

BOYS TOWN EDUCATION CENTER

Establishing a Spirit of Place



■ EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tucked away amidst the trees and historic paths of Boys Town, Nebraska, stands the Boys Town Education Center. The future-ready space creates a safe and inclusive learning environment through research-informed design principles. Most notably it honors the mission of Father Edward J. Flanagan, Boys Town’s historic founder, who worked his entire life to inspire impactful moments in children’s lives.

Students at Boys Town come from difficult backgrounds, including fractured families, homelessness, or involvement with the juvenile justice system. Despite these challenges, they arrive seeking guidance and the opportunity to find success in school and in life. Through tailored support and customized educational plans, Boys Town empowers its students to overcome adversity and build a foundation for success.

It is crucial that the design for the Education Center responds and caters to the specific needs of Boys Town students while supporting teachers and staff. The design was inspired by thousands of hours of research, stakeholder engagement with the Boys Town Core Planning Team, student and teacher shadowing, design exercises, and student-led artwork.

The original high school stood for over 70 years and served grades 9-12, leaving elementary and middle school students spread out in other buildings across the campus. With the aging facility, the space was no longer capable of meeting the educational goals and vision for the students at Boys Town. Through the visioning and planning process, the design team and Boys Town stakeholders confidently determined a new building on the existing site was the best way forward to best serve the students and staff at Boys Town.

“We don’t all come from the same place, we come from all over America, and we come from all walks of life. We’re from all economic statuses, all races, all religions. That means every person is going to need a different style of education. Every person is going to need a different style of relationship. Having a space and an environment that is adaptable to that student and to that teaching style of that teacher is going to allow for a lot more opportunity and a lot more success.”

Boys Town Student

The new 110,000 SF educational facility serves 450 students from grades 4-12. The building consists of varied classroom sizes, small group rooms, learning commons, and maker spaces. The new center solves the need to consolidate grade levels and meet educational standards that the aging facility could not. Every space in the new facility integrates trauma-informed design principles, considering every student and teacher’s needs. The result is a future-ready learning facility where users feel comfortable and safe to maximize teaching and learning outcomes.

The design captures the spirit of Boys Town, celebrating its significance in every detail. The building seamlessly blends into the existing campus and thoughtfully integrates the unique community and the architectural heritage of Boys Town. It ensures the elements that have placed Boys Town on the National Historic Landmark list are celebrated and enshrined through design.

At Boys Town, the weight of trauma echoes through both the lives of students, many of whom have faced profound adversity, and the staff, who bear the emotional toll of their commitment to care. These realities shaped the design workshops and engagement sessions, bringing urgency and purpose to trauma-informed design principles. This approach not only serves as the foundation for Boys Town’s built environment but has also revolutionized how learning spaces worldwide are envisioned by the design team—infused with empathy and a deeper respect for the personal experiences that define those who inhabit them.



SCOPE OF WORK

At the beginning of the design process, project team members met with the Boys Town Core Planning Team and other key stakeholders to establish Guiding Principles, the We See Statement, and the concept of Spirit of Place, which set the foundation for the project. The design team attributed over 2,000 hours during the planning process and conducted over 30 different touch points with stakeholder groups throughout planning, design, and construction.

BUDGET / PROJECT DATA

<i>Project Name</i> Boys Town Education Center	<i>Student capacity:</i> 450
<i>District Name</i> Boys Town	<i>Site size in acres:</i> 4
<i>City/State</i> Boys Town, NE	<i>Gross Area in SF:</i> 110,000
<i>Occupancy Date</i> 8/1/2023	<i>Per Pupil SF:</i> 244
<i>Grades Housed:</i> 4-12	<i>Total Cost:</i> \$46,000,000
<i>Project size:</i> 110,000 SF	



Spirit of Place

It is our goal to create a place where we can all grow together. We are all integral in that process, coming together to create a greater whole. At Boys Town, we believe every child, regardless of circumstance, deserves the opportunity to succeed. We look beyond the building to a higher good, through spirit, culture, and a foundation of spirit.



We See Statement

We see a safe, flexible learning environment that encourages positive interactions and behaviors as students achieve their academic dreams and prepare for adulthood with technology at their fingertips.

Guiding Principles

Safe and Innovative

Our school will be a safe place where students and teachers feel comfortable and inspired to grow and learn.

Flexible and Adaptable

Our school will inspire students to reach their full potential through flexible learning environments with spaces for collaboration that provide structure and have the ability to adjust to the unique needs of students and teachers.

Honoring the Past and Looking Toward the Future

Our school will honor the diverse legacy of our historic institution and learn from it while looking toward the future with innovative spaces for collaboration, interaction, and creativity.

Creative and Inspiring

Our school will be a family-oriented, innovative, and inviting environment that fosters fun and inspires students to love to learn again.

TIMELINE	2020				2021				2022		
	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN- FEB	JUNE	AUG	OCT- DEC	OCT	MAY- JULY	AUG
ACTIVITIES	Kickoff & Virtual Workshop 1 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Trends in EducationTeacher Interview SessionStudent Shadow	Virtual Workshop 2-4 <ul style="list-style-type: none">UnderstandingProgrammingSite	Virtual Workshop 5 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Recommendations	Workshop 6-7 <ul style="list-style-type: none">Design CharretteDesign Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none">User Group MeetingFurniture Test Classrooms	Existing High School Demolition Begins <ul style="list-style-type: none">User Group Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Ground Breaking	Student Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none">Student Tile Project	Student Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none">Faith Art InstallationStudent Life Mural	Teacher Engagement <ul style="list-style-type: none">Furniture TrainingBOLD Workshop 1Butterfly PaintingBOLD Workshop 2	School Begins <ul style="list-style-type: none">Grand Opening
STAKEHOLDERS											
CORE PLANNING TEAM	●	● ● ●	●	● ●	●		●				●
EDUCATORS	● ●			● ●	● ●	●	●	●		● ● ● ●	●
STUDENTS	●						●	●	● ●		●
ALUMNI	●						●				●

School & Community Research and Engagement



“There are no bad boys.
There is only bad environment,
bad training, bad example,
bad thinking.”

Father Flanagan



COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Who is Boys Town



Founded in 1917 by Father Edward J. Flanagan, Boys Town welcomes children of all races, genders, and spiritual beliefs. Boys Town began with Father Flanagan, an ordained priest from Ireland, who dedicated his life to addressing social issues affecting vulnerable children in Omaha, Nebraska. Driven by a vision of creating new opportunities for those in dire circumstances, including imprisoned youth, he sought and supported the most disadvantaged boys. Father Flanagan's visionary approach to learning began with the Home for Boys, which has since grown to address the changing needs of those it serves. His enduring mission to create a world where children are valued, loved, educated, and guided continues to inspire and adapt to the needs of the community.

In 1938, Boys Town's notoriety soared thanks to the Hollywood hit *Boys Town*, starring Spencer Tracy as Father Flanagan. The inspiring and eye-opening story led to a sequel called *Men of Boys Town* that kept the mission in the public eye. In 1986 Boys Town was featured in *Miracle of the Heart, A Boys Town Story*. Most recently, *Heart of a Servant* and *Blue Baby* were released in 2024. They are documentaries that follow the life of Father Flanagan and the journey of eight incarcerated youth at Boys Town, respectively.

Today, Boys Town stands as a national symbol of exemplary educational care. It is the largest nonprofit organization devoted to children and families in the United States. Boys Town's footprint has grown and expanded to over a dozen locations in Nebraska, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Nevada, and New England. As of 2023, over 3 million children and families have been positively impacted by Boys Town programs.

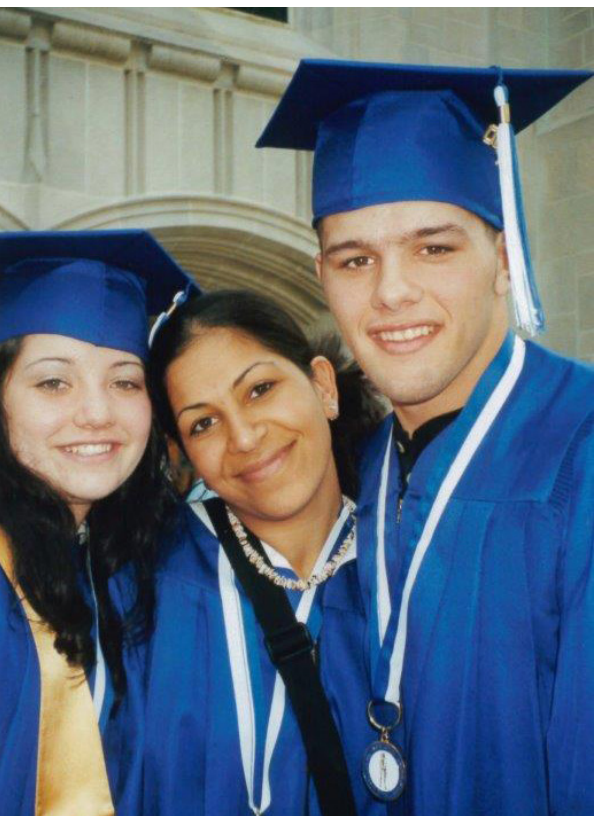
The Village of Boys Town, where the Boys Town Education Center is located, is recognized as Nebraska's only National Historic Landmark. It continues Father Flanagan's mission to provide life-changing care for children in need. The campus offers housing and residential treatment for up to 450 boys and girls at a time, welcoming at-risk youth of all ages and backgrounds. Comprehensive services include education, residential care, research, healthcare, and a variety of community programs, which provides students with the wrap around care they deserve.

Boys Town students come from challenging circumstances, such as broken homes, homelessness, or the juvenile justice system, and are seeking support and a path to a brighter future. The students come from many different educational backgrounds and communities across the country, with many specialized educational needs, including individual education plans (IEP). Personalized support and educational plans empower students to overcome challenges and achieve success at Boys Town.



“At Boys Town we firmly believe that a strong education is a life-changing foundational opportunity that all youth deserve.”

Boys Town CEO



AVAILABLE ASSETS

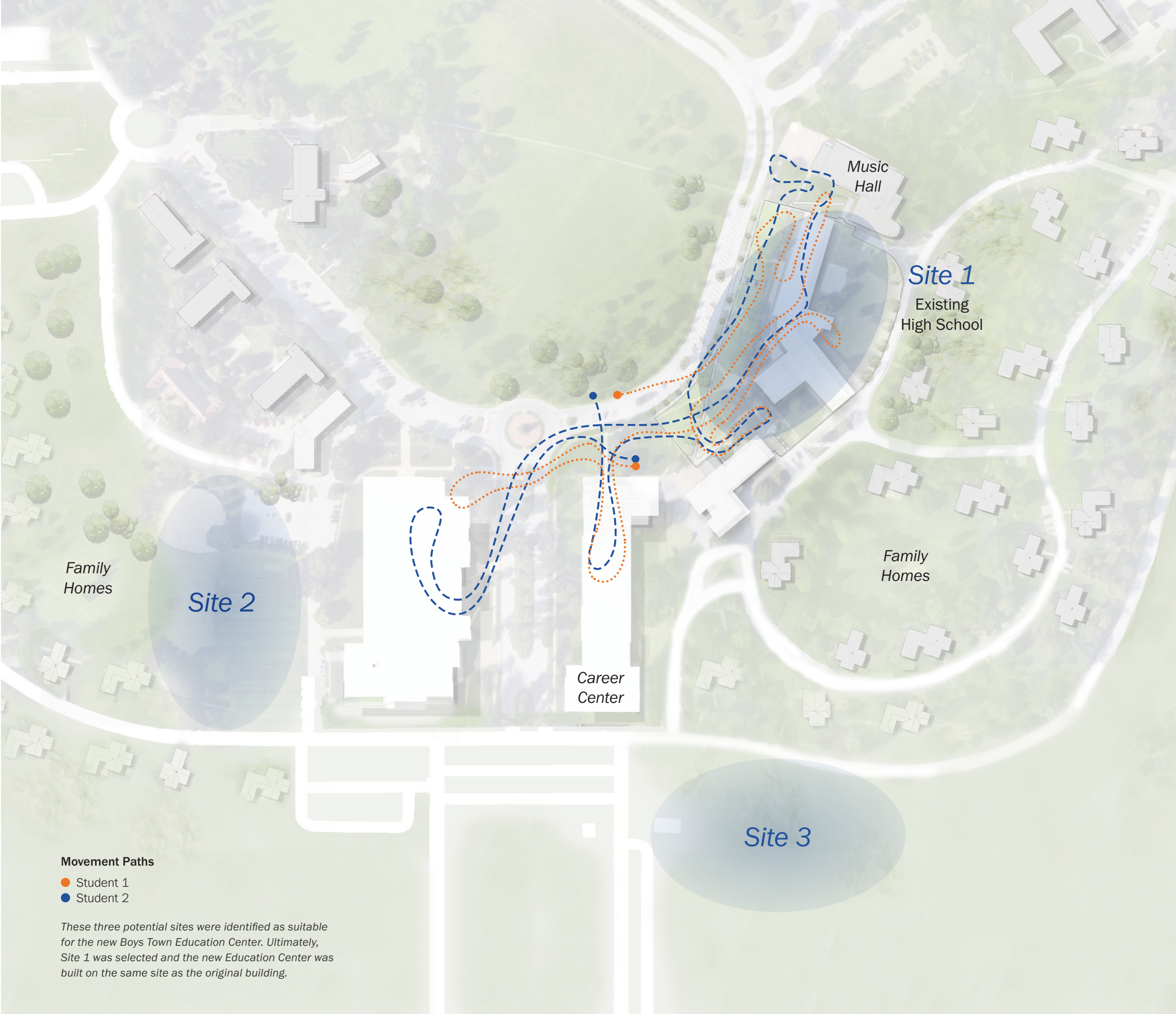
The decision to build new

One of the unique aspects of Boys Town High School, originally built in 1948, was also one of the biggest challenges faced during the design process. The existing high school was notably on the National Register of Historic Places – complicating the decision to renovate the current high school or build a new facility.

Boys Town identified three potential sites on its 1,300-acre campus for the new educational facility for the design firm to explore. One was the renovation of the existing facility (Site 1) and the others were two new locations (Sites 2 and 3) where a new school could be built.

The design team conducted comprehensive facility and educational adequacy assessments that considered existing architectural, mechanical, structural, and electrical conditions, as well as the educational culture, learning environments, and day-to-day student activities. After careful deliberation with Boys Town leaders, examining historical records and taking into consideration Father Flanagan’s vision for Boys Town, and relying on the study of the current facility, it was determined that renovating the existing facility would not be feasible. A new school was needed in order to fulfill Boys Town’s vision and mission for its students.

Following the same decision-making process, Boys Town leaders elected to build the new school on the existing site (Site 1) of Boys Town High School on Flanagan Boulevard. The design team’s student and teacher shadow exercises were one of the main factors in this decision. The design team charted student movements every 15 minutes throughout the day to determine focal points on campus. This site championed the school’s educational program and vision, its suitability maximized campus efficiency, and construction avoided disruption to in-person learning.



Movement Paths

- Student 1
- Student 2

These three potential sites were identified as suitable for the new Boys Town Education Center. Ultimately, Site 1 was selected and the new Education Center was built on the same site as the original building.

PROCESS

Candid Conversations

The design team and Boys Town stakeholders both attribute the success of Boys Town Education Center to the collaborative process between the architects, educational designers, the Boys Town leadership team, the teachers, and the students. From start to finish, every voice was heard and responded to through design.

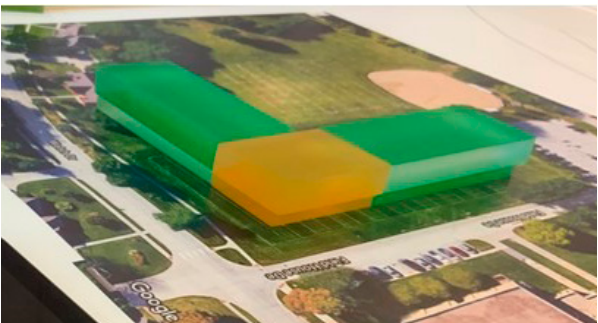
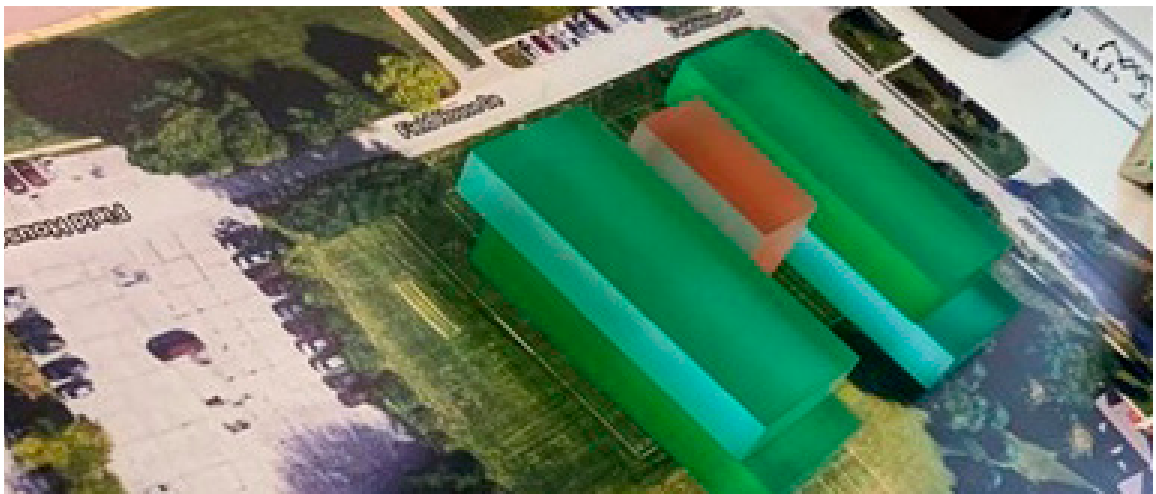
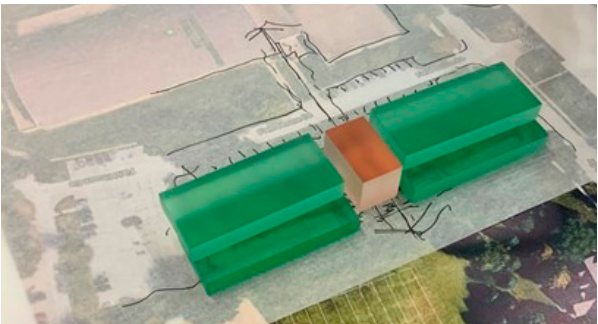
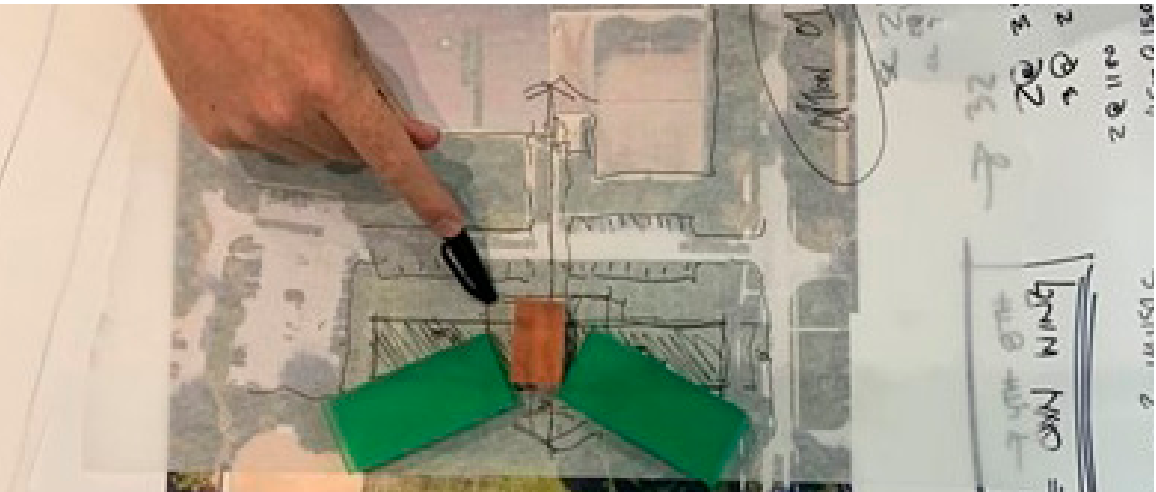
Designers met with the Boys Town Core Planning Team, teachers, students, and alumni on 30 different occasions throughout the process. They engaged in teacher and student shadowing, educational workshops, design shares, existing school tours, student and teacher engagement, furniture testing and training, and educator change management training.

This relationship allowed for a candid and transparent communication pattern. At a planning meeting, an educator stated many of the students feel like they are animals at a zoo when the tour

buses slow down on Flanagan Boulevard. This comment was a driving factor throughout the project. There was a desire to provide a place for kids to learn with dignity, create a separation between the students and the tours, while welcoming those visiting campus.

The importance of trauma-informed design principles became abundantly clear during these workshops and student and teacher engagement sessions. Nearly every student at Boys Town has experienced some type of trauma in their lives. Additionally, the teachers and staff at Boys Town were open about the secondhand trauma they experience in their day-to-day at Boys Town.

Not only was this the cornerstone of design at Boys Town, but it has had a transformational effect on how the design team creates learning environments around the world. Special attention and care is placed on how each student and teacher's personal life experience affects the built environment.



“I can’t think of another school where students helped design, build, and then attend their school.”

Boys Town Administrator

RESEARCH-INFORMED SOLUTION

Trauma-Informed Design

Early in the design process, Boys Town identified the physical learning environment’s critical role in student success. Through historical research, the design team also learned Father Flanagan understood the importance of a positive learning environment. This empowered the design team to instill research-informed design principles and to have open and sincere conversations with Boys Town leadership about the importance of these design elements.

Trauma-informed design aims to create a safe and comfortable environment. Central principles of trauma-informed design include sensory boundaries, nested layers, and identity anchors that align with key design pillars: dignity, belonging, and comfort. Architectural design elements that can help mitigate stress include exposure to natural light, avoidance of hidden spaces, spaces that provide appropriate privacy, and open interior environments that facilitate visibility.

The individual needs of students determine these spaces. Space can forge meaningful connections to learning and provide the resources students need to meet their educational goals. Thoughtful design and meticulous attention to detail establish a connection between the educational environment and the learning experience.



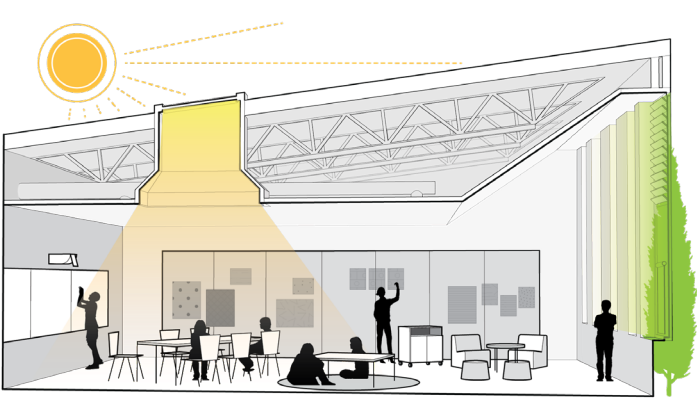
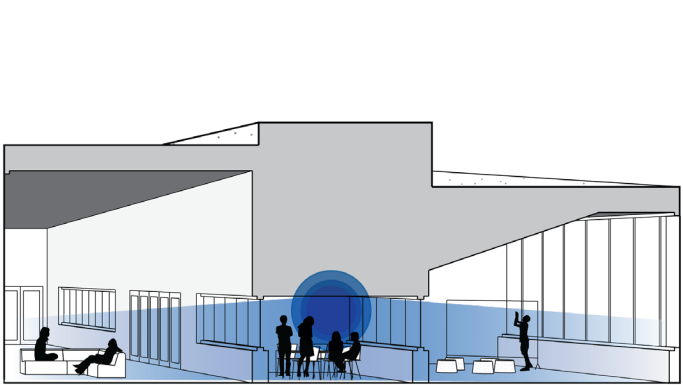
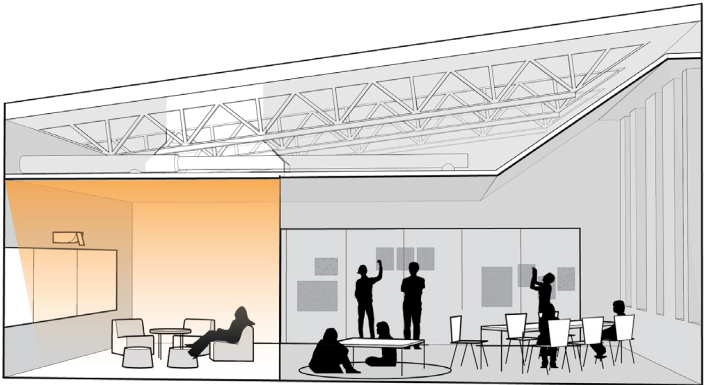
Appropriate Privacy

Visibility

Natural Connection

“We approach visioning and planning with a renewed focus because of the impact the research and student-centered design at Boys Town had on our design team.”

Design Team Member



RESEARCH-INFORMED DESIGN
Prioritizing Students and Educators

In addition to trauma-informed design, the design team also examined how flexibility, individualization, naturalness, and stimulation affect the learning environment. Research informed every space at the Boys Town Education Center and intentionally supported the project’s “We See Statement,” as well as the four Guiding Principles.

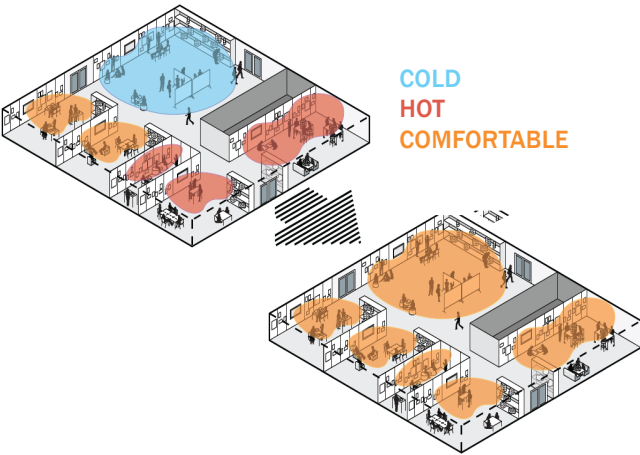
Flexibility

For operable spaces to impact student outcomes, best practices for sightlines, acoustics, doors, and furniture must be followed. Movement keeps students engaged, adds novelty, and feeds oxygen to the brain. At Boys Town, students have a variety of learning spaces they utilize throughout the day that keep them moving and engaged.



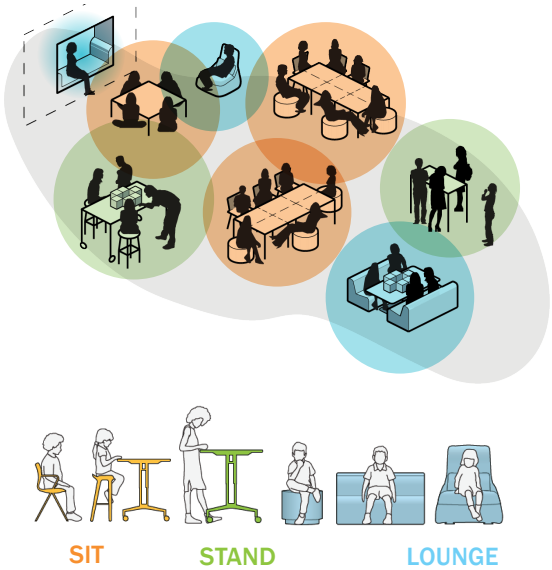
Naturalness

Depending on the type of learning activity taking place, the number of students, the types of equipment, and window orientation, actual temperatures can vary greatly across learning spaces within the same school. Giving teachers control of heating and cooling in each space and throughout the learning environment empowers them to provide thermal comfort for the learning group.



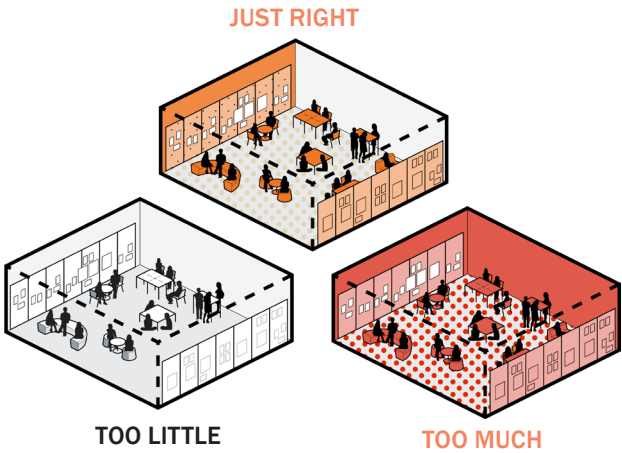
Individualization

High student engagement is linked to an enhanced ability to sit, stand, or lounge in the classroom. Providing physical comfort requires more than meeting the naturalness factors alone. The learning environment must be personalized for every student and teacher alike. Students at Boys Town have ample seating choices, as well as the space needed to utilize those seating choices.



Stimulation

When students perceive collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking reflected in and valued by the design of the school, they are significantly more engaged. Creativity and critical thinking have a strong relationship to the brain’s visual networks, particularly the constant back-and-forth between perceptual memory vision and executive memory. The student-led artwork at Boys Town gives students ownership and agency of their learning environment instilling ownership and pride.



STUDENT-LED DESIGN

Ownership Through Artwork

Engaging the students in the design process was one of the most exciting and rewarding pieces at Boys Town. Utilizing the students' creativity and talent adds a unique artistic touch to the interior finishes and an authentic connection for the students to the school. There were 40-50 student groups toured during the 20-month construction period. During the tours, construction updates and processes were discussed and students got to see the design and functionality of their new building develop in real-time.

To enhance a sense of ownership of their space, students were engaged in designing the tile patterns that playfully adorn the walls at pivotal connection points, as well as a monumental butterfly wall, created with local artist Watti White.

Tile Project

Boys Town students were placed in work groups to create tile patterns that would inspire different finishes of the interior walls of the new facility. In partnership with a design studio at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, life sized tiles were laser cut on chipboard for the student groups to create to scale patterns. Students had an opportunity to color in the designs from a coloring book that was created from the patterns designed during the special work groups.

The final tile pattern creations were installed in five separate locations in the new Boys Town Education Center, reminding them of the agency they have in their choices.

“It really meant a lot to incorporate pieces of them, who they are, and to see the representation of our students in the design of our building.”

Boys Town Administrator

Butterfly Mural

In addition to the student tile project, Boys Town students had the opportunity to put their stamp of creativity through the butterfly mural, which adorns the media center wall. Students were asked to color and decorate a butterfly and local Omaha artist Watti White pieced them together to create the mural.

The butterfly was a symbol chosen by the students. It signifies one's journey of faith and the beauty that comes from the journey. It captures the path the students take at Boys Town, growing, evolving, and soaring. The project has taken on a life of its own and keen observers will see chrysalises and other butterflies sprinkled throughout the school and campus.



“It was a good opportunity for us to show our creativity throughout the school and for the people who go to the school later to see our creation.”

Boys Town Student





“If I hadn’t been at Boys Town, I wouldn’t have met people with the construction family who are helping me pursue my dream of going into construction.”

Boys Town Student

A Life-Changing Experience

One Boys Town student created an opportunity for himself and was an intricate part of the construction process. Colton, who was a student at Boys Town, approached project leaders on site and asked if he could come work for them. They jumped at the opportunity and the student began working as a Laborer 1 at the Education Center. He adjusted his school schedule with the support of Boys Town, allowing him to work from 7 a.m. - noon and attend classes in the afternoon. After graduating in May 2023, he joined the construction team full time. He became the team’s “do it all guy” and made an immediate impact on the project. His ultimate goal was to become a crane operator, which he began training for later that summer. The practical resume-building experience he was able to gain while working on the Boys Town Education Center played a pivotal role in helping him pursue his dream.



Physical & Educational Environment



“You can’t learn in an environment where you don’t feel safe.”

Design Team Member



SITE PLAN

Centrally Located

Holding a prominent position on Flanagan Boulevard, the Boys Town Education Center serves as the hub for students’ day-to-day activities. It seamlessly blends in aesthetically with the surrounding Boys Town Campus. Following student foot traffic during the visioning process was a determining factor in the campus’ location. It is important for students to efficiently move from building to building while also taking advantage of the fresh air and access to nature. In addition, clear wayfinding and familiar routes are measures that mitigate reactions to the effects of trauma.

“It reminds me more of what I would see if I were to walk on to a college campus.”

Boys Town Student



“When students come to Boys Town, education success is often the first success they’ve had in their lives. It’s our job to create an innovative environment because the traditional environment hasn’t always been successful for our kids.”

Boys Town Administrator

**BALANCING TRANSPARENCY
AND PRIVACY**

Intimacy by Design

At the beginning of the design process, students and staff shared their desire for more privacy on the campus. Because the Education Center is on the main drive of a National Historic Landmark, hundreds of thousands of people visit the site each year. The front side of the school sits on the main drive within the Village of Boys Town, and because students described feeling as if they were on display when tour groups passed by their old school like animals at the zoo, the new school’s building entrances are strategically dampened by design elements. There is a distinct separation between public and private spaces.

The three-story, 110,000 SF school is configured to give students an added layer of privacy. A series of bays projecting from the building on the drive-facing side allow large windows to be positioned perpendicular to the exterior wall so that students enjoy daylight and views to the outdoors, but tour-bus passengers cannot see into the learning spaces.

The design team did what you never do when designing schools: they hid the main entrance. They did so by creating a student-centered courtyard sheltered from the street by a monument to the past and a celebration of student life. The street facing monochromatic graphics depict the history and purpose of the campus. It can be seen clearly from afar, but as one moves closer to the graphic, the image begins to disappear encouraging those visiting campus to keep their distance. The sheltered side of the monument is full of movement and color, a celebration of opportunity and growth.

The colorful mural is designed by Watie White, the local artist who collaborated on the butterfly mural. The art piece inspires students to feel the warmth and comfort of the Boys Town campus and exudes a sense of pride and belonging.



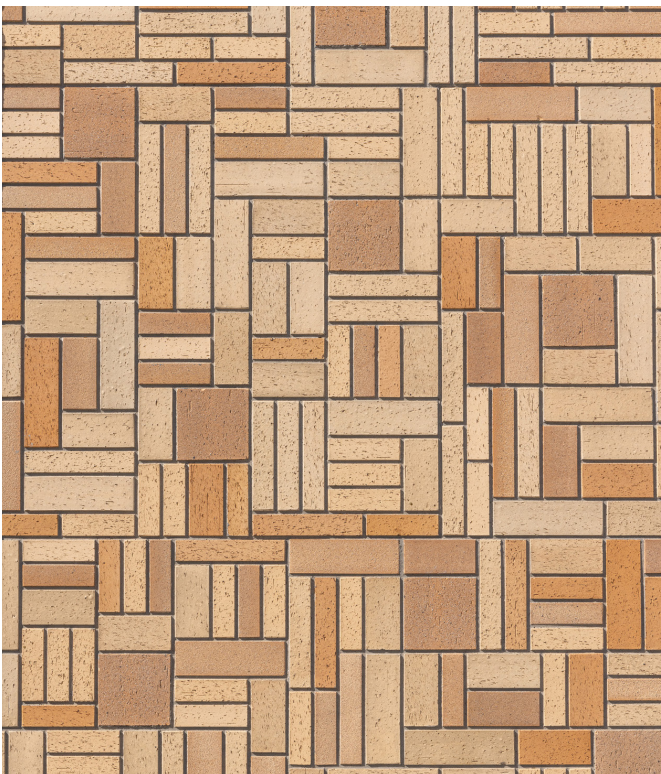
SUSTAINABILITY WITH HISTORICAL NODES

Timeless Design

The new Boys Town Education Center façade captures the spirit of the intricacies that make Boys Town unique. It seamlessly blends with the existing aesthetic of the Boys Town Campus. Design intricacies are parsed out and thoughtfully woven into the façade, like the vertical and horizontal juxtaposition of the brick and stone detailing. The north-south site orientation along Flanagan Boulevard also posed challenges for ideal solar orientation.

The solution to the building’s site orientation is through window bays that provide students with privacy, while allowing for natural light into the classrooms. The fin design on the window bays allows windows to face north and south, substantially limiting solar heat gain by reducing west-facing glazing. This sustainable strategy, along with a high-performance envelope and optimized window frits, reduces solar heat gain and glare into the learning environment.

A restrained but very intentional material palette is used on this project, focusing on extremely durable materials with a long life-cycle and a neutral but warm palette meant to create a welcoming and timeless space. Terrazzo floors are used throughout the entire building and provide a clean, easy to maintain texture that will last the lifespan of the building. Additionally, the design leverages the Boys Town central mechanical plant, mitigating energy costs. The building utilizes bipolar ionization to remove germs in the air. The system places electrical charges on fine particles, purifying the air and reducing the spread of illness in the building.



Buildings on campus feature unique brick patterns, as seen here. These patterns inspired the exterior design for the Education Center.

■ FAITH AT THE CENTER

Spirit Hall and Central Staircase

Spirit Hall

Spirit Hall is the focal point of Boys Town Education Center – physically and philosophically. Spirit Hall is a two-story space positioned in the middle of the school. It's encased with glass and accented by acoustical felt. It provides a serene space for students and teachers to practice their faith, reflect, and meditate. Art glass distorts views into the space, allowing for peaceful and private reflection, while still allowing for proper supervision. Faith, no matter what religion or denomination, is a cornerstone of Boys Town's philosophy, which is why the space is strategically designed with specific adjacencies to accommodate all religions. Father Flanagan made it a priority for every student at Boys Town to have faith as the basis of their Boys Town experience. This space allows for that goal to be lived out in the new school.



“Large windows, large and spacious lighting facilities, where the sunshine comes in, help to light up the hearts and minds of the children within that building. The beautiful flowers in variegated colors help to elevate the child’s mind and heart to higher things, which old, staid and prosaic buildings cannot do.”

*Father Flanagan,
philosophy for school design*

Central Staircase

Wrapping around Spirit Hall is the school’s main staircase and circulation hub. It facilitates all student inter-floor travel. The three-story staircase is one of the best displays of how the design responds to trauma-informed research. Teachers and administrators noted that the stairwells in the old school were a pain point for student disturbances throughout the day. They were difficult to supervise, brought students in close proximity to each other, and had poor visibility and transparency for students.

Here’s how the design keeps student and staff safe at Boys Town:

It allows for a central point of supervision in the school, only needing three perspectives to monitor the entire school.

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Maximizing the width of the staircase allows for students to maintain comfortable distances from one another and is more efficient in moving large numbers of students between periods. Congruently, designers created the main corridors with extra space and width, using the same principles.

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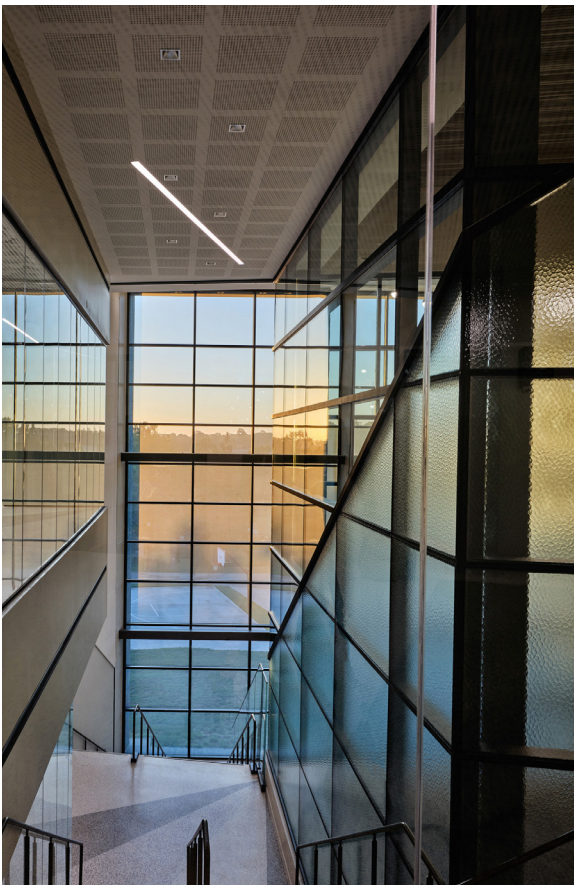
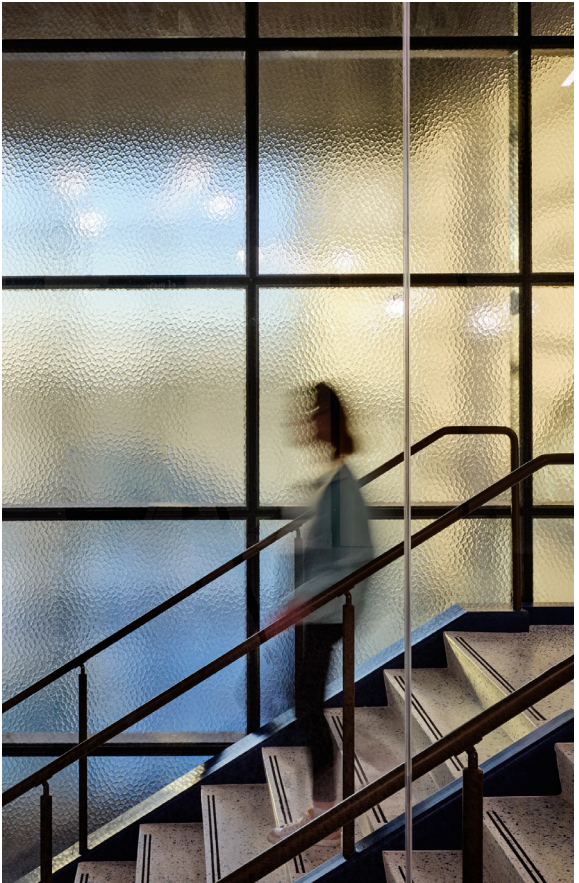
Extra safety measures are taken with the staircase railings. The railings are six feet tall and span floor to ceiling on the top floor.

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The glass railings allow for transparency and maximized site lines for students using the stairs, while allowing for natural light to filter through the space.

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Materials were carefully sourced and selected to create a natural feel and to avoid the feeling or semblance of a detention center.



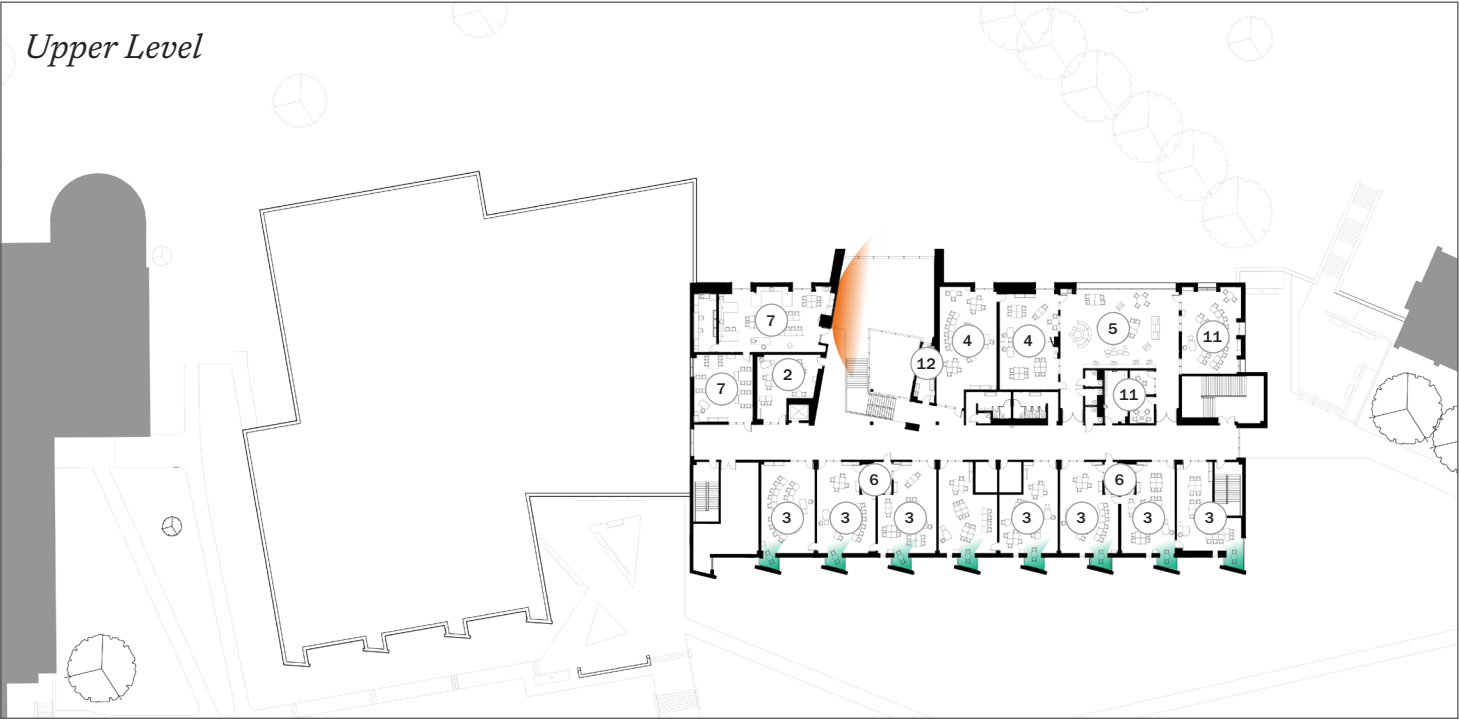
EDUCATIONAL MAPS

Designing for Future-Ready Learning

Elementary and middle school students have access to a shared learning commons for collaboration and “messy work.” A multipurpose room that also serves as a FEMA-rated storm shelter offers activity space for these students to engage in physical education activities. The media center serves all students, grades 4-12, and features a collaborative approach with books focused on leisure and reading. Maker spaces or “tinker spaces” give high school students the opportunity to immerse themselves in technology and STEM-related activities. Students in good academic and behavioral standing have access to privilege rooms, which are special places for games, movies, and social interaction. Three outdoor classrooms are incorporated based on direct student input.



- | | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|--|-----------------------|
| 1. Administration | 7. Maker Space | 13. ES MS Dining Commons | ● Comfort Cove |
| 2. Small Classroom Studio | 8. Privilege Room | 14. ES MS Gym
FEMA Rate Storm Shelter | ● Social Stair Nook |
| 3. Medium Classroom Studio | 9. Spirit Hall | 15. Media Center | ● Mini Stage |
| 4. Large Classroom Studio | 10. Student Stair | 16. Outdoor Classroom | ● Vista Vantage Point |
| 5. Learning Commons | 11. Educator Support Space | 17. Play Group | ● Laptop Rail |
| 6. Small Group Room | 12. Educator Respite Room | | ● Chess Connection |



“The Education Center provides for us those flexible learning environments that we are able to take kids outside of the classroom and we have more space available to do that collaborative learning.”

Boys Town Administrator

FUTURE-READY

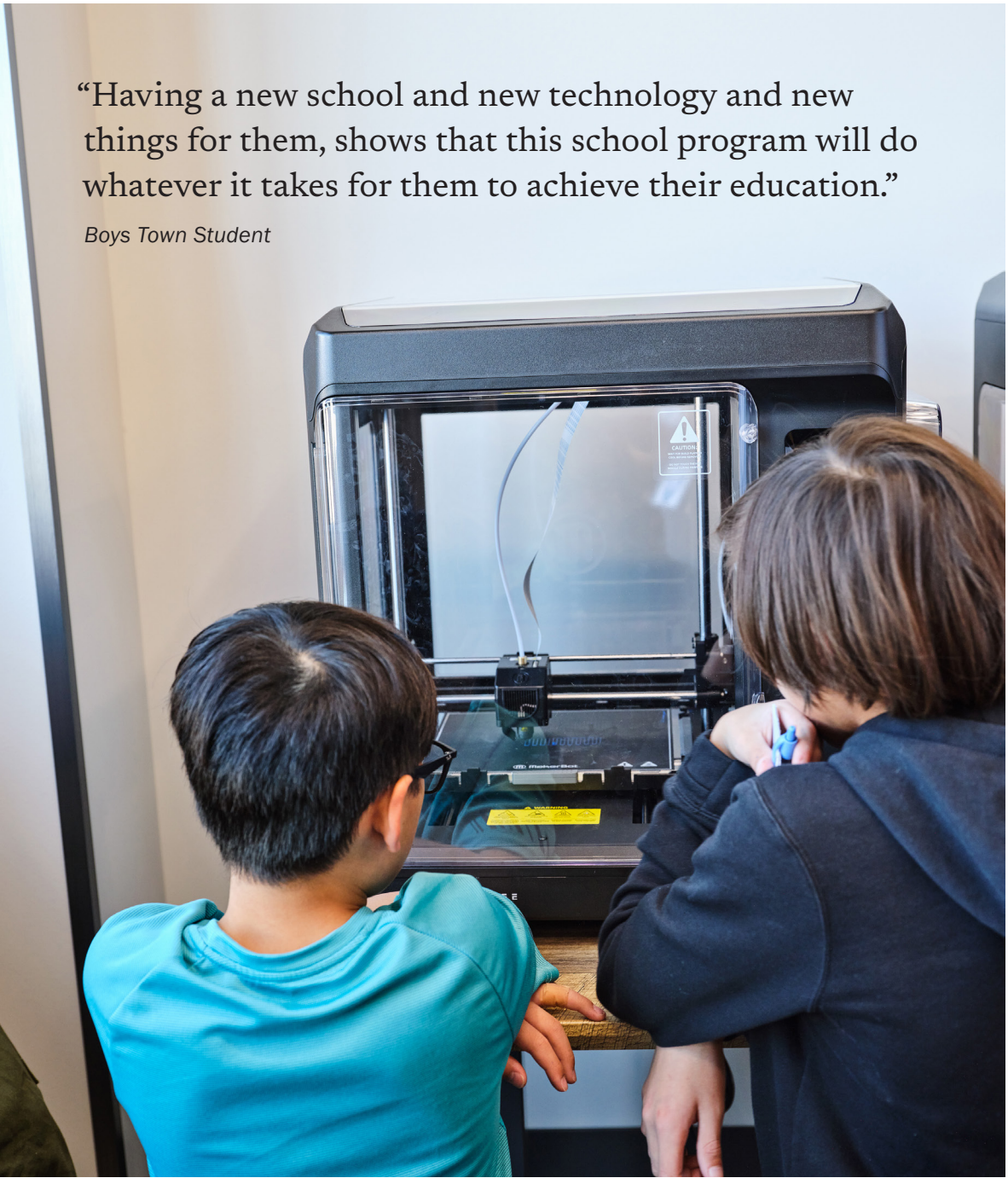
STEM and Technology

Boys Town seeks to prepare its students for life after Boys Town. Whether that's returning to their previous school, pursuing an advanced degree, or entering the workforce, it's important that students have the skills and experience to be successful.

The old Boys Town High School was not preparing students for the world they'd be entering. The curriculum and facility lacked technological integration. Students are not permitted to have cell phones at Boys Town. The school had a single cart of iPads and a computer lab and students had many restrictions on the technology they could use. After touring other schools and a change in philosophy on the importance of students having access to technology, it became clear technology integration would be imperative at the new Boys Town Education Center.

Boys Town Education Center has interactive devices throughout the building, both mounted and mobile. They also have a 1 to 1 technology policy now and every student has their own personal device. The facility leverages technology in a variety of ways to allow for flexibility in curriculum delivery. The designers carefully coordinated furniture selection and placement, classroom studio computer cart charging stations, and power/data access. Educational designers helped bridge the change management piece for teachers and administrators, helping usher in the new educational culture at Boys Town. The team coached and guided the Boys Town staff through new practices and procedures with change management tactics. This allows staff to effectively provide a future-ready learning environment for students and better prepare them for life after Boys Town.

Similarly, Boys Town wanted to provide more access to STEM opportunities for its students. Boys Town's campus career center provides students with access to CTE programming and some STEM opportunities. The new Education Center builds on Boys Town's commitment to provide real-world learning to students and provides access to new programming including robotics, coding, and 3D printing.



“Having a new school and new technology and new things for them, shows that this school program will do whatever it takes for them to achieve their education.”

Boys Town Student

The STEM labs at Boys Town Education Center are multifaceted in their value. They enable teachers to facilitate extracurricular activities, like the robotics club, without having to travel to a different building. Students now have access to industry leading

resources to be successful in those activities. They also provide exposure to STEM opportunities. Now, students can see STEM classwork and activities as they walk through the building, sparking interest and intrigue.



■ TRAUMA-INFORMED DESIGN

Principles in Action

At Boys Town, it’s difficult to parse out the elements of the educational environment without acknowledging the connection to the physical environment. Programming and classroom features took their cues from how the physical environment responds to research and feedback garnered from firsthand accounts at Boys Town. As one member of the design team pointed out, “You can’t learn in an environment where you don’t feel safe.” The design prioritizes comfort, privacy, and safety and transparency to create an optimal learning environment for the students at Boys Town.

“I struggle with vertigo and migraines. Being able to customize the lighting not only helps the students that are struggling, but it also helps me do my job.”

Boys Town Teacher

Comfort

Classroom Size

Students who have experienced trauma may have boundary issues, so the design affords 64% more space than a typical school, with 55 SF per student to enhance comfort and psychological safety.

Light Features

Each classroom is equipped with tunable lighting features, giving educators the ability to create appropriate learning environments for their students with the use of different light settings.

Natural light and a connection to the outdoors is a major focus of the project. At the previous high school, there were multiple areas of the school that received little to no natural light. The unique site incorporates as much natural light as possible while still affording the students and teachers the privacy they desire.

Flexible Furniture

The Boys Town educational model calls for flexible and future-ready learning, however the space they were previously learning in did not match those values. The design provides a diverse set of learning spaces in classroom size, furniture, and seating choices. Different-sized classroom studios cater to a range of class sizes and programming, from small (less than 6 students) to medium (7-10 students) and large (11-14 students). This allows for lower student-to-teacher ratios for those who need more assistance.

Comfort Nooks

Comfort nooks are fashioned along the external walls facing Flanagan Boulevard. These “spaces within spaces” are multifaceted. In addition to the exterior fin that provides an extra layer of safety and security to students, they also allow students who are experiencing boundary issues to be a part of the class while seeking the space they need.



Safety & Transparency

Safety and Security Measures

Special attention was placed on safety and security measures to ensure their effectiveness without making them abhorrently apparent. Intentional interior design elements signal to students and staff designated safe areas in the classroom where they are not visible from the hallway. The video security system around the school allows for better supervision, and intentional design measures minimize the spaces where students are able to be hidden or unsupervised.

Alarm systems within the school are intentionally softened and don't feature loud buzzers or sirens. This provides a smoother and more tranquil transition from where the students are to designated safe areas. Loud and unforeseen noises, similar to a traditional alarm system, can be a trigger for students with trauma and create a harsh environment.

Every classroom has two exit points. Students and staff only use the secondary door for emergencies. It provides a level of comfort to students and staff that they can effectively exit the classroom if necessary. Multiple exits also add a layer of safety and protection for teachers who are in need of assistance in the event of a student altercation or breakdown.

Transparency

Unknown environments can also trigger students who have experienced trauma. The design allows for clear visibility when entering and exiting spaces, which reduces anxiety. Small group rooms are concealed from the hallway, but are transparent and accessible inside the classrooms. This affords students and teachers privacy from hallway views when in these rooms.



Privacy

Breakout Rooms and Quick Action Shades

Dispersed small group rooms throughout the building allow for more group work, acoustic separation, and student and teacher one-on-one time. They also serve as de-escalation spaces. If a student is distressed, educators can take the student into this space and quickly activate blackout shades in the room to ensure the student is not on display.

Building Orientation

Perhaps the most innovative feature of the design is the building’s designated “front” and “back.” Because students described feeling as if they were on display when tour groups passed by their old school, the new school’s building entrances are strategically dampened by design elements.

The design for the non-public facing, back of the school maximizes views and creates a sense of openness. On the public-facing side along the main drive, exterior windows are strategically positioned so students can feel protected and less visible while still enjoying views outside and natural light.

Teacher Respite Rooms

There are four teacher respite rooms throughout the facility with varying levels of intimacy and privacy. After learning about the secondhand trauma Boys Town educators experience, it was important that the design respond to their professional and personal needs, as well.



“The dedicated spaces for teachers, including restroom access, enhance faculty well-being—supporting the holistic approach to the school’s design.”

Boys Town Administrator



— Results



“Graduating (high school) was never even a thought in my eyes. Just to be here is surreal. To make my family proud and to make myself proud is a big accomplishment.”

Boys Town Student on Graduation Day



■ LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES

Living Out a Mission

The staff and administration at Boys Town have an unwavering commitment to the Boys Town mission – and the students are the benefactors. Boys Town has an educational facility that is tailor-made for the students and educators, which enables them to be successful. The designers recently sat down with some of the Boys Town students to get their thoughts about the Education Center. They asked them what they were most proud of at school.

One student responded:

“I’m proud that my grades are better.”

They were asked why they think their grades have seen improvement:

“It’s because of the teachers. All of them come in early or stay after school if you need help.”

The design team shared this story with the Boys Town administration and teachers:

“Everyone that comes to work at Boys Town believes this is a place that can change kids’ lives. In order to accomplish that, you need to have the resources. Our staff and our students are deserving of a place like this because they are doing such amazing things to change the lives of these kids.”

The student highlighted here was at Boys Town prior to the project and is now preparing to graduate from the new Education Center. They are a member of the robotics team that meets before and after school, and an exemplary student in the STEM program. Through the help of Boys Town, they were able to secure an internship that will enable them to attend community college after graduation with all educational expenses covered to pursue a degree and licensure as a diesel mechanic.

Boys Town, its teachers, and the Education Center forever changed this student’s outlook and trajectory by supporting the mission of life-changing work for children in need.



ELEVATING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Data Supported

Boys Town gives students the pathway to educational and life success through the Education Center. All throughout the design process, designers prioritized the project's Guiding Principles. The result is an educational facility where students and staff feel joy for learning through a safe and inclusive environment. In keeping true to Father Flanagan's mission and vision, the Boys Town Education Center will be a springboard of hope for those who call it home for generations to come.



100% Teacher Retention

From the 2023-24 school year to the 2024-25 school year, Boys Town retained every teacher on staff.



Math Scores Rise 30 Points

According to MAP achievement scores through the Northwest Evaluation Association, students who attended Boys Town in 2023-24 saw their math scores (86th percentile) significantly rise compared to the scores of the students who attended Boys Town in 2022-23 (56th percentile).



Behavioral Incidents Significantly Down

From 2022-23 to 2023-24, Boys Town saw a decrease in behavioral incidents. Further, they saw an even greater decrease in behavioral incidents in those students who attended Boys Town in both 2022-23 and 2023-24.

“For me, this is the best thing that’s happened to me during my time at Boys Town. I’ve never experienced a brand-new school before. I’ve never experienced a school like this. It’s my senior year, it’s my time to shine.”

Boys Town Student

