

A4LE MACCONNELL AWARD

# NEW VISTA HIGH SCHOOL

BOULDER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT



MOA ARCHITECTURE



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Vista High School reimagines what a contemporary learning environment can be, transforming a constrained site into a dynamic, student-centered campus that reflects the school's alternative education model. Designed through an inclusive engagement process with students, educators, and the community, the project responds to the need for flexibility, individuality, and connection—core tenets of New Vista's philosophy and broader district goals centered on student wellness, engagement, and personalized learning. A key design challenge was balancing an ambitious vision for nontraditional learning with a tight budget, requiring thoughtful prioritization and innovative solutions to deliver high-impact spaces without compromise.

At the heart of the school is a two-story commons that serves as the social and academic hub, seamlessly integrating dining, collaboration, and media functions into a single, flexible environment. Rather than relying on traditional program elements, the design replaces a conventional gymnasium with a fitness-focused wellness space and distributes breakout areas throughout the building to support diverse learning styles and informal interaction. Transparency, daylight, and visual connectivity are emphasized throughout, culminating in an auditorium with a full-height glass wall framing views of University of Colorado Boulder—reinforcing a connection to the broader community and students' future aspirations.

The project demonstrates a deep commitment to next-generation learning by supporting both structured and informal educational experiences. Flexible classrooms, integrated collaboration zones, and student-driven spaces empower users to shape their environment, while the incorporation of student artwork and local artist contributions fosters a strong sense of ownership and identity. The building is designed to meet LEED standards and achieves significant energy performance improvements, operating approximately 26% more efficiently than code and reducing energy use by nearly 60% compared to the previous facility. Sustainable site strategies, daylighting, and high-efficiency systems further support student wellness while reducing long-term operational costs.

Beyond meeting the project's original goals, New Vista High School has become a visible expression of the school's culture and values, strengthening community pride and creating a more connected and inclusive student experience. Through innovative design, careful stewardship of resources, and a highly collaborative process, the project delivers lasting educational, environmental, and community value while positioning the school to adapt and thrive for decades to come.







## SCOPE OF WORK

Full architectural and interior design services were provided for the replacement of New Vista High School, from programming through construction administration. The project included site analysis and the design of a new facility on the existing campus, requiring careful coordination with site constraints and ongoing school operations.

A collaborative stakeholder engagement process with students, staff, and the community informed the program and vision, resulting in a flexible, student-centered design. The scope included classrooms, collaboration and breakout spaces, a two-story commons, auditorium, administrative areas, and a fitness-based wellness space, along with integrated technology, security, and FF&E coordination.

Throughout design and construction, the team coordinated closely with consultants and the contractor to maintain budget and schedule, ensuring the final facility aligns with the school's educational goals and design intent.

## BUDGET

\$43,000,000





ORIGINAL BUILDING

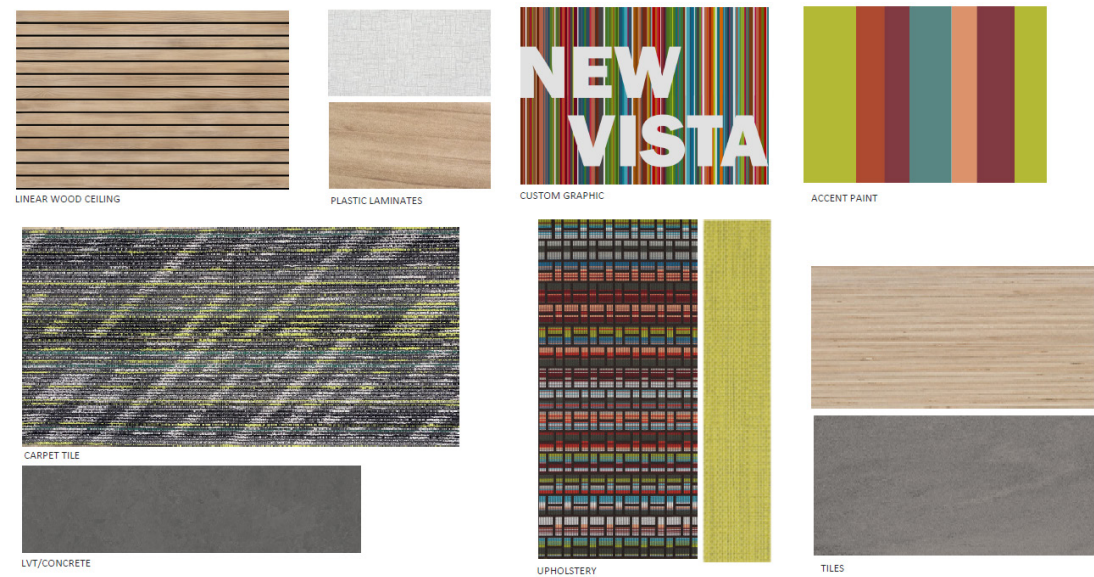


FINAL EXTERIOR RENDERING



NEW SCHOOL ON EXISTING SITE

### INTERIOR FINISHES CONCEPT



### DAT MEETING FEEDBACK



## SCHOOL & COMMUNITY RESEARCH AND ENGAGEMENT

The planning process for New Vista High School was rooted in collaboration, transparency, and a shared commitment to honoring the school’s unique identity within the broader Boulder Valley School District community. Serving a diverse population of students, families, educators, and local partners, the project reflected a community that values creativity, inclusivity, and student-centered learning. From the outset, the District and design team worked closely with a Design Advisory Team (DAT) composed of students, staff, parents, and community members. This group not only represented key stakeholders but also served as a critical asset—bringing deep knowledge of the school’s culture, strong engagement, and a shared investment in its future.

Interactive workshops and visioning sessions encouraged open dialogue and idea-sharing among all participants. Early meetings focused on understanding the existing facility’s challenges—including aging infrastructure, inefficient systems, and poor thermal performance—while identifying opportunities for a new building to better support evolving educational needs. These conversations established clear goals centered on flexibility, wellness, sustainability, and creative expression. Through iterative design reviews, the DAT provided feedback on site layout, interiors, materials, and sustainability strategies, reinforcing a sense of shared authorship and ensuring the design remained aligned with community priorities.

This inclusive engagement process was intentionally structured to elevate a wide range of voices and perspectives. By incorporating multiple formats—hands-on workshops, open discussions, and visual feedback tools—the team created accessible opportunities for participation and encouraged input from all stakeholders, including students who are often underrepresented in traditional planning processes. The result is a learning environment that reflects the diversity of its users and supports equitable access to a variety of learning settings.

The collaborative process directly influenced the learning environment that emerged. The team’s focus on New Vista’s nontraditional model—where students learn through choice, voice, and connection—led to flexible spaces that adapt to different learning styles and needs. Large commons with breakout spaces encourage interaction and collaboration, while art patios, gallery corridors, and outdoor classrooms reflect the community’s creative strengths and values. Continuity of engagement through design, construction, and post-occupancy ensured the project remained true to its vision, resulting in a facility that not only meets programmatic goals but serves as a lasting asset to the community at large.







## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The new New Vista High School reflects a building as unique and forward-thinking as the students it serves. The facility embraces creativity, flexibility, and sustainability at every scale.

Positioned at the literal and metaphorical edge of a public school district and a University Campus, the New Vista Site serves as a transformative gateway between the present and the future. By strategically framing the University of Colorado Boulder's historic campus through its architectural lens, the building creates a living portrait of ambition and legacy for every student.

The theater, the heart of the design, offers a dualistic experience of excellence. With the blackout curtain drawn, it is a focused sanctuary for high-school performance—a space of such caliber and technical precision it can host a national film festival. Yet, with a single gesture, the backdrop opens to reveal a stunning, framed view of the CU campus. This intentional transparency acts as a continuous “nod to the next step,” grounding student achievement in the immediate landscape of their aspirations and bridging the transition to higher education through inspired design.

Sustainability is central to the project. The building uses over 60% less energy than the previous facility and performs 26% better than baseline energy code through high-efficiency systems, extensive daylighting, and a high-performance envelope. More than 60% of the site is dedicated to green space, with outdoor classrooms, an art patio, a student garden, native landscaping, and over 100 new trees extending learning into the landscape.

Safety and security were integrated through layered yet welcoming strategies, including a secure entry vestibule, clear sightlines, zoned circulation, and well-lit gathering spaces that balance openness with supervision and comfort.

Creative material selections reinforce the school's arts-focused identity. Polished concrete floors, wood ceilings, vibrant accents, mural walls, and gallery-like corridors create a warm and expressive environment, while expansive glazing frames views of the Flatirons and strengthens the connection between students, community, and place.

The design honors the historic Baseline site while maintaining the intimate, community-oriented character New Vista is known for. Its walkable, transit-accessible location strengthens connections to surrounding neighborhoods and the broader Boulder community.

# FLOOR PLAN



ADMIN & OFFICE



OPERATIONS & SUPPORT








CLASSROOMS & STUDIOS

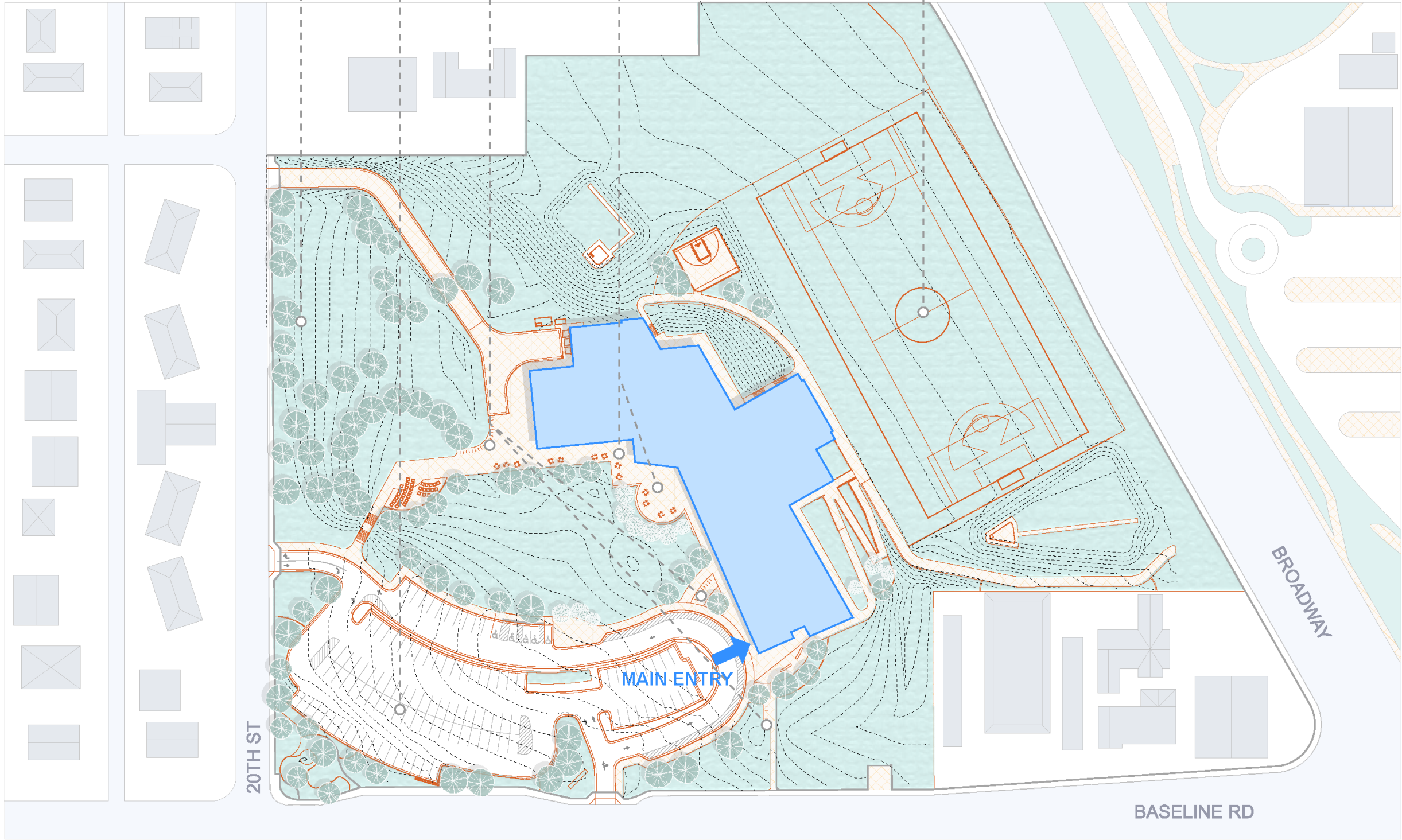


COMMUNITY & GATHERING



# SITE PLAN

-  FUTURE STUDENT GARDEN
-  PARKING
-  BIKE RACKS
-  OUTDOOR LEARNING PLAZA
-  SYNTHETIC TURF ALTERNATE





NEW VISTA HIGH SCHOOL  
A BELLERUE HEART SCHOOL DISTRICT

## EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

The new home for New Vista High School reflects the spirit of a school that has never followed a traditional path. Rooted in a nontraditional, student-centered learning program, the design embodies creativity, collaboration, and choice—values that define New Vista’s approach to education. The design process focused on creating an environment that physically expresses the school’s mission to empower learners to take ownership of their education.

Every aspect of the building was developed with the learner in mind. The design celebrates individuality and creative expression through vibrant colors, natural materials, and spaces for local artist murals to be featured. The main corridor doubles as a gallery walk to showcase student artwork, the art room opens to an outdoor patio for flexible studio work, and expansive west-facing glazing fills learning spaces with daylight and panoramic views of the Flatirons—reinforcing a sense of belonging and connection to the beautiful city of Boulder.

Supporting a range of learning styles and instructional methods, the building offers flexible environments that move beyond traditional classrooms. The two-story commons serves as cafeteria, media center, and collaboration hub—its tiered steps and open plan encourage spontaneous gathering and informal learning. Breakout rooms, outdoor classrooms, and patios extend learning beyond the walls, while classroom transparency visually connects interior learning spaces to the upper-level corridor overlooking the commons, creating a sense of openness and shared community. An operable partition in one of the learning studios allows the space to transform from a single large classroom into two smaller, focused learning zones. The auditorium’s sloped seating and reconfigurable floor further support adaptability for performances, meetings, or community events.

The design fosters an inclusive, healthy, and supportive environment. The fitness room emphasizes wellness and mindfulness over competition, with space for yoga, stretching, and strength training. Daylight, natural ventilation, and warm materials contribute to a calm and inviting atmosphere, while the layout offers students autonomy in how and where they learn.

Finally, the design anticipates future shifts in education through adaptability and sustainability. Flexible layouts, multipurpose areas, and modular furniture allow the school to evolve as pedagogy changes. Designed to high-performance standards, the building uses 60% less energy than its predecessor and includes a solar-ready roof and sustainable materials—ensuring longevity and alignment with BVSD’s environmental goals.





EXIT

THE ROOST





## RESULTS

The new New Vista High School reflects a learning environment as unique and forward-thinking as the students it serves, directly supporting the school's alternative, student-centered educational model. Designed around choice, voice, and connection, the building replaces traditional classroom hierarchies with flexible, adaptable spaces that empower students to learn in ways that best suit their individual needs. Large commons function as the heart of the school, supporting collaboration, independent study, and social interaction, while integrated breakout spaces, art patios, and gallery corridors foster creativity, ownership, and interdisciplinary learning.

The project advances Boulder Valley School District's goals by creating a high-performing, future-ready facility that prioritizes flexibility, sustainability, and student wellness. The design accommodates evolving pedagogies through multipurpose spaces and minimizes long-term operational costs through high-performance systems and durable material selections. Achieving over 60% energy reduction compared to the previous facility and performing 26% better than baseline energy code, the building demonstrates responsible stewardship of public funding while delivering long-term value through reduced energy use, lower maintenance demands, and extended building life.

Equally important, the project strengthens its connection to the surrounding community. Located on the historic Baseline site, the school maintains its longstanding presence within Boulder while enhancing accessibility through walkability, bike infrastructure, and proximity to public transit. Community identity is embedded throughout the design, from student-created artwork displayed in gallery-like corridors to spaces that support public events and performances. Outdoor learning environments—including gardens and gathering areas—extend the school's impact beyond the building, encouraging connection to nature and shared community use.

Sustainability and wellness are foundational to the project's outcomes. Extensive daylighting, views to the Flatirons, and access to outdoor spaces support student well-being and academic performance. Native landscaping, over 100 new trees, and water-conscious site strategies reinforce environmental stewardship, while features such as bike parking, EV charging, and green space promote healthy lifestyles. Safety is seamlessly integrated through CPTED-informed strategies, including clear sightlines, secure entry, and zoned circulation, balancing security with openness.

An unintended yet meaningful outcome of the process was the strengthened sense of ownership and identity within the school community. Through an inclusive Design Advisory Team process, students, staff, and community members directly shaped the design, resulting in a facility that not only reflects their values but fosters pride, belonging, and deeper engagement. The result is a school that goes beyond a building—serving as a catalyst for creativity, connection, and a renewed sense of place.



