

A4LE James D. MacConnell Award - New Construction

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GPS

Grandville Public Schools
7/8 Middle School

Student-Focused and Flexible Middle School

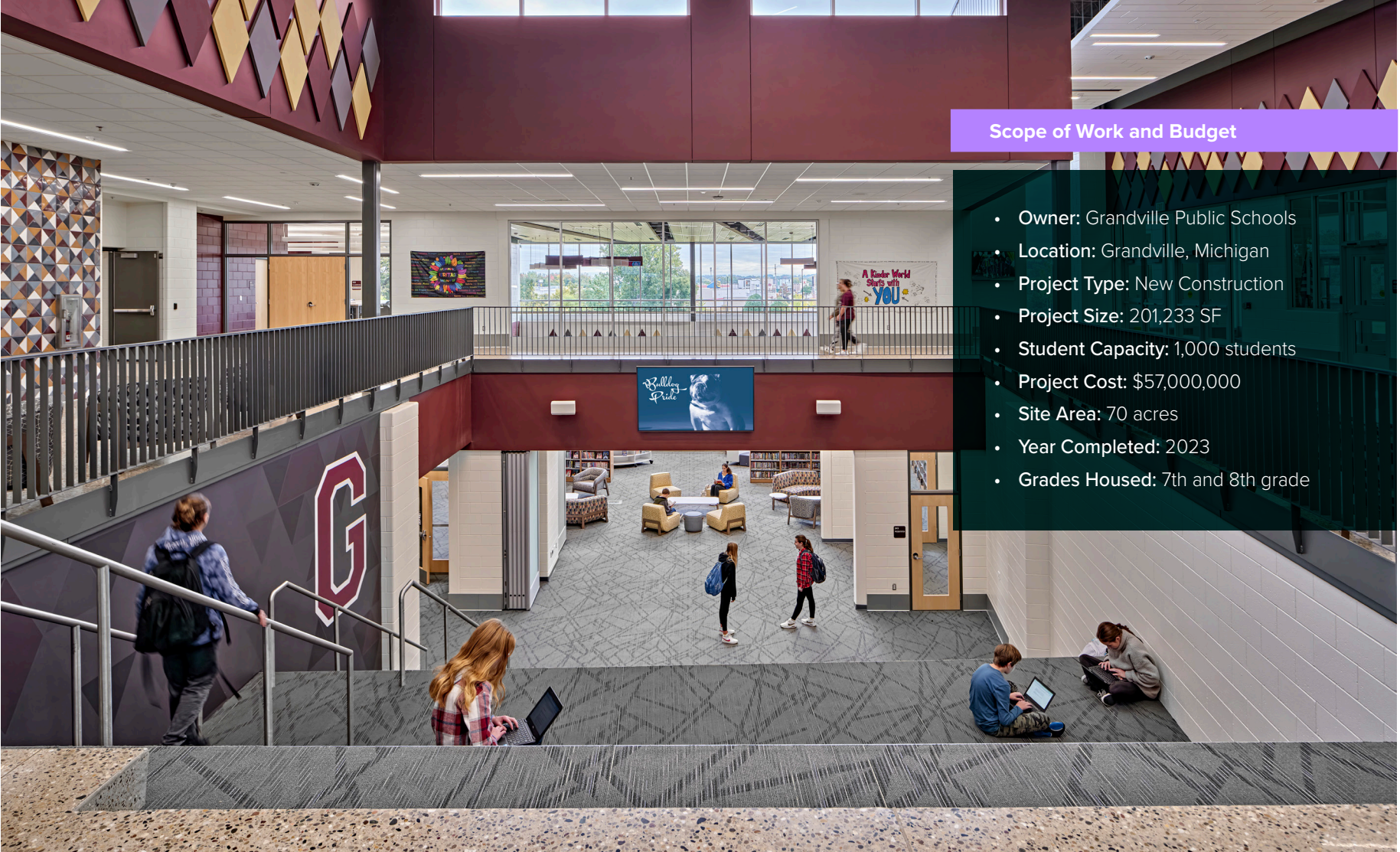
Grandville Public School’s new, multi-story middle school boasts more than 200,000 square feet of teaching and learning space that offers students a variety of specialized spaces for a well-rounded educational experience. A large learning staircase with adjacent technology creates a hub where students can socialize, have small group meetings, and enjoy lunch together. The spacious corridors double as dynamic learning areas filled with movable furniture and tech, making every corner a potential spot for creativity and collaboration. Breakout rooms and large group spaces offer flexible learning opportunities in fun, non-traditional settings that spark



imaginative thinking. Beyond the classroom, an attached robotics arena can host a variety of competitions with up to 120 robotics teams and 2,000 spectators. This competition space also makes robotics more accessible for neighboring districts to utilize the space and create collaboration among different grade levels and teams.

Guiding Principles

- 1. Education for every child:** Experience learning in a non-traditional setting that fosters an understanding of each student’s learning styles and abilities.
- 2. Integrated technology:** Technology at the forefront that is accessible, flexible and reliable.
- 3. Build on brand:** Create a sense of pride and togetherness in the community, allowing everyone to identify as a ‘Bulldog’.
- 4. Transparent learning:** Create a 21st century learning environment that is collaborative, flexible, and maximizes access to natural daylight.
- 5. Adaptable security:** Allow for passive supervision and building zone partitions to create secure areas for students and staff alike.



- **Owner:** Grandville Public Schools
- **Location:** Grandville, Michigan
- **Project Type:** New Construction
- **Project Size:** 201,233 SF
- **Student Capacity:** 1,000 students
- **Project Cost:** \$57,000,000
- **Site Area:** 70 acres
- **Year Completed:** 2023
- **Grades Housed:** 7th and 8th grade

The facility’s design also incorporates many methodologies that enhance the social-emotional learning and development of middle school students. By creating intentional collaboration spaces that encourage relationship building to promoting nature rich learning with hands-on opportunities, the district kept student mental health in mind. A counseling area in the school also has a separate entrance from the main office to promote students’ privacy when seeking support services. Throughout the facility, a cohesive maroon and gray color palette, along with branded graphics, clearly identifies itself as a

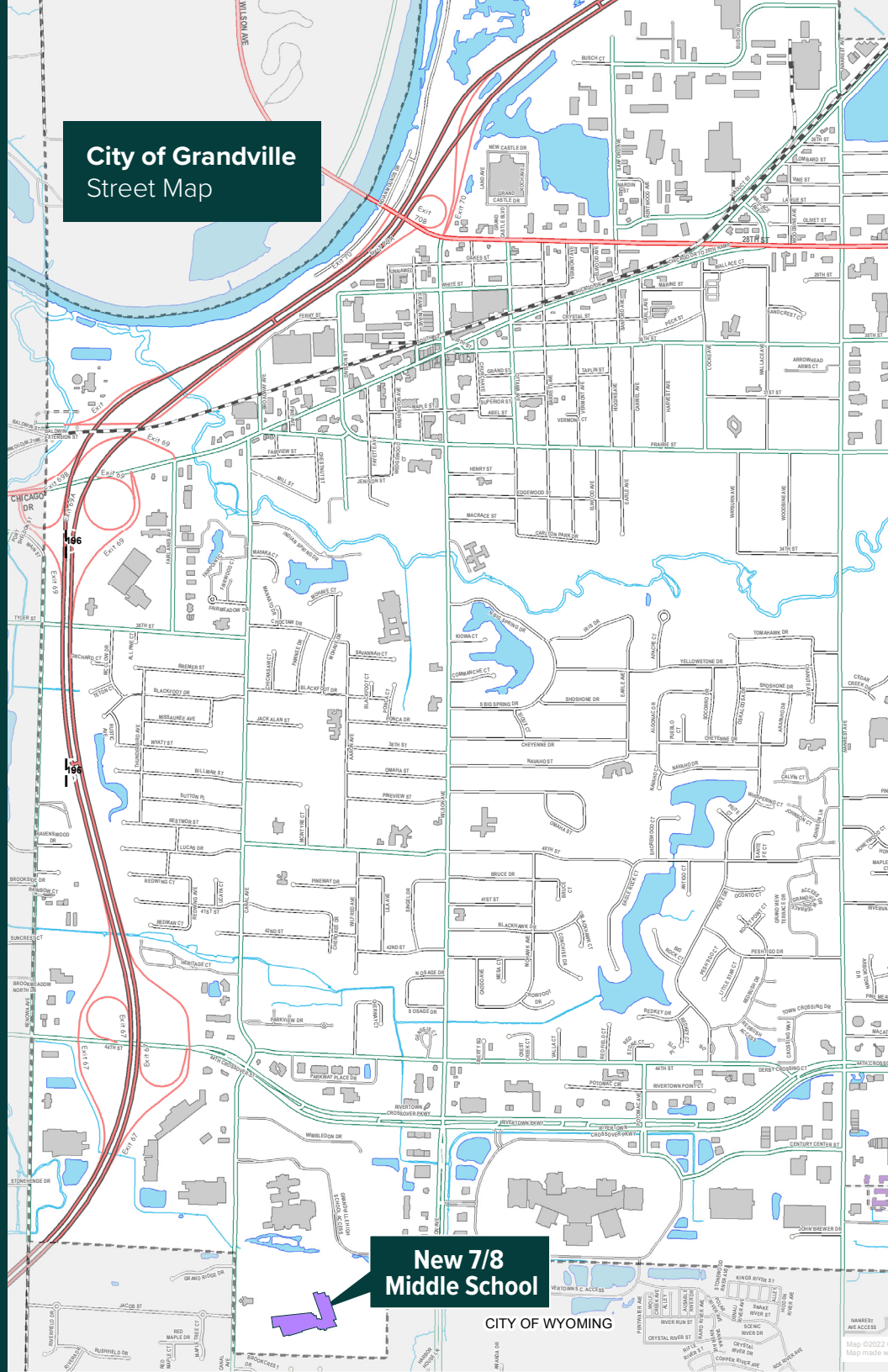
“Grandville” building. Student focused messaging in the building encourages positivity and an inclusive sense of belonging for all students.

Grandville’s new middle school provides a collaborative and imaginative environment for all students, designed with a holistic approach that supports the academic, social, and emotional needs of its students. The inspiring spaces within the school are thoughtfully created to foster an environment where students can thrive and reach their fullest potential.

A Tight-Knit Midwestern Community

Originally established in 1833, the city of Grandville is located on the southwest outskirts of Grand Rapids and is defined by the winding Grand River that flows through it. The city encompasses around 8 square miles of land with a population of around 16,000 citizens. Grandville embodies the traditional American suburb feel with Division 1 athletics, a destination shopping mall, and suburban home developments constructed post 1980s. Just 25 miles from Lake Michigan and 8 miles from bustling Grand Rapids, Grandville offers all the convenience of city living without losing the small-town community feel.

The Grandville Public Schools district has a long history of achievement, with the first graduating high school class dating back to 1882. With more than 5,500 students currently in the district, and a projected increase in enrollment, Grandville has continually invested in their facilities to help each student reach their fullest academic potential. Positioned close to over 10 colleges and universities, quality education is a priority for the Grandville community.




The Grandville Middle School project team consisted of stakeholders from multiple groups including the district leaders, board members, community and neighbors, the robotics club, and counseling staff. The stakeholder groups participated in various design workshops, planning sessions, community forums, and facility walk-throughs during the bond planning process.

Engaged Stakeholders




Specific attention was paid to the educational programming and hands-on learning opportunities for students. Considerations for music and the arts, STEM, physical education, and social-emotional learning were brought to the table early in the process. Working in collaboration with the robotics team, known as the Robodawgs, their needs informed a significant portion of the facility design.

This design process fostered Collaboration, Collegiality, and Connection to achieve a result that serves multiple goals and stakeholder groups.



Grandville Public Schools

BOND PROPOSALS on the Nov. 5 Ballot



PLEASE VOTE

Tuesday, Nov. 5, 2019

www.gpsbulldogs.org

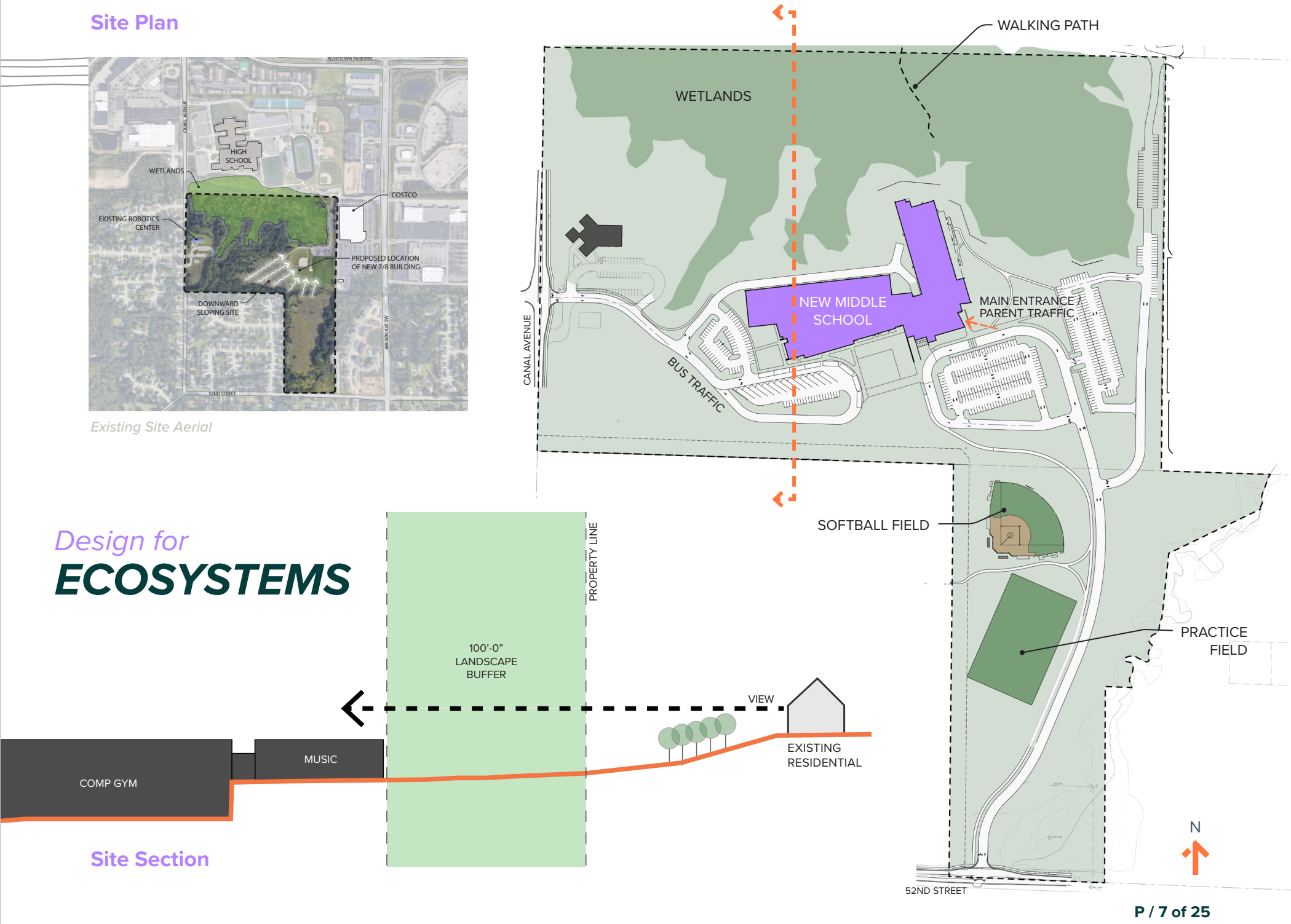
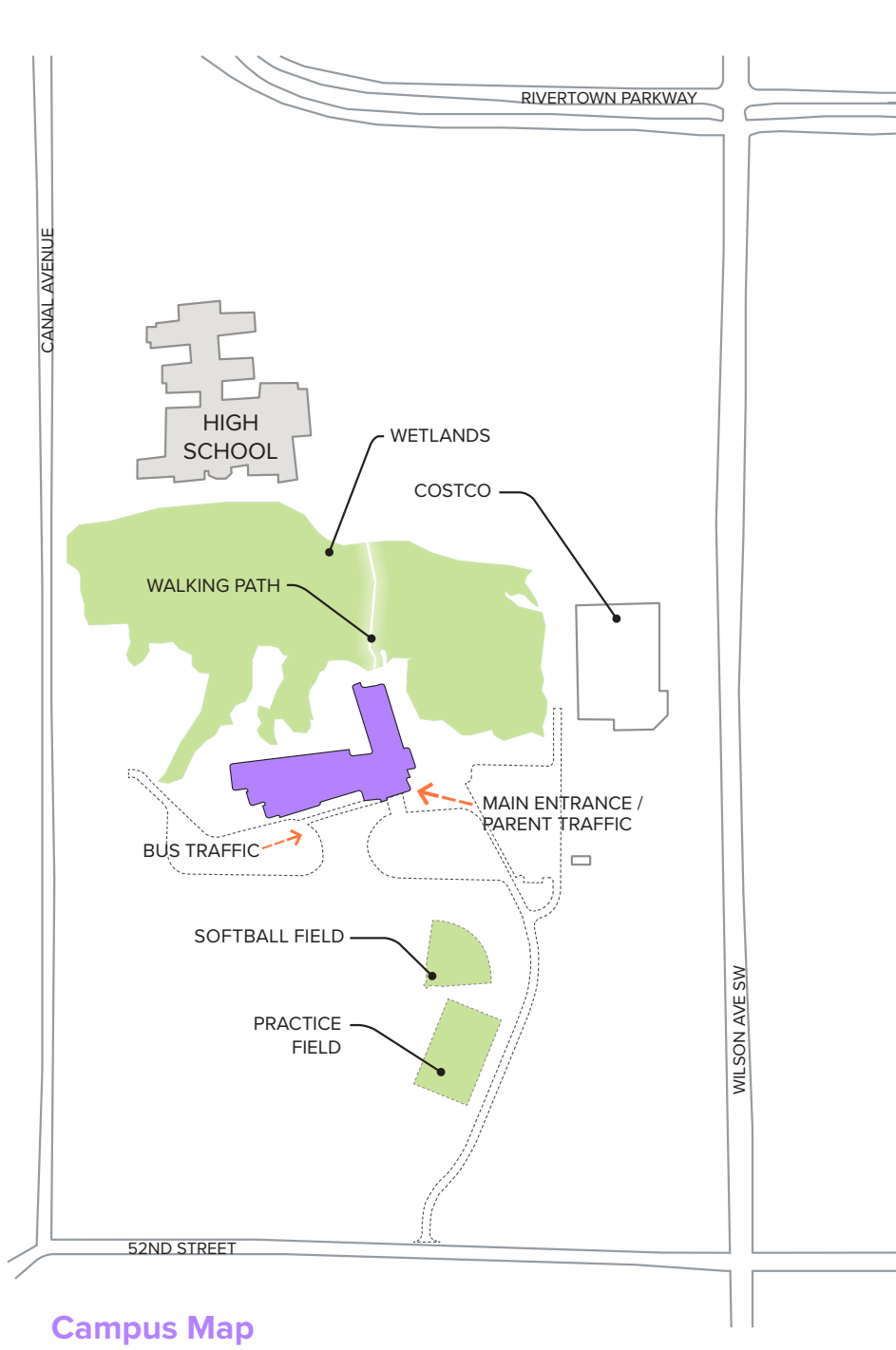


Challenges

- **Site Typography:** The proposed building site is comprised of multiple hills, with up to 50 feet of slope in some areas. There was also an underground river that was discovered after schematic design that needed to be addressed prior to construction.
- **Building Orientation:** By situating the building so that the larger volumes were buried in the hill, the presence and mass of the building was able to be reduced significantly.
- **Integration with Robotics:** Originally proposed as a separate facility, the decision was made to integrate the robotics and engineering center with the middle school would provide more opportunities for students.

Assets

- **Established Trust:** Grandville Public Schools, GMB and the construction manager, Owen-Ames-Kimball, have over a decades-long relationship working together to improve Grandville’s educational facilities.
- **Woodlands and Wetlands:** Connection to the existing natural habitats for many mature trees, native plants, and wildlife was maintained and provides hands-on learning opportunities for students on campus.
- **Community Support:** The Grandville community has been supportive of multiple bond initiatives in the past, funding projects that have provided new facilities, improved safety and security, and supported innovative curriculum and student programming.



Visioning Process

In September 2018, Grandville Public Schools sent a postcard to 15,000 households asking for recipients to answer a survey about potential district improvements. A committee comprised of community members sifted through thousands of responses to analyze the results and inform the bond proposal that included the new Grandville Middle School.

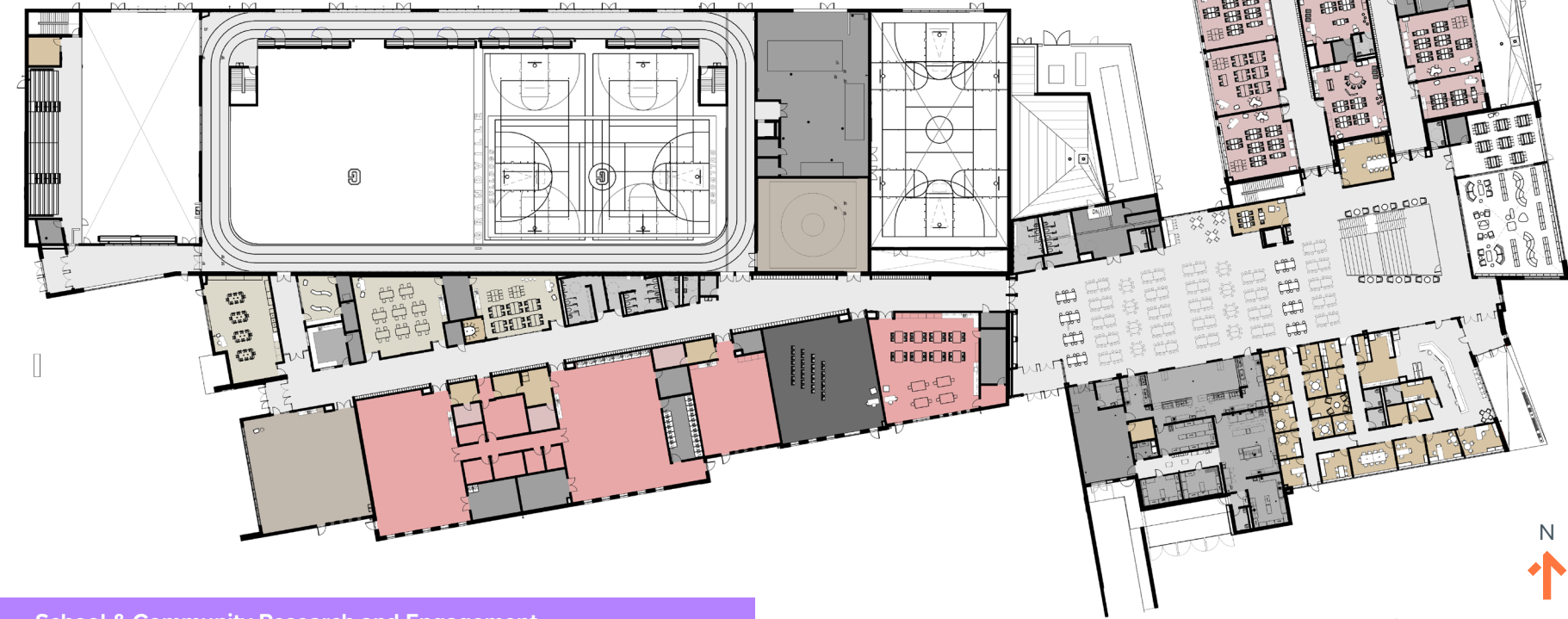


This was truly a community-driven bond proposal. In fact, more than 20% of the survey respondents did not even have students attending school in the district, demonstrating that each person in Grandville had the opportunity to contribute to this process.

The team achieved Diversity by deliberately and authentically engaging all voices and perspectives in the process.

The resulting plan focused on several key educational improvements that would positively impact middle school students:

1. **Robotics:** Build an addition to the robotics and engineering center to house a comprehensive K-12 robotics program and provide assembly, competition and storage space in a centralized location.
2. **New Middle School:** Accommodate growth and create space in K-8 by turning Grandville Middle School into a 5th-6th grade building and constructing a new middle school by the high school.
3. **Safety and Security:** Install hardware and technology as well as new locks and safety glass on interior classroom doors.
4. **Technology:** Provide instructional technology that connects students to the world of work and strengthens post-graduation employability.
5. **Music:** Replace aging school-owned band and orchestra instruments.



School & Community Research and Engagement

Main Floor Plan

A School Designed for Every Student



Visioning Process

The community also recognized a need to get students engaged in a hands-on, multi-level program, that leaned into technology instead of pushing it away. As the robotics program grew, so did the community support, until it became apparent that the current facility was not meeting their needs. Bringing the community together around a non-traditional extra-curricular program such as robotics allowed many parents the opportunity to see first-hand what education in the 21st century can look like. The inclusion of a robotics-specific facility broadens access to non-traditional sports programs and strengthens the regional community of students, teachers, and parents beyond Grandville's borders. The space represents a meaningful commitment to inclusivity and community building.



School & Community Research and Engagement



“Everybody has their own role,” said one high school VEX competitor with the Robodawgs. “We want everyone to know how each part works. Everybody has a chance to learn and get involved.”

Navigating an Established Site

Surrounded by a dense tree canopy and natural existing wetlands on all three sides, the new Grandville Middle School positions itself to take advantage of these natural elements, providing learning opportunities that are both welcoming and engaging. Careful attention was made to preserve existing mature trees, reducing the number of new trees required to be planted and maintaining the natural habitats for many native plants and wildlife.

Connection to the existing high school was maintained via a walking path between the two schools offering opportunities for students to routinely interact with the natural environment. The science classrooms were also located on the lower level to offer convenient access for hands-on learning and outdoor experiments.

By working with the existing topography, the school sought to maintain as much of the overall site character as possible. This allowed for better circulation, improved spectator sight lines in athletics spaces, and an immersive experience of being in and amongst the tree canopy in the academic wing. Existing residential properties were also considered as their once unobstructed views would soon be considerably different. To buffer noise from traffic and retain privacy, sight lines were directed above the new building, while also providing a 100' landscape buffer.



Investment from the Community

A \$94 million bond proposal approved by the Grandville community in 2019 supported the construction of this new middle school, which was intended to help address capacity issues in the district's elementary school buildings by creating more space at the intermediate level. The new building allows other schools across the district to grow and strengthen their programs, in addition to providing more space for students.

The project team hosted a construction tour at the facility in spring 2022 to showcase the building's progress. The tour was open to community members at two different times with district administration as well as project design and construction team members present to answer questions. We even had some future parents and students of the community who were able to experience the facility prior to completion.



Advancing Education and Inspiring Students

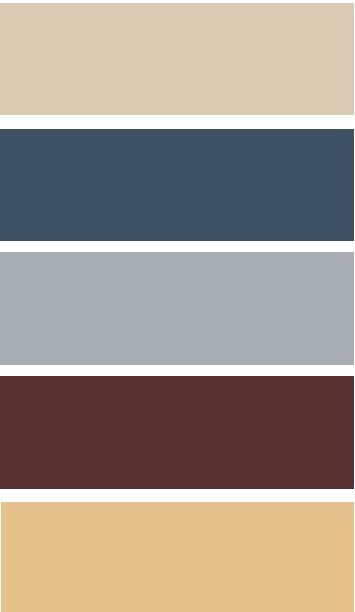
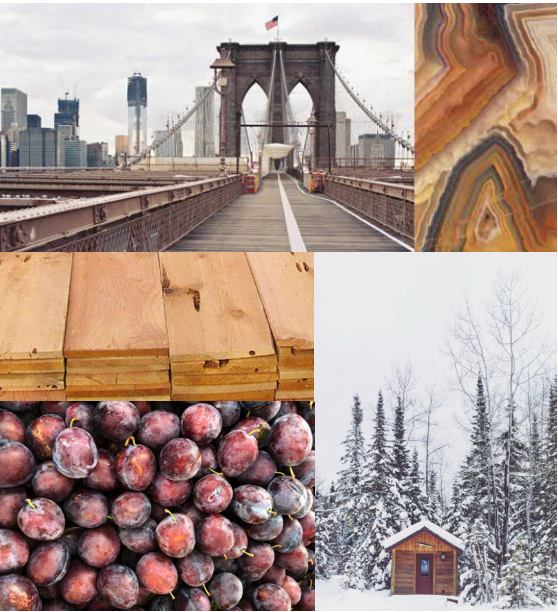
At the Grandville Middle School, students in each grade are divided into three “teams” that rotate between four core teachers for math, science, English and social studies. The teams structure fosters relationship building between students and teachers and creates right-size “communities” within the school. Because students rotate between the same core teachers each day, educators can better monitor students’ performance and make quicker adjustments when needed. The middle school’s vibrant and open spaces encourage students to be active participants in their learning – constantly on the move, teaming up, and bouncing ideas off each other, rather than being stuck at rows of desks all day.



Physical Environment

State-of-the-art features of the middle school design:

- A large learning staircase for students to socialize, do homework, have classroom meetings, and eat lunch
- Breakout rooms and large group spaces for flexible learning options
- A robotics arena
- Three gymnasiums
- An elevated track
- A “specials” wing for band, orchestra, choir, and art
- A large media center
- Cafeteria space
- Outdoor turf and agility area with basketball court



Finishes



Creating a unique school that places Learners First was achieved at the Grandville Middle School by recognizing students as the ultimate beneficiaries of the work.

When the project was initially conceived, the robotics facility was intended to be a separate building. However, by merging the robotics program with the new middle school, the school was able to capitalize on shared efficiencies and shared opportunities for a more robust STEM based pedagogy. Students are not only able to take classes that directly relate to their extra-curricular programs and interests but are modeling real world examples of teamwork and collaboration. Beyond the initial benefit of shared resources and spaces, the shear reach of this program has already started to have an impact on the community. The Robodawgs are a well-known and respected program that has competed regionally, nationally, and internationally and with the new arena and resources at their fingertips, the program will continue to soar.



Since welcoming students through its doors, the Grandville Middle School has been recognized as an award-winning project that will inspire other education leaders. Recognition includes a 2024 Honor Award from the Grand Rapids chapter of the American Institute of Architecture and a 2023 Outstanding Design Award from American School & University Magazine. The project has also been featured in Education Snapshots.

Education for Every Child

One of the main guiding principles for this project was to create learning experiences in a non-traditional setting that fosters an understanding of each student’s learning styles and abilities. Up to 1,000 students each year will learn, explore, and grow within the unique spaces of Grandville’s Middle School. From performing arts and dedicated STEM spaces to physical education and extra curriculars, there is a place for every student to succeed.

Whether you walk to school, get on a bus, or get dropped off in a car, the common thread among all students is that they are entrusted into the care of the school when they walk through the doors. As parents, the health and safety of the child is of utmost priority. While teaching and learning are at the heart of what a school provides as a service, it’s the spaces inside that start to foster learning and engage students in unique and important ways.

Located on the second floor of the academic wing of the school, the extended learning area positions itself as a beacon of light, providing ample access to daylighting, soft collaborative seating options, and acoustically private breakout spaces. Surrounded by a dense tree canopy and natural existing wetlands on all three sides, the academic wing of the building positions itself to take advantage of these natural elements, providing learning opportunities that are both welcoming and engaging.



Physical Environment

Educational Visioning

The middle school building was designed to emphasize student collaboration and team building, providing plenty of open spaces with natural light where students can work together and build the skills that they need to be successful.

The district’s superintendent said he believes it’s important for modern school buildings to have “non-institutional” spaces for kids to learn. This means creating spacious and open areas with flexible seating to offer a more relaxed and creative environment than the standard classroom set-up.



During the visioning process, the following design elements were considered:

- **Durability of Space** – Implementing durable furniture, materials, and storage
- **Campus Plan** - Creating continuity between schools on one site
- **Flexibility/Adaptability** - Student focused spaces, furniture, programs, and technology
- **Security** – Adequate supervision and visibility without requiring additional staff
- **Partition Areas** - Zoning the building to maximize operational efficiency
- **External Transparency** – Creating ample natural light in common areas, hallways, etc.
- **Internal Transparency** – Incorporate glass at appropriate levels to maintain student focus and still provide adequate supervision
- **Student Focused Graphics** – Support positive messaging throughout the building
- **Build on Brand** – Design a building that identifies itself as a ‘Grandville’ building using maroon color palette throughout
- **Promote Privacy** – Emotional sensitivity to students’ needs
- **Innovative Space** – Keep technology at the forefront, experience education/learning in a non-traditional setting
- **Collaborative Spaces** – Create flexible extended learning areas (ELAs)
- **Energy Efficiency** – Find ways to bring sustainability into the classroom and on campus



The educational visioning process recognized the need for Respect by accepting ideas, thoughts, and perspectives from all stakeholders, where new ideas and perspectives were embraced and welcomed.



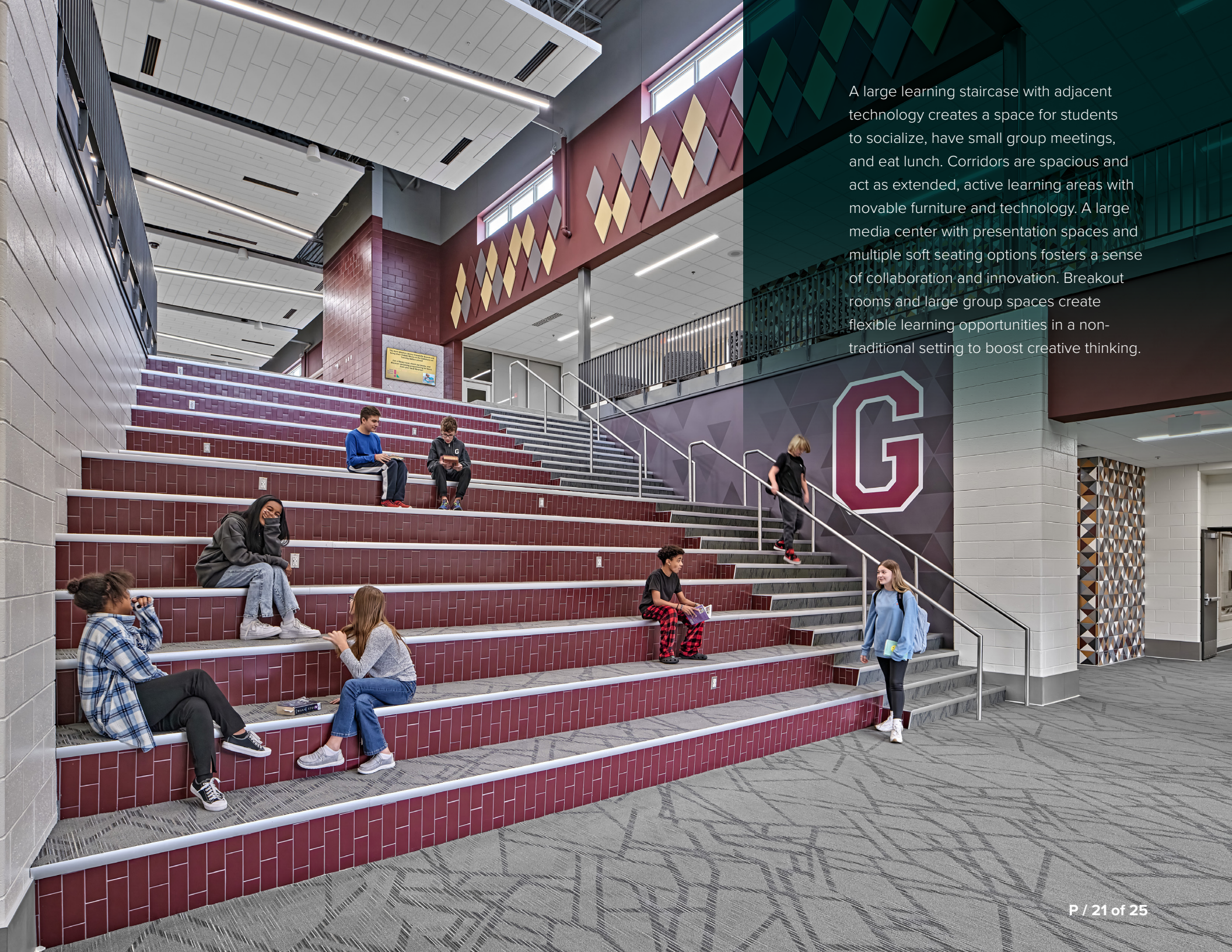


Educational Environment

Flexible Learning Supports the Curriculum

The average day for a Grandville middle school student consists of a seven-period day that maximizes student electives. Students are placed in teams to help them transition from their elementary schools into the middle school. Each team consists of approximately 150 students, which allows teachers to get to know each student better and helps preserve a small school environment in a building of 900 7th and 8th grade students.

The new middle school offers students a variety of specialized spaces for a well-rounded educational experience. Classrooms contain modular casework, TVs on mobile carts, and flexible furniture which allows for easy rearranging of teachers and programs as educational needs change throughout the day and in the future. The academic wing is separated from shared resource areas with the cafeteria acting as a central hub in between. Specialized areas include a performing arts theater classroom, shop spaces, an art room, STEM classrooms, science lab with outdoor access, and band, orchestra and choir spaces.



A large learning staircase with adjacent technology creates a space for students to socialize, have small group meetings, and eat lunch. Corridors are spacious and act as extended, active learning areas with movable furniture and technology. A large media center with presentation spaces and multiple soft seating options fosters a sense of collaboration and innovation. Breakout rooms and large group spaces create flexible learning opportunities in a non-traditional setting to boost creative thinking.

Student-Focused and Flexible Middle School

Social emotional learning has played a big part in the design and educational environment for the middle school, and the Grandville district as a whole.

Safety and security goes well beyond physical safety and has to consider psychological shelter. How do students feel when they are at school? How do they feel when they are within the buildings themselves? We recognize that for a lot of students, school might be the best part of their day. It might be the place where they get fed, it might be the place where they get nurtured and have access to resources they don't have at home.

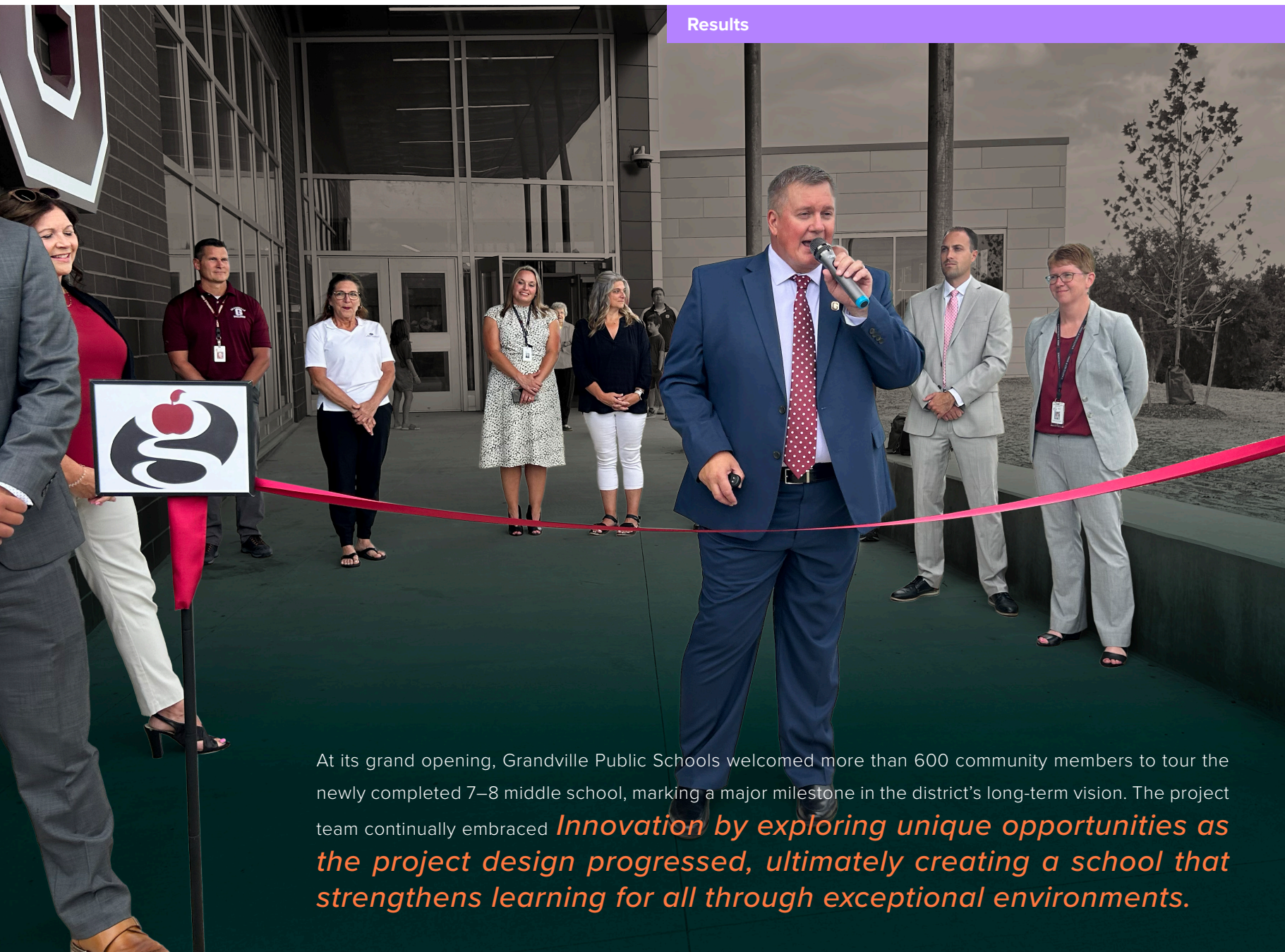


Designing schools for the next generation of learners is a significant responsibility and should be done through the lens of educating the whole child. By keeping the whole child in mind, we are demonstrating that **Place Matters for each student – aligning learning and place, our work strengthens learning for all through better environments.** Through education, we are not only training students for the next phase of their lives, but most importantly, we're preparing them to be responsible citizens who can positively impact their communities.

Educational Environment

The following principles of social emotional learning were used in this school:

- Robust conversations with counselors throughout the design process
- Rebranding the counselor's offices as the "student success center" and making them more prominent, readily accessible, and highly visible to students
- Re-imagining the cafeteria as a space that can have all day use
- Positivity wall graphics inspired by the district's [be nice. program](#)
- Actively connecting students to the natural environment, which promotes physical development, encourages hands-on learning, and enhances emotional well-being
- Include small group spaces that promote student collaboration and allow students to receive critical services from educators and specialists.



Results

At its grand opening, Grandville Public Schools welcomed more than 600 community members to tour the newly completed 7–8 middle school, marking a major milestone in the district's long-term vision. The project team continually embraced **Innovation by exploring unique opportunities as the project design progressed, ultimately creating a school that strengthens learning for all through exceptional environments.**

From the earliest planning sessions to final construction, the project team remained committed to exploring forward-thinking design solutions. The result is a future-ready school that enhances learning for all students by prioritizing adaptability, connectivity, and overall well-being. The final design achieved the project’s guiding principles aligned with Grandville’s educational, district, and community goals:



Results

1. Education for Every Child

Learning in a non-traditional setting that reflects each student’s needs, styles, and abilities.

- The school features a range of flexible learning environments that extend beyond the traditional classroom. Varied seating and working options, study nooks, and collaborative spaces provide students with choice in how they learn.
- Views of adjacent wetlands and wooded areas, ample natural light, and thoughtful integration of indoor-outdoor learning zones contribute to a strong sense of well-being and connection to nature.
- Designed for long-term adaptability, the school can evolve with educational practices and technologies, reducing the need for future renovations and maximizing the district’s financial investment.

2. Integrated Technology

Technology that is accessible, flexible, and prepares students for the future.

- The building supports Grandville’s robust STEM and robotics programs, embedding technology into daily learning experiences.
- Collaborative learning areas include café-style seating, Bluetooth connectivity, and screen-sharing capabilities. Students can project content directly from their Chromebooks to wall-mounted displays.
- Throughout the school, extended learning areas and feature spaces such as the learning stair are equipped with integrated whiteboards and presentation technology to support hands-on instruction, group work, and brainstorming.

3. Building on Brand

Spaces that foster pride and unity across the district and community.

- The middle school is part of a cohesive, community-supported \$94 million bond program that also repurposed the former middle school into a 5/6 facility. Together, these buildings reflect the identity and evolution of the Grandville learning community.
- Principal Ken See described the new school as a reflection of the district’s values, saying “We value connections and relationships and collaboration, and in our new building, we see spaces that foster this. What a gift.”
- The design reinforces Grandville’s “Bulldog” spirit and supports a sense of belonging for students, staff, and families alike.

4. Transparent Learning

A collaborative, flexible, daylight-filled environment that supports 21st-century skills.

- The school is designed to encourage transparency — both in architecture and in learning. Glass walls, open sightlines, and shared spaces invite students to engage, explore, and collaborate.
- Outdoor access from science labs and academic wings adjacent to natural areas promote curiosity, discovery, and a deeper connection to the environment.
- Post-occupancy interviews with students and staff are being used to assess how extended learning areas are performing, with early feedback highlighting increased collaboration and engagement.
- The school is designed to accommodate up to 1,000 students, supporting long-term enrollment growth without compromising the student experience.

5. Adaptable Security

Balancing openness with safety through smart design solutions.

- The building incorporates layers of passive supervision and security while maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.
- Features include security glass glazing, a keyless entry system, and thoughtful zoning that allows different areas of the building to be sectioned off when needed.
- Designed for community use, the school includes a dedicated entrance for the robotics arena and fitness/track facilities, allowing for after-hours access while protecting academic zones.

Grandville’s new middle school offers students more than just a place to learn, it’s a vibrant, flexible, and inclusive environment built to serve generations of students and the community at large. The project embodies the district’s belief that well-designed spaces can unlock student potential, foster innovation, and inspire pride throughout the community.



“We have an abundance of spaces to choose from that allow for teachers to diversify our instruction delivery and practices. Having the space to allow individual students, groups of students, or whole classes to move around and be flexible has been helpful in increasing engagement.”

-Ashley Zuiderveen, Grandville Middle School Teacher