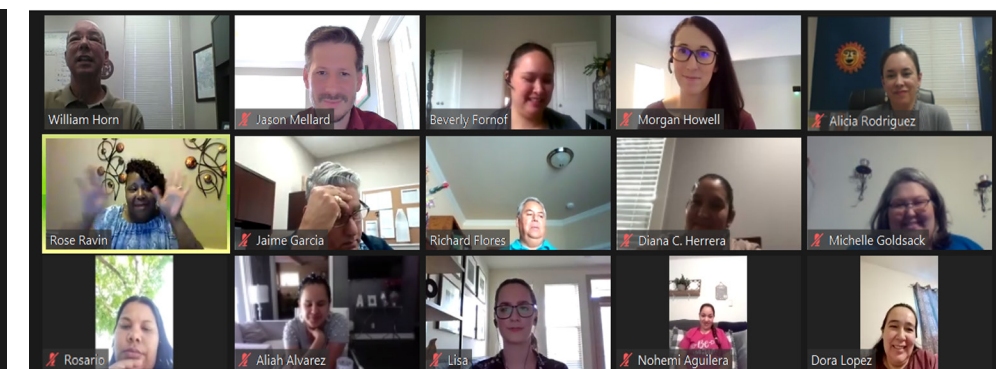
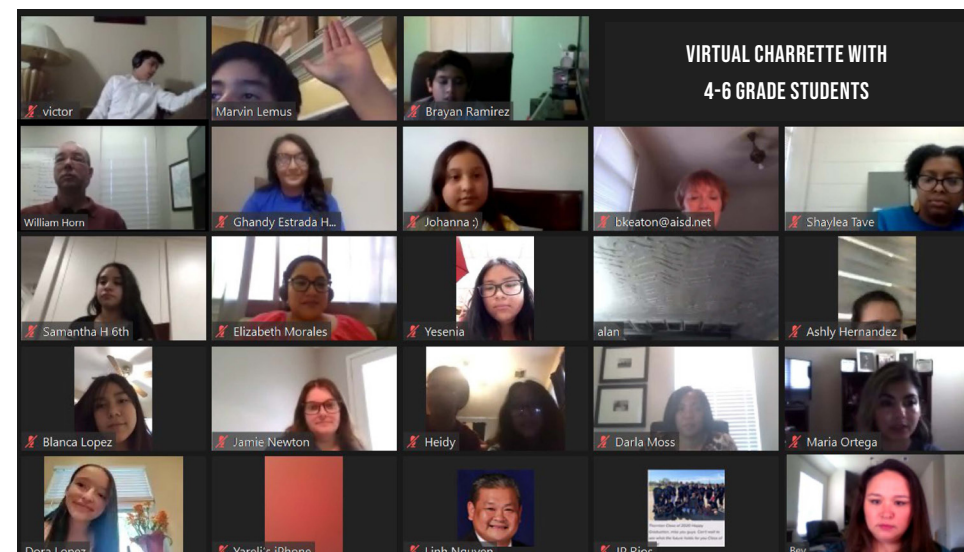
The design process, impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, was conducted virtually via Zoom. The design team creatively engaged stakeholders, teachers, and students in highly-collaborative and engaging visioning sessions that solicited their input and feedback, ensuring all perspectives were included and the community felt heard. Many of their ideas and suggestions were incorporated in the design. The key stakeholders included:

- Board of Trustees
- Superintendent & Executive Leadership
- Campus Administrators
- Teachers and Educators
- Parents and Community Members
- Students



When we started visioning, we met with each user group and asked them what makes Thornton so special — from all of these groups, we heard:

**COMMUNITY,  
FAMILY AND PRIDE.**



### VIRTUAL VISIONING DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

Due to the pandemic, virtual visioning sessions were conducted with all user groups via Zoom. The process challenged the design team to think creatively and lead engaging conversations to gather input, feedback, and create a shared vision.

## CHALLENGES

The district's mission for this bond program was to address community needs, create efficiencies in enrollment, and to enhance campuses in the East Arlington community. Arlington ISD, along with members of the community, were adamant about creating an elementary school centered around belonging. To meet this need and inspire interaction, the campus offers welcoming and adaptable common areas used by both students and the public at large — the front entry courtyard creates a shaded gathering space for people to socialize, the cafeteria doubles as a community meeting space after hours, and a dedicated parent center offers English and technology skills courses to adults to uplift and educate the community.

Designed during the COVID-19 pandemic, the design team implemented creative solutions to gather information and input virtually from stakeholders, students, and faculty through a series of Zoom meetings, survey questionnaires for participants to fill out prior to meetings, and a prepared list of questions and activities to facilitate the visioning process.

Additionally, since the majority of the community spoke Spanish, there was a language challenge the design team needed to overcome. Corgan invited Spanish-speaking members of the design team to attend the visioning sessions and translate the content of presentations and materials into both English and Spanish.

## AVAILABLE ASSETS

The new school was constructed on the existing site and the previous school was demolished before construction on the new campus began. Thornton students and teachers relocated to another school within the district while the new campus was under construction. The district's planning of the new Myrtle Thornton campus combined two schools — Thornton and Knox Elementary School — into one campus.

During early discussions in the planning and design stage, a key driving factor became saving two mature oak trees at the school's existing playgrounds. These beautiful trees became the focal point of the new school entrance and offered a shaded area for people to gather for after school events or during pickup and drop off times.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The community helped identify three guiding principles for the new elementary school. These included:

- 1 Learning Rich Environment:** Creating active and flexible learning spaces that feature collaboration areas, learning on display, restorative spaces, and connection to the outdoors. These spaces connected back to the sense of family and community by helping students thrive together.
- 2 Strong Identity:** The new school supports the vision of Arlington ISD, represents the community, instills campus pride, and serves as a "Gateway to East Arlington." This new school needed to embody the culture and strong community values.
- 3 Community Engagement:** Supporting parent education through English programs and technology, ample assembly spaces to serve as a community resource, and provide extra-curricular spaces for students. Community spaces were key to creating a shared space for the entire neighborhood, such as the outdoor learning spaces and large gathering rooms.

### ENGLISH AND SPANISH TRANSLATION

To support Spanish speaking students and community members, the design team translated all presentations into Spanish, and brought Spanish speaking team members at all meetings to translate, allowing for maximum comprehension and collaboration between the design team and community.



### SAVING THE OAK TREES

While the entire existing facility was going to be demolished, the staff, students, and community felt strongly about saving the existing oak trees at the front of the school, which served as a core memory for many generations of students and families. These oak trees now serve as the main entry point for the new school.

### A4LE NORTH TEXAS CHAPTER IMPACT AWARD — SILVER PRIZE GRANT WINNER

Myrtle Thornton Elementary School was awarded the \$7,500 Silver Prize grant from A4LE North Texas Chapter. The grant money was used to help increase parent training and support through Empower Hour Parent Training and Engagement. They equipped the family engagement room with technology to support the trainings. This grant allowed the design team to implement shared common spaces and technology into the program, which supported on of the guiding principles.



# SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

Thornton Elementary School

### Outdoor Learning / Aula al aire libre

**A** **B**

Things that you (or your teacher) use in the classroom everyday.

Cosas que tú (o tu maestro/a) usan en el aula de clases.

Thornton Elementary School — Survey Responses

### What is your least favorite room at your current school?

¿Cuál es tu aula menos favorita en tu escuela?

MUSIC / MÚSICA	38%
NONE / NINGUNO	13%
CAFETERIA / CAFETERÍA	13%
RESTROOMS / BAÑOS	13%
SCIENCE / CIENCIAS	6%
PE	6%
LIBRARY / BIBLIOTECA	6%
MATH / MATEMÁTICAS	6%

Thornton Elementary School — Survey Responses

### What are three things that you consider essential for the design of the new Thornton elementary school building?

¿Cuáles son las tres cosas que considera esenciales para el diseño del nuevo edificio de la escuela primaria Thornton?

**PROGRAM**  
Safety / Seguridad  
Accessibility / Accesibilidad  
More Space / Más espacio  
Collaboration / Colaboración  
Grade Level Separation / Separación de nivel de grado  
Storage / Almacenamiento

**DESIRES**  
Outdoor Learning Opportunities / Oportunidades de aprendizaje al aire libre  
Natural Light / Luz natural  
Convenient Staff Workrooms / Salas de trabajo para el personal  
Community Gathering Space / Espacio de reunión comunitaria  
Wall Space for Display / Espacio de pared para exhibición

**DISTRICT COORDINATION**  
Technology / Tecnología

Thornton Elementary School — Survey Responses

### What are your favorite learning activities to do outside?

¿Cuáles son tus actividades de aprendizaje favoritas para hacer afuera?

STUDYING PLANTS AND ANIMALS / ESTUDIAR PLANTAS Y ANIMALES	33%
SCIENCE / CIENCIAS Looking at the weather and experiments / Experimentos y observar el clima	27%
ACTIVITIES / OCUPACIONES Running, Girls on the Run, and Soccer / Corriendo, Girls on the Run, y fútbol	27%
DON'T HAVE ANY / NO TENGO NINGUNO	13%

## VISIONING

The virtual visioning sessions proved to be a successful way to communicate and gather input from everyone involved. The goals of the school centered around creating foundational pillars including STEAM and hands-on learning opportunities, flexible collaborative areas, reading nooks, and learning circles for small group interaction, and a variety of shared common spaces to welcome the members of the community.

When asked to define the school's current culture, teachers described it as a close-knit, welcoming community where diverse students feel cared for, loved, and supported. They expressed the desire for functional, useful spaces that would adapt to individual needs for both students and teachers.

## VIRTUAL ACTIVITIES TO PROMOTE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Due to the pandemic, the design team had to rethink strategies to gather information and feedback from students on their new school. To increase engagement in a virtual setting, the design team held multiple activities:

- 5 Second Game/Juego de 5 segundos:** The design team created the "5 Second Game," which called on students to think creatively when shown a prompt. For example, one prompt was "things you can find in a library" and they had to respond with three items in five seconds. This helped the students think creatively and encouraged participation, which is challenging within a virtual environment.
- This or That/Este o aquel:** Students used Zoom voting features to vote on their preferred photo on the screen, allowing the design team to get an idea of the space they envisioned for their future school.
- Student Surveys/Respuestas a la encuesta estudiantil:** The design team sent surveys to students to gauge how they wanted to learn, what their favorite subjects were, what they disliked about their current school, and what they wanted to see improved.

Thornton Elementary School

### What the students want to see in their collaboration spaces.

Lo que los estudiantes quieren ver en sus espacios de colaboración.

**CLASSROOM/ AULA** **CLASSROOM/ AULA**

**CLASSROOM/ AULA**

**CLASSROOM/ AULA**

**CLASSROOM/ AULA**

**COLLABORATION SPACE/ ESPACIO DE COLABORACIÓN**

Thornton Elementary School — Survey Responses

### What are some of the limitations in your current school's physical environment for teaching and learning?

¿Cuáles son algunas de las limitaciones en el entorno físico de su escuela actual para la enseñanza y el aprendizaje?

Space Constraints	41%
Inefficiency	30%
Classroom Space / Espacio en el aula	11%
Technology	11%
Accessibility	11%
Assembly Space / Espacio de asamblea	7%
Library Size / Tamaño de biblioteca	7%
Collaborative Space	7%
Too Much Separation / Demasiada separación	7%
Campus is Too Spread Out / El campus está muy extenso	16%
Access to Common Resources & Work Areas / Acceso a áreas comunes	7%

## THE VALUE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

By orchestrating well-planned virtual meetings and gathering in-depth information and research, members of the community along with stakeholders, teachers, and students felt their ideas were heard and supported. Through agility and preparation, the design team brought everyone together at once to voice their input and opinions, creating an inclusive design process that benefited the school district and community while creating a clear plan of action for the design team and contractor. The result is an elevated learning experience that brings people together, inspires excitement, and creates true culture of belonging.

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Celebrating Hispanic heritage and creating a strong sense of community and culture, the school is designed to provide a diverse, equitable, and inclusive learning environment that welcomes everyone to the school. The school's opening ceremony was scheduled during Hispanic Heritage month, encouraging students to engage in extra curricular events like folkloric ballet to further express their heritage.



# CELEBRATION OF CULTURE

HISPANIC HERITAGE

FOLKLORICO-INSPIRED

RHYTHM & LAYERS

UNIFIED SPIRIT

DYNAMIC ENERGY



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



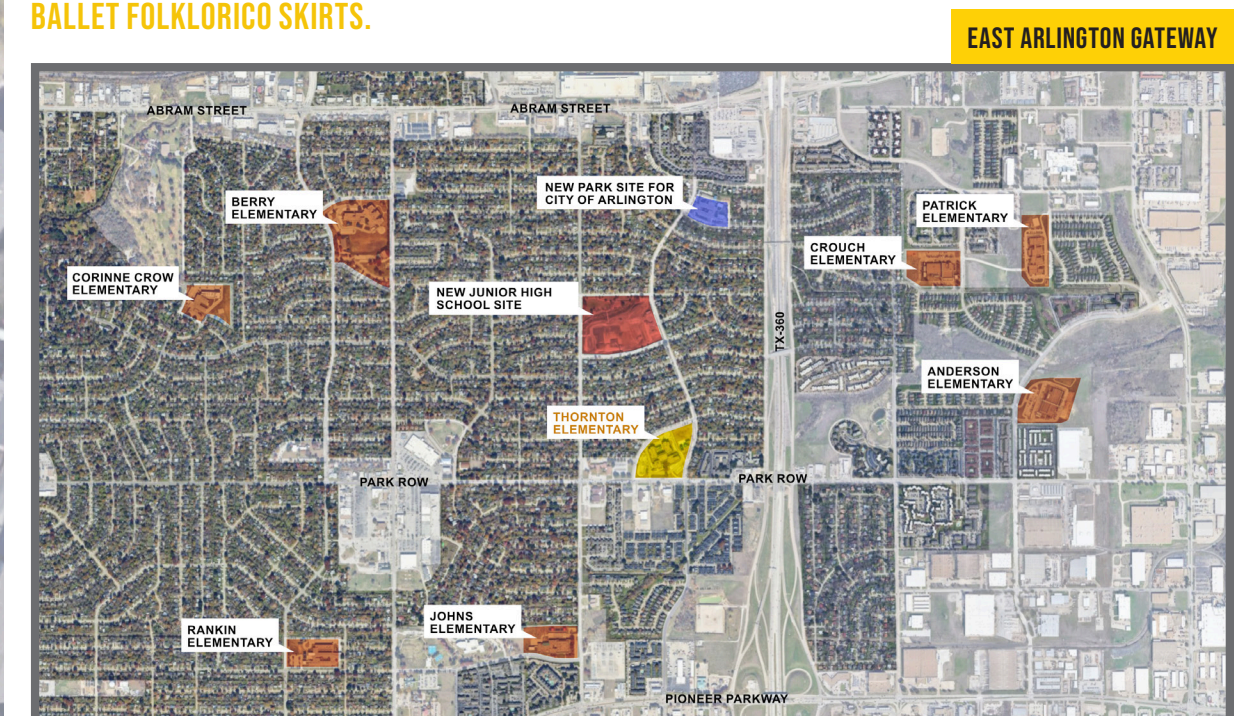
## A GATEWAY TO EAST ARLINGTON

A welcoming beacon to the neighborhood, the school embraces its people and culture while providing a modern learning environment, setting the tone and precedent for future schools to meet the district's goals and aspirations of their evolving curriculum. Combining Myrtle Thornton Elementary School and Knox Elementary School into one campus, the design team needed to merge two strong cultures and identities into one shared campus.

Due to the site being seen as the "Gateway to East Arlington," the district asked that the design address the intersection of Park Row Drive and Carter Drive. The design team reoriented the building by placing the entry promenade at the start of the intersection, leading to the main canopy and all the way up to the front door.

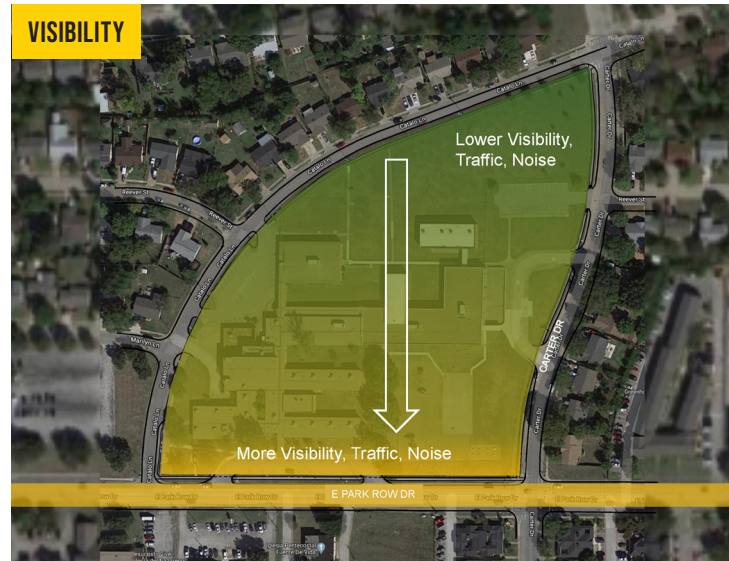
Within proximity to many residential units, a majority of parents and their children walk to and from school. To create an inviting yet functional entrance, the design features a wide walkway to welcome pedestrians.

THE ADJACENT SITE PLAN SHOWS THE SWIRLING FLOOR PATTERN, MIRRORING THE BALLET FOLKLORICO SKIRTS.



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

### VISIBILITY



### SAVING MATURE TREES



### ENTRANCE AND PEDESTRIAN ZONES



### SITE SCHEME



## OPTIMIZING THE SITE

With residential zones to the North, East, and West, and Park Row Drive to the South, the site was naturally zoned for more public functions to be towards the South along Park Row Drive while the more "private" functions were to be to the North. As a result, design team placed the public spaces, such as the front entry, cafeteria, gym, administration, and entry courtyard, towards the South, and placed classrooms and the outdoor learning courtyard to the North to ensure student safety. This allowed the public spaces to be easily visible and accessible, while offering a more quiet and intimate setting for the focused learning and playing areas.

The building is oriented at an angle to emphasize the promenade and entry, leading people through the inviting canopy to the building's front door.

## CREATING EQUITY ACROSS THE DISTRICT

The new facility provides ample opportunities to learn and gather through flexible spaces on the interior and exterior of the building. Collaboration spaces are highlighted throughout the school to encourage interaction and connections. Providing hands-on learning opportunities for students both in and out of the classroom was a key driver of the district's goals.

One key concern with the previous school was the lack of power outlets; however, with thoughtful and strategic technology integration in every classroom, the new school lives up to the standard of the other Arlington ISD facilities, providing an equitable learning experience across the district.

Implemented during the bond program, Arlington ISD included an all-day Pre-K program, available to all families both in and out of the district's boundaries. STEAM elements within the Pre-K classrooms, such as lego walls, soothing yet playful colors, and close walking distance to all areas of the school were strategically planned with these young learners in mind.



NEW ELEMENTARY SITE



EXISTING ELEMENTARY SITE



EXISTING ELEMENTARY EXTERIOR





## PROMOTING EQUITY AND INCLUSION

As part of the bond program, the district identified several underserved schools that required an elevated educational environment in the East Arlington area. Due to the age of the existing Myrtle Thornton Elementary School, the facility was not able to meet the needs of the teachers or students. By creating a new facility, the district created shared equity across the region, providing the same educational experience as their other school campuses.

During visioning, user groups and stakeholders voiced their desire for community gathering spaces, giving parents places to socialize before and after school while waiting for their kids. They also discussed how vital Thornton was to the community, giving them a sense of family. By saving the oak trees, sited on the South of the site where the front entry would be located, they were able to preserve the legacy of the original campus.

The oak trees serve as a main focal point of the exterior entrance, creating a welcoming warm presence where students and family members can gather as well as use as an additional outdoor learning space during school hours. Embracing community and education, the school serves as a legacy of the past while creating a bright future.

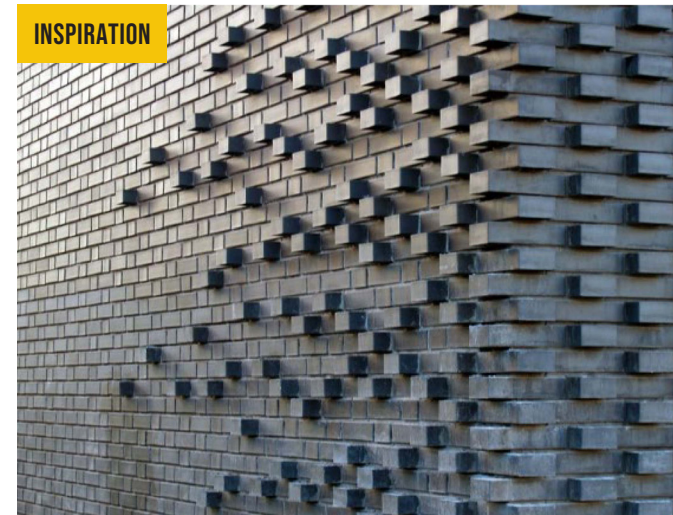
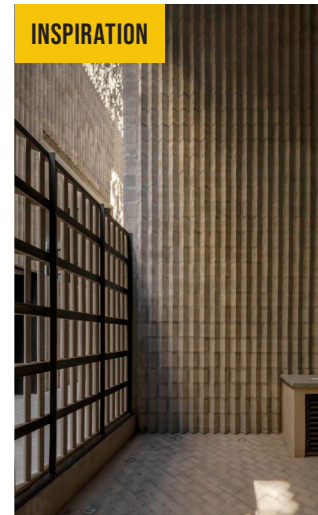
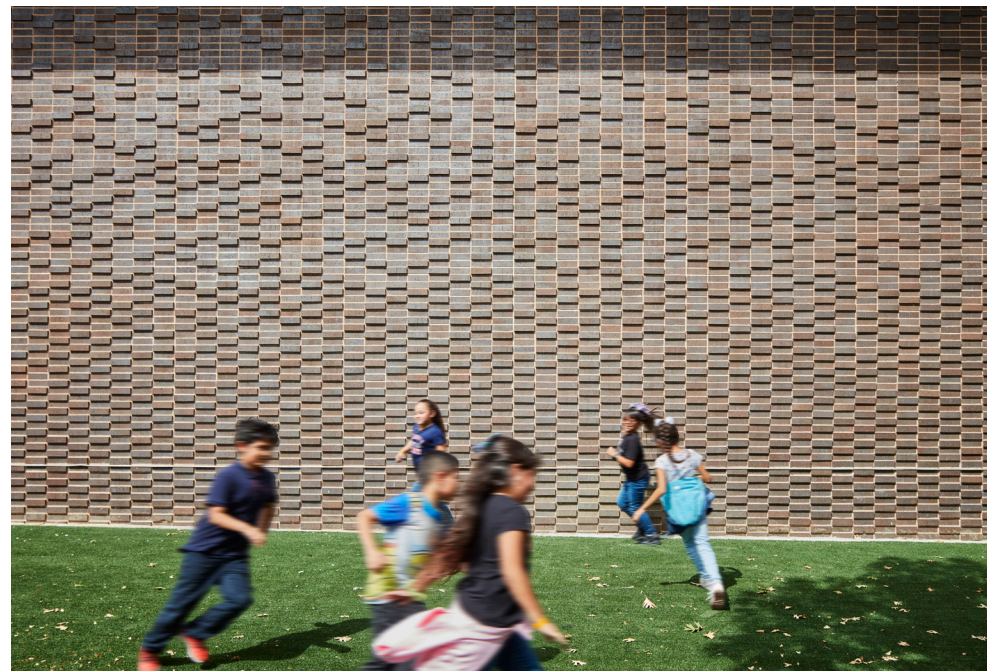


## CREATING A COMMUNITY CELEBRATING DIVERSITY

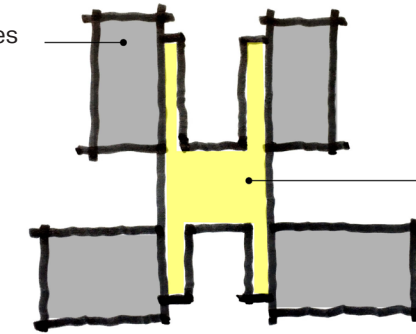
### BRICK PATTERN REFLECTS HISPANIC ARCHITECTURE

Enhancing the natural beauty of the site through using simple materials and local resources, the design team incorporated brick detailing to create visual appeal and articulate the vernacular of the region. The variation of style in brick reflects Hispanic architecture while being mindful of community resources and providing a cost effective design element.

Ample glass was used in the space, breaking up the brick facade. This allowed natural daylight to be brought into the space to improve student health and wellness.



Heavier brick masses  
at corners.



Glass and accent  
masonry extend from  
the central library to  
wrap community and  
student courtyard.

### BRICK PATTERNS

This pattern was inspired by the artisanal  
approach of brick found in Hispanic architecture.





# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



## SPINE ACTS AS KEY CONNECTION POINT

Inspired by Hispanic architecture, the spine plays off a neutral and terracotta palette with pops of bright color, serving as a focal point, wayfinding element, and a community icon. The terracotta wall connects both the front entry courtyard and library to with the North outdoor learning center, forming the massing and spine of the building within the heart of the campus. Arlington ISD wanted the interior courtyard walls designed thoughtfully, resulting in a warm terracotta tile facade, which was expansive without being imposing. Primary and secondary colors intentionally placed throughout created a festive and whimsical aesthetic reflective of the Folkloric culture.



### SHADED CANOPY

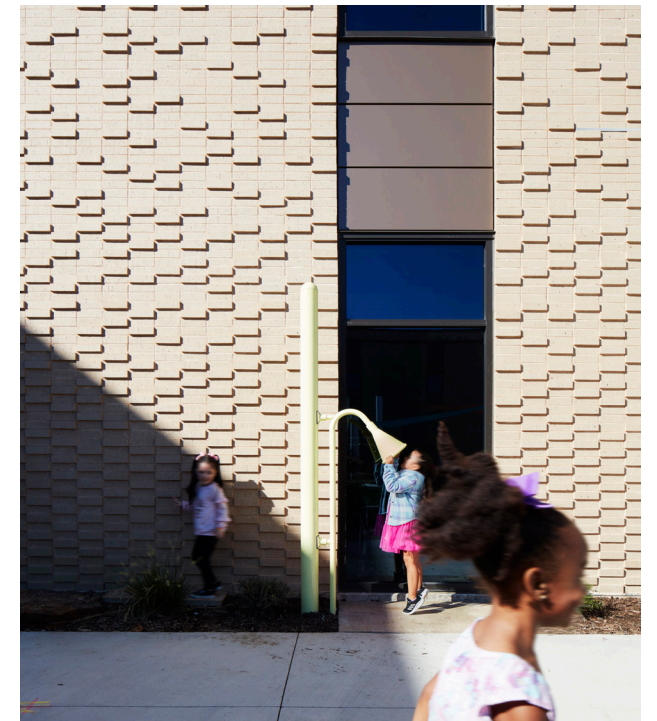
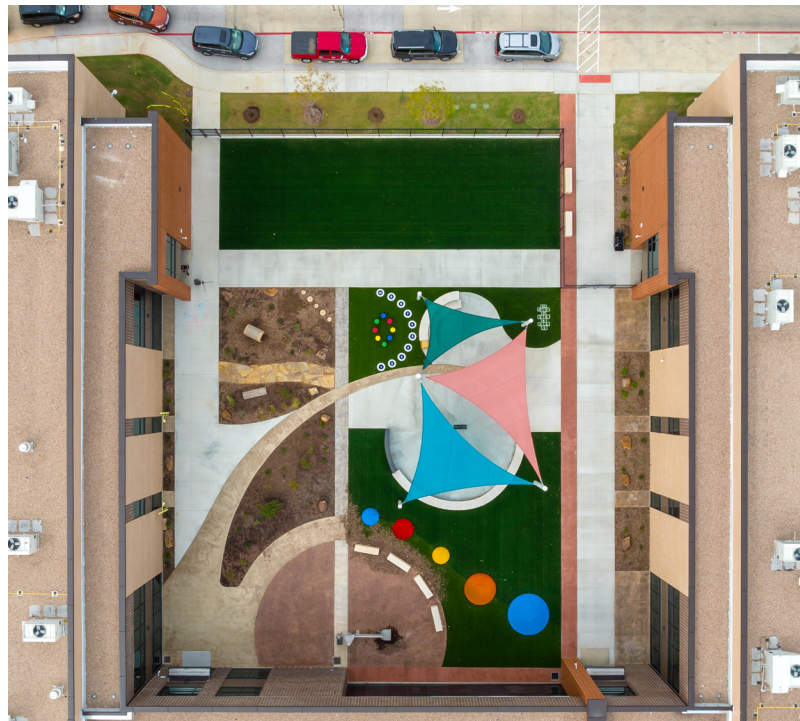
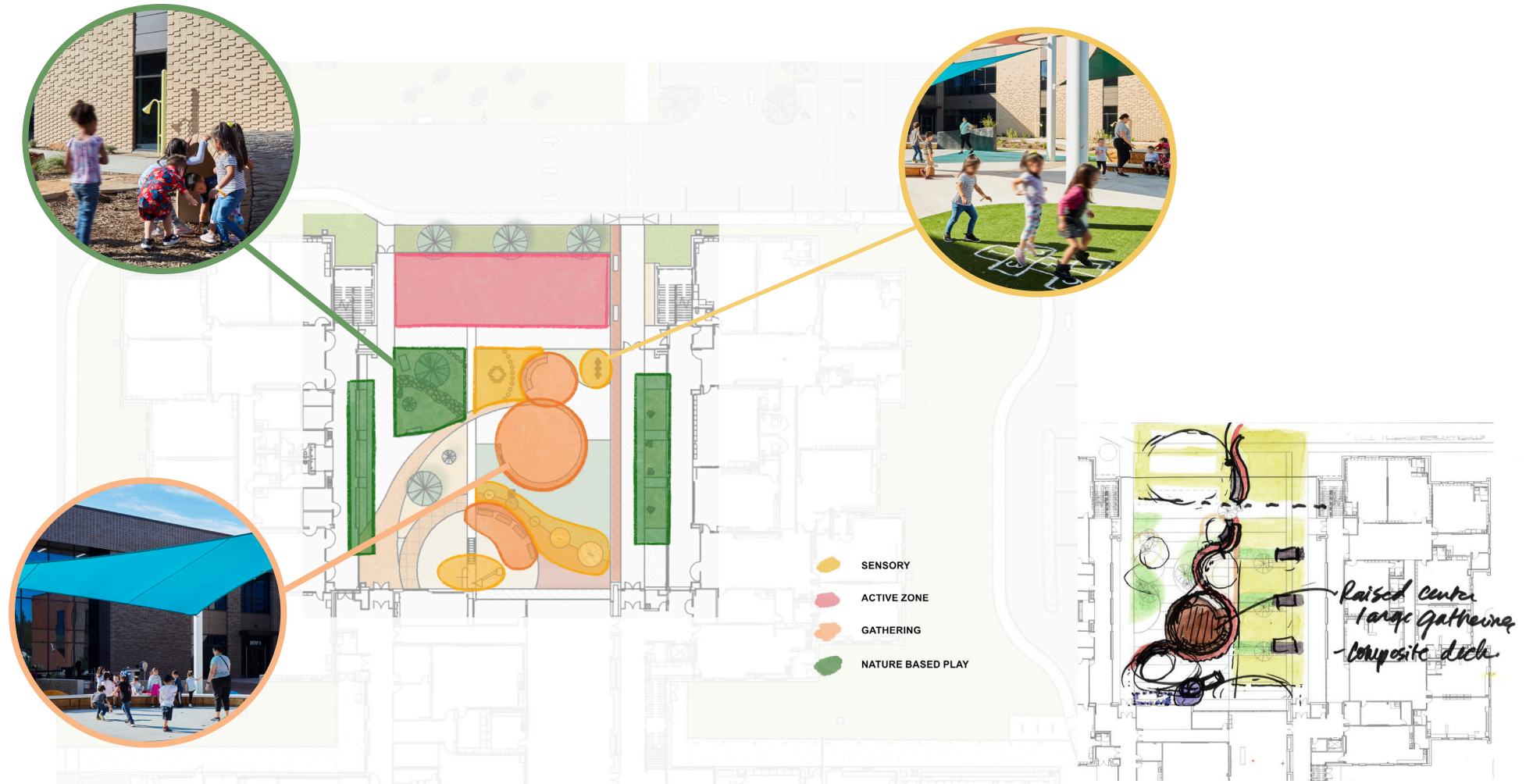
A shaded canopy on the entryway of the central spine created a welcoming focal point, providing wayfinding while articulating the Hispanic architecture. In the hot Texas climate, the canopy provides relief for community and family while they wait to pick up their students from school. The pattern draws inspiration from tree leaves, creating shade along the walkway and catching sun rays at various times throughout the day to create interesting and rhythmic shapes and movement.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

# RESTORATIVE AND ACTIVE OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS TO PROMOTE STUDENT WELL-BEING

For younger children, research shows that place attachment is best accomplished through an environment that facilitates exploration, sensory engagement, and play. Vibrant, playful spaces that support open-ended use are better for children who show a heightened attentiveness to place and tend to focus on what they can do in an environment.

The terracotta spine wall carries through the building and out into the courtyard to create a nature-focused environment which is an extension and continuation of the entry plaza and preserved oak trees. Sweeping, curved pathways provide a restorative sense of extent and lead learners from the shared collaboration spaces in the interior, and out into dynamic gathering spaces featuring built-in seating, shade structures, instructional resources such as a chalkboard teaching wall. These elements provide opportunities for experiential learning through a water table, sound cones, and natural play elements. The outdoor learning environment supports a playful perspective on learning and encourages students to explore, experiment, discover, and interact. Native plantings blended with nature-inspired play provides sensory engagement and nature-based learning. The courtyard is intentionally designed to be low maintenance for facilities staff, while also reflecting real natural environments.



**NATURAL ENVIRONMENTS ARE INHERENTLY LESS  
STRUCTURED AND LESS PRESCRIPTIVE,  
OFFERING LIMITLESS OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
EXPLORATION AND IMAGINATION.**



## EDUCATIONAL VISION AND GOALS

A synthesis of culture, community, and forward-thinking education, Myrtle Thornton Elementary School is a design in balance. By analyzing visioning and planning data, the design team identified key program elements that balanced these characteristics with the district's vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> century, modern learning environment:

### JOYFUL EXPERIENCES

Opportunities for hands-on, socially interactive experiences activate this vibrant learning environment, creating a joyful space that celebrates learning, community, culture, and play. Imparting a warm and welcoming spirit, the school embraces its role as the heart of this community, providing spaces for students and community to gather.

### ACCESS TO NATURE

Infusing the learning environment with natural light, windows frame views to the two beautiful existing oak trees preserved on the site, integrating the benefits of access to nature in the heart of the school. Warm natural materials like wood and terracotta balance vibrant colors and connect the interior to nature. In the courtyard, outdoor learning spaces provide opportunities for students to explore native plants, interact with a water table, climb turf mounds, learn about fossils, and engage in sensory learning experiences.

### SCHOOL AS A CANVAS

To instill a sense of belonging and community pride into the learning environment, culturally-inspired design features have been integrated. Lively colors, swirling patterns, and warm textures reflect students' heritage and create an inspiring environment that celebrates community connection.

### FLEXIBLE LEARNING PODS

Two grade level classroom pods are divided by support spaces, such as teacher workrooms, restroom, etc., which creates grade level communities and allows for flexibility for changes in student enrollment. For example, if more second grade space is needed one year, then more third grade the next, the space allocation can shift. This provides the opportunity for combined learning experiences within and between grade levels, such as guest readers, co-teaching, and group projects.

### ADAPTIVE TO DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES

Collaboration spaces can be used for large group/small group settings to support a wide array of curriculum and student learning styles. Differentiated spatial opportunities support individual needs, allowing students to find comfort and engagement in soft seating elements, collaborative small and large group learning spaces, and individual.

### ENHANCED PROGRAMS

This new campus includes a dual-language program that allows students to practice speaking, presenting, and listening. This school offers more flexibility to accommodate a wide variety of engaging, interactive learning experiences, which was not possible at the previous elementary school.

#### FIRST FLOOR

- Administration
- Athletics
- Cafeteria
- Classroom
- Collaboration - Student
- Fine Arts
- Kitchen
- Media Center
- Restrooms
- Service Spaces



#### SECOND FLOOR

- Administration
- Classroom
- Collaboration - Student
- Lab
- Restrooms
- Service Spaces





## LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

A growing body of research shows creative expression positively impacts mental health. Engaging in creative activities can help students feel empowered, encourage problem solving, and support social activity, all of which enhance their mental health. Integrating creativity—and other opportunities for self-expression—into schools gives students an opportunity to display their hard work and natural talents.

Designers supported students during this project by providing constructive opportunities for active play on the campus. This idea stems from the district's desire to engage the whole body in learning to help students learn and retain knowledge and information.

Play is the most authentic pathway to learning for young children—it encourages exploration, inquiry, and imagination, and supports cognitive, social, and emotional development. Through unstructured play, young learners construct new knowledge through cooperative, joyful, and hands-on experiences that help them build future-ready skills. The new school integrates engaging opportunities for playful learning both indoors and out through flexible classrooms, collaboration spaces, outdoor learning environments, and reading nooks for individualized learning.

**"UNSTRUCTURED PLAY HAS BEEN SHOWN TO PROMOTE THE SOCIAL EMOTIONAL, COGNITIVE, LANGUAGE, AND SELF REGULATION SKILLS THAT BUILD EXECUTIVE FUNCTION AND A PROSOCIAL BRAIN. PLAYFUL LEARNING AIMS TO STIMULATE THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS BY LETTING STUDENTS WONDER, EXPERIMENT, FAIL, TAKE RISK, CONSTRUCT, AND REFLECT CRITICALLY ON THE CONTENT AND THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCE."**

Dr. Michael Yogman — The Power of Play: A Pediatric Role in Enhancing Development in Young Children



## PUTTING COMMUNITY AT THE CENTER

The design team wanted to create a place to convey belonging, value, opportunity, and connection to its inhabitants. A good school can activate place attachment — these benefits include connection to memories, belonging, comfort and security, relaxation, and positive emotions like happiness and pride.

Welcoming community spaces have been integrated into the design to support parent and community involvement and the high percentage of students who walk to school with their parents. These spaces were located towards the front of the school to create more connection. This allowed them to be easily located by visitors/parents, and also allowed the classroom/academic wings to be shut off to visitors for security.

The front entry, library, and administration were all centered around the front entry plaza with plenty of views connecting them back out to the front entry space.



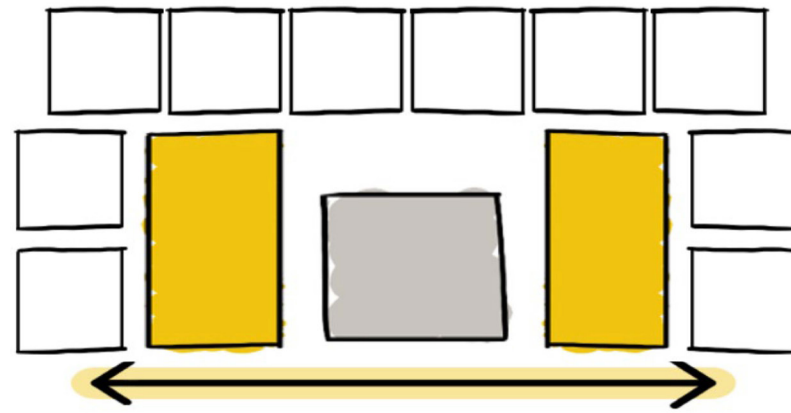
## ADAPTIVE EDUCATIONAL SPACES TO MEET DIVERSE LEARNING STYLES

Classroom pods are laid out with two grades per pod. This allows flexibility in the future so that if there happens to be more of a grade level one year, they have room to grow into the adjacent classrooms and still keep the entire grade level together.

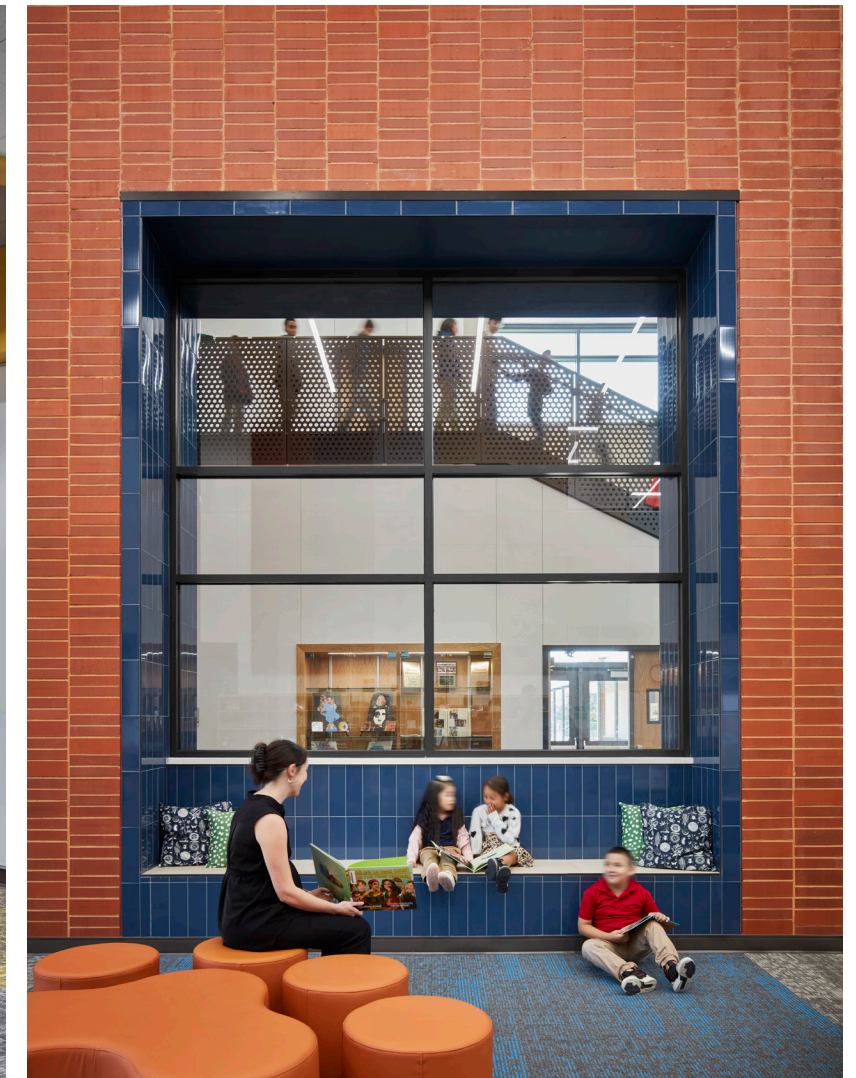
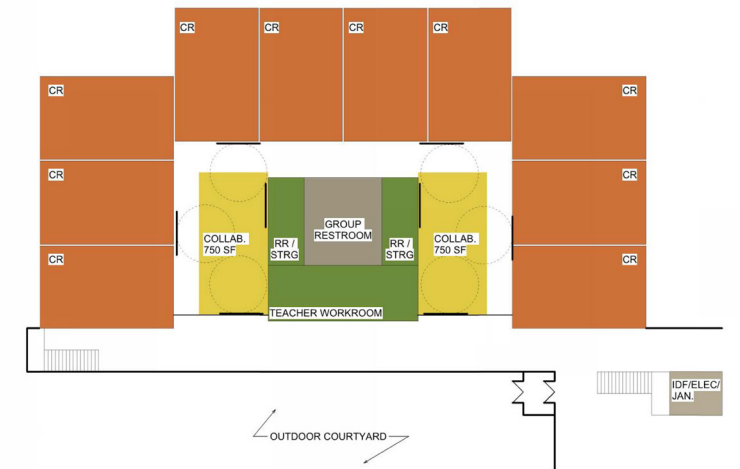
The center of the pod are the shared support spaces, such as group restrooms, staff restrooms, teacher work rooms, etc. These act as a buffer between the two grade level designated areas, while still also allowing them to be connected.

On either end of the pod, right outside the classroom, is a collaboration area sized large enough for a couple classes. It has soft seating that can be used for small or large group activities as well as the capability to teach a class out here.

During early visioning and planning sessions, students emphasized their desire for collaboration spaces, but also places where they could perform individual work. Giving them flexibility throughout to accommodate diverse learning styles was key to the design. Individual work zones were implemented to give students a quiet place to study.



**Collaboration Pod Centrally Located**  
Teacher Workroom as Buffer

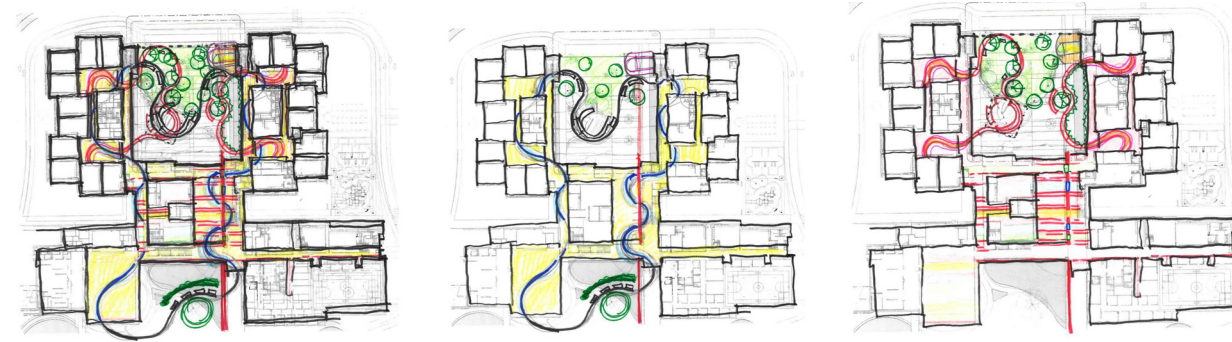


## INSPIRED BY BALLET FOLKLORICO

Warm materials, vibrant color, and rhythmic patterns throughout the school embrace the tradition of Ballet Folklórico, creating a variety of lively spaces that spark energy and excite students to learn.

Inspired by Folklórico dance and the community's predominately Hispanic heritage, the design imparts a sense of belonging and identity for the students and their families through the use of colors, patterns, and materials as a celebration of community culture. Ingrained in the community's culture, Ballet Folklórico is an activity that some of the students partake in at the school as an extracurricular activity.

Each grade level is assigned a color in their classroom pod. This color is then seen at the entry to their pod, throughout their collaboration space and at their water fountain and restroom entrance. The bright curving patterns in the floor "dance" throughout the school and move in and out of the shared spaces, including the two outdoor courtyards.



### FLOOR PATTERN FOLLOWS FOLKLORICO INSPIRATION

Early design sketches explored how the flooring pattern would run through the school. The pattern speaks to the Folklórico brightly-colored skirts.



## RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT

The new Myrtle Thornton Elementary School serves as a community icon — not only serving the district's needs and vision for a next generation learning environment, but it also feels like home to students, parents, teachers, faculty, and community members.

### ACHIEVING EDUCATIONAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The new design achieves the guiding principles established during visioning:

- **Learning Rich Environment:** By creating spaces for diverse learning styles and promoting flexibility, students want to learn, and teachers want to teach. Active play environments get students connected with the natural environment, and gain opportunities to learn with the whole body.
- **Strong Identity:** The enhanced atmosphere and connection to the community's largely Hispanic culture creates a second home for students. The students feel an immense amount of pride in what they are doing, with a vigor to continue learning.
- **Community Support:** In the old Thornton, faculty would use rooms such as the cafeteria or library to assist parents. The new center offers a dedicated space for parents to come and use the resources the school has available like computers.

**“WE HAVE A BEAUTIFUL TEACHER’S LOUNGE AND WORK ROOM, IT’S JUST LIKE, SO MUCH... IT’S A GOOD OVERWHELMING.”**

Paula Page, ESL Pre-K teacher





## ACHIEVING SCHOOL DISTRICT GOALS

Due to the age of the existing elementary school, modern teaching and learning styles were nearly impossible to implement, and it was no longer meeting the needs. The new facility encompasses the spirit of the previous school while incorporating a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment.

The new school was also able to support programs for STEAM, Pre-K, and Dual Language programs, which was a key driver in the strategic vision for the district.

**"I REMEMBER WHEN THIS SCHOOL WAS BEING DESIGNED, WE HAD STUDENTS, FAMILIES, AND TEACHERS TALK ABOUT THEIR DREAMS ABOUT WHAT THE BUILDING WOULD LOOK LIKE, THE KINDS OF THINGS THAT WOULD BE HERE – AND TODAY, YOU CAN LOOK AROUND, WALK THE HALLS AND THOSE DREAMS THAT THE STUDENTS ARTICULATED ARE REAL AND THEY ARE ALIVE."**

Dr. Steven Wurtz, Chief Academic Officer, Arlington ISD

## ACHIEVING COMMUNITY GOALS

Parents want to feel welcome and involved in the school environment — they desired a strong sense of community. The new school provides them connection through welcoming community spaces and community-driven design. With large gathering spaces, the community can host and attend even more events at the school, feeling further connected and enhancing a "home" environment.

## RESULTS OF THE PROCESS AND PROJECT

### VALUE AND GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The new school was completed close to the initial budget, despite the rising costs of inflation. This was done through close partnership with the district and contractor, finding alternatives that helped cost, but didn't sacrifice quality.

**"[THE DESIGN TEAM] MANAGES WITH AN APPROACH TOWARDS EFFICIENT, COST-EFFECTIVE DESIGNS TAILORED TO THE SPECIFIC NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY THEY SERVE."**

Kelly Horn, Assistant Superintendent, Arlington ISD

### SUSTAINABILITY AND WELLNESS OUTCOMES

Driven by a desire for student health and wellness, Myrtle Thornton Elementary School promotes a whole-student vision. By providing outdoor environments for learning and play, students can explore nature while having quiet time for resting and recharging for the school day.

Ample daylighting throughout the campus through floor to ceiling glass in common areas supports student health. Traditional sustainable building techniques, such as energy efficient roof-top units, lighting controls, daylight harvesting, and building orientation to achieve low heat gain contribute to cost efficient solutions for the district.



**"I THINK THESE SCHOOLS ARE EXPRESSIONS OF LOVE. YOU HAVE THIS BRAND-NEW BUILDING THAT KIDS CAN COME TO WITH LOTS OF REALLY UNIQUE SPACES FOR THEM TO LEARN IN. AND EVERYONE IS WELCOME."**

Alicia Rodriguez, Principal

**"IF YOU EQUIP A NEW SCHOOL WITH FACILITIES THAT MATCH THE LOVE AND DEVOTION THIS COMMUNITY HAS, THE POTENTIAL OF OUR LEARNERS IS LIMITLESS – AND THAT'S WHAT THIS NEW BUILDING IS ALL ABOUT. IT IS ABOUT GIVING EVERY STUDENT EVERY OPPORTUNITY THAT THEY NEED AND WANT TO SUCCEED IN THEIR LIFE AND TO THRIVE IN THEIR DREAMS."**

Dr. Steven Wurtz, Chief Academic Officer,  
Arlington ISD

