



MEMORY LANDSCAPES

Architecture Shapes Memory – Memory Shapes Identity

SWEATT-WINTER CHILD CARE AND EARLY EDUCATION CENTER - FARMINGTON, MAINE



Executive Summary

What if architecture could act as a child’s first teacher?

The Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center, located in Farmington, Maine, is built on the premise that the environments of early childhood shape how children understand learning, nature, and place for the rest of their lives. Here, the building itself becomes curriculum, using space, light, material, and sequence to translate developmental theory into lived experience.

In a rural region with limited access to childcare, Sweatt-Winter serves children from six weeks through early school age while supporting hands-on learning for the University of Maine at Farmington’s early childhood education programs. This dual role informed the core design approach: an environment that nurtures formative memory development through unseen adult presence supported by embedded sightlines, allowing learning and teaching to unfold without performance.

A sequence of memory-making landscapes—mountain, meadow, birch forest, and evergreen woods—structures a child’s experience. Each memory landscape aligns with stages of cognitive and emotional development, from an infant’s first sense of safety and observation to a preschooler’s growing independence and creative agency. Like chapters that build on one another, these spaces guide children in learning independence, self-regulation, and inquiry. Indoors, regionally specific imagery and material cues foster observation, vocabulary, and pattern recognition. Outdoors, natural playscapes extend this learning through authentic materials and managed risk. Children move through a continuous cycle of preparing, experiencing, reflecting, and representing as they build ecological literacy and confidence over time. Architecture invites children to inhabit, interpret, and remember.

The \$3.1 million renovation was funded through voter-approved state bonds, \$1 million from the Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan, \$1 million in Congressionally Directed Spending, and \$200,000 in philanthropic support from the Lennox Foundation for the outdoor playscapes. Opened in October 2023, the facility prioritizes early childhood development, using nature as curriculum to support security, self-regulation, and growth while expanding childcare and strengthening educator preparation. The center has added at least 20 childcare openings including new infant and toddler programs, and contributed to a 20 percent increase in enrollment in the University of Maine at Farmington’s undergraduate early childhood education programs.

Sweatt-Winter demonstrates how architecture and landscape, thoughtfully composed, can shape identity through memory, place, and experience like a first book, read not once, but lived again and again.



SCOPE OF WORK

The \$3.1 million renovation, supported by public and philanthropic investment, adaptively reused a single-story call center at 274 Front Street in Farmington, Maine, which the University of Maine System purchased in 2019. Opened in October 2023, the 10,000-square-foot building supports early childhood education and teacher preparation, translating engagement with families, educators, and administrators into a nature-based learning environment. Interior planning organizes adult support spaces, including offices, a kitchen, laundry, storage, and a university classroom, alongside a child-scaled learning zone with four classrooms connected by a daylight commons. The design incorporates discreet observation areas, distinct classroom identities, and two outdoor playscapes that extend learning through Maine’s forests, materials, and seasons.



Project Location: 274 Front St, Farmington, ME 04938
Capacity: 54 Children
Building Area: 10,000 SF
Site Area: 3.2 Acres

STRATEGIC GOALS



01 SEASONAL CONSISTENCY

In a northern climate where winter limits outdoor access for months, learning cannot pause with the weather. Sweatt-Winter sustains a connection to nature through regionally specific imagery, materials, and light qualities indoors, paired with natural playscapes outdoors when conditions allow. The goal of this approach is to maintain a biophilic connection that is stable, legible, and meaningful year-round.



02 MEMORY-MAKING ANCHORS

Sweatt-Winter is organized around familiar Maine landscapes that children return to daily and grow through over time. These memory-making anchors support developmental progression from security to exploration, stillness, and inquiry. Repetition builds spatial literacy and independence, translating abstract educational goals into environments children understand with their bodies and remember.



03 IDENTITY THROUGH ENVIRONMENT

By pairing autonomy with support and curiosity with structure, the building teaches children that they are capable, safe, and connected to place. Layered visibility allows freedom without isolation; children act independently while remaining securely held. Over time, Sweatt-Winter becomes a template for learning and belonging, shaping confident, ecologically literate learners through the environment.

Key Challenges

SEASONAL LIMITATIONS

In Maine, winter is not a short detour. This long season can pull young children from the outdoors just as nature's patterns are first imprinted. Too often, early childhood facilities default to generic interiors that could be anywhere, leaving children to encounter their own landscape only in fragments. The stakes are highest for infants, who face the greatest barriers to access in cold weather. What is needed is not a "nature theme," but a regional ecology as curriculum. By embedding Maine's seasonal patterns in architecture, children internalize a memory landscape even when weather limits outdoor time. Place-specific design, not abstraction, sustains year-round biophilic connection.



SEASONAL CONSISTENCY THROUGH DESIGN

EXISTING CONDITIONS

A vacant call center is not where you expect childhood to begin. Yet in Farmington, an already-built shell became an intentional act of reuse, leveraging community investment to transform what stood empty into something shared. Without altering the exterior, the architecture recalls familiar Maine landscapes indoors, gathering what children know and arranging it into a sequence they can move through and remember. Adult functions recede, and a child-scale world unfolds along a clear path into a sunny commons and four connected classrooms. Familiar places are held anew within existing walls, reimagining the building as a space where memory, belonging, and learning take root.



MEMORY-MAKING LANDSCAPE ROOTED IN PLACE

SAFETY VS. DEVELOPMENT

Early childhood education is like a rehearsal: closely observed but not stage-managed. Children need space to test limits, negotiate peer worlds, and discover themselves without adults shaping behavior. Yet educators and early childhood education students need clear visibility to meet supervision, learning, and safety standards. That tension shaped a layered visibility strategy: precisely aligned sightlines provide enclosure and autonomy while maintaining continuous oversight. Like a stage director observing rehearsal, educators—and students learning alongside them—witness authentic behavior and study responsive practice. This is architecture as pedagogy: independence without isolation, oversight without intrusion, and safety that supports development.



SEEN AND UNSEEN. CONNECTED AND INDEPENDENT

THREE CHALLENGES - ONE DESIGN RESPONSE



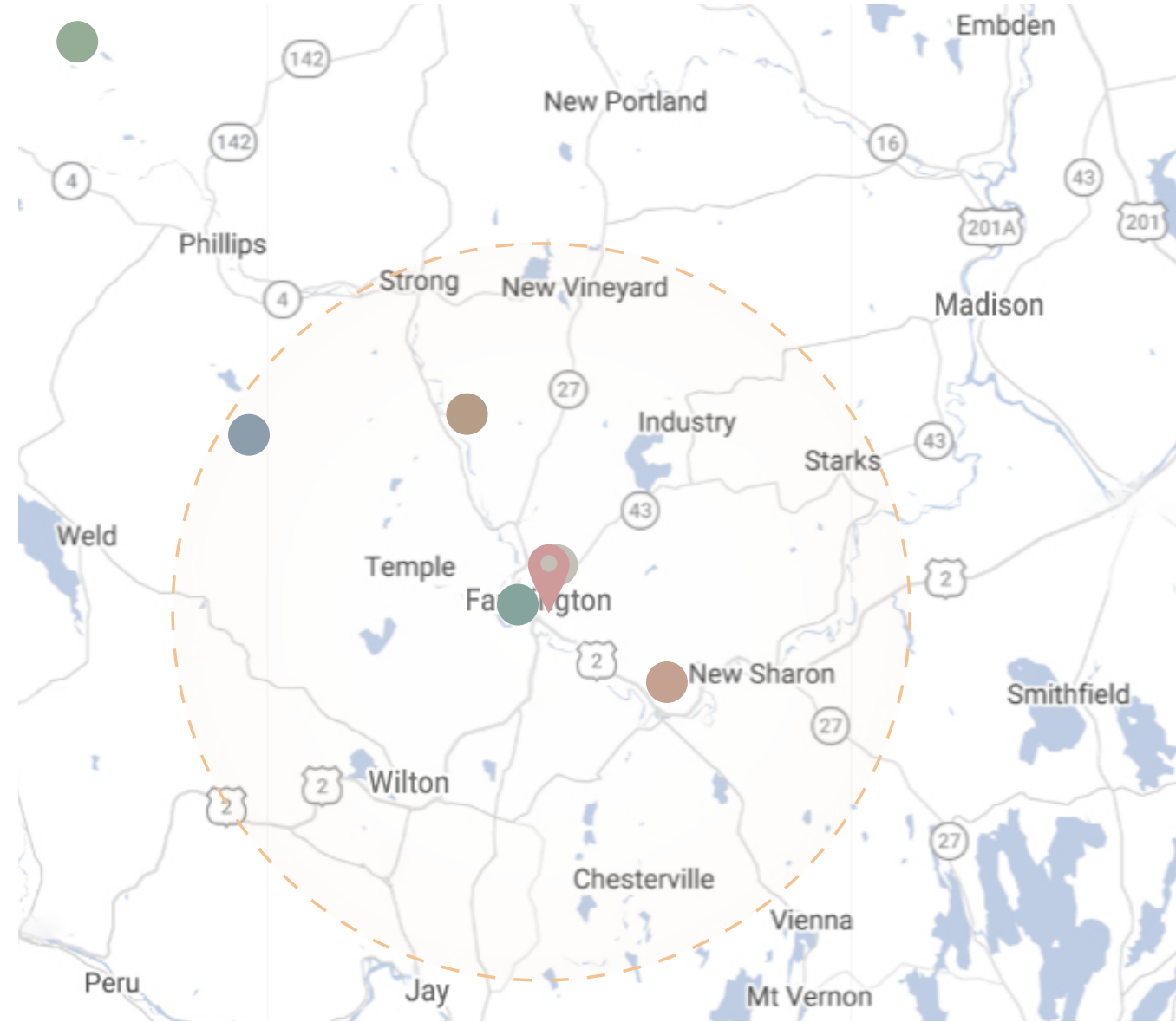
Site Context

Farmington sits at the meeting of river and mountain, where the Sandy River bends through a valley shaped by ice, water, and forest, and the western foothills of Maine. Mt. Blue, at 3,187 feet, remains a constant presence to the northwest, visible from town. Franklin County is among the most forested regions in the state, blanketed in a hardwood and spruce-fir forest that defines the daily rhythm of life.

Snow often arrives by November and lingers well into April. Winter is not a brief interlude here but a defining season of childhood: five to six months when outdoor access narrows, daylight shortens, and the landscape settles into a quieter, more monochromatic register. This climate does not ask to be endured; it asks to be understood.

Long before the town was named, the Abenaki people lived along the Sandy River, which they called Anmessokkanti, "the land of the small fish." The Amaseconti, a band of the Abenaki tribe, maintained villages at Farmington Falls and New Sharon, following the land's seasonal rhythms. Their relationship to this place was a curriculum learned through generations of inhabiting it.

Sweatt-Winter stands within sight of these same ridgelines, forests, and river valley. Its interior landscapes reflect what lies outside: evergreen slopes, birch trunks bright against winter woods, lupine meadows of early summer, and layered mountain horizons. These are the landscapes of home, brought inside to be read, remembered, and carried forward.



CLIMATE · FARMINGTON, ME

160+ average annual snowfall (inches)	5-6 months snow covers ground	18°F average January temperature	92% Franklin County is forested land
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SEASONAL CALENDAR

J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Winter (limited outdoor access)			Transition (Apr, Oct)		Outdoor season (May-Sep)						

MAP ANNOTATION KEY

- Evergreen Forest
Mt. Blue State Park
- Mountain Landscape
Mt. Blue
- Wildflower Garden
Lupine Fields
- Winter Birch Forest
Sandy River
- Abenaki Village Site
Farmington Falls
- Titcomb Mountain
UMF Campus

THE FOUR LANDSCAPES · LOCAL ORIGINS

A Literary Inspiration
Where the Wild Things Are

Evergreen Forest



Maine is 90% forested — the most forested state in the nation. The spruce-fir forests of Mt. Blue's upper slopes hold their deep green through every winter month, even when snow flattens the meadow. This is the one landscape that does not disappear in November. The mural teaches what the mountain already knows: some things endure.

Mt. Blue slopes · Franklin County forests

B Literary Inspiration
Blueberries for Sal

Mountain Landscape




Mt. Blue (3,187 ft) anchors the northwestern horizon, visible from the Sweatt-Winter building's orientation. The layered receding ridgelines in the mural describe exactly what a child sees looking outward: Mt. Blue first, then Sugarloaf, then on clear days, Mt. Washington far beyond. The landscape provides its own lesson in distance and patience.

Mt. Blue · Sugarloaf · Sandy River valley

C Literary Inspiration
Miss Rumphius

Wildflower Garden




Every June, Maine roadsides erupt in lupine. In Franklin County these fields grow along Route 2, Route 4, and the rural roads within a mile of the building. The mural makes permanent what June gives for three weeks — the same fields Barbara Cooney painted into Miss Rumphius while living on the Maine coast.

Route 4 · Sandy River corridor · June roadside

D Literary Inspiration
Owl Moon

Winter Birch Forest



White paper birch is listed in Farmington's original 1846 timber inventory alongside maple, ash, hemlock, and spruce. In winter, when birch leaves are gone, birch trunks glow pale against the snow and darkening sky. Jane Yolen captured this quiet exactness. Children will one day walk among these familiar trees, already known through memory formed inside.

Sandy River corridor · Titcomb Mountain trails

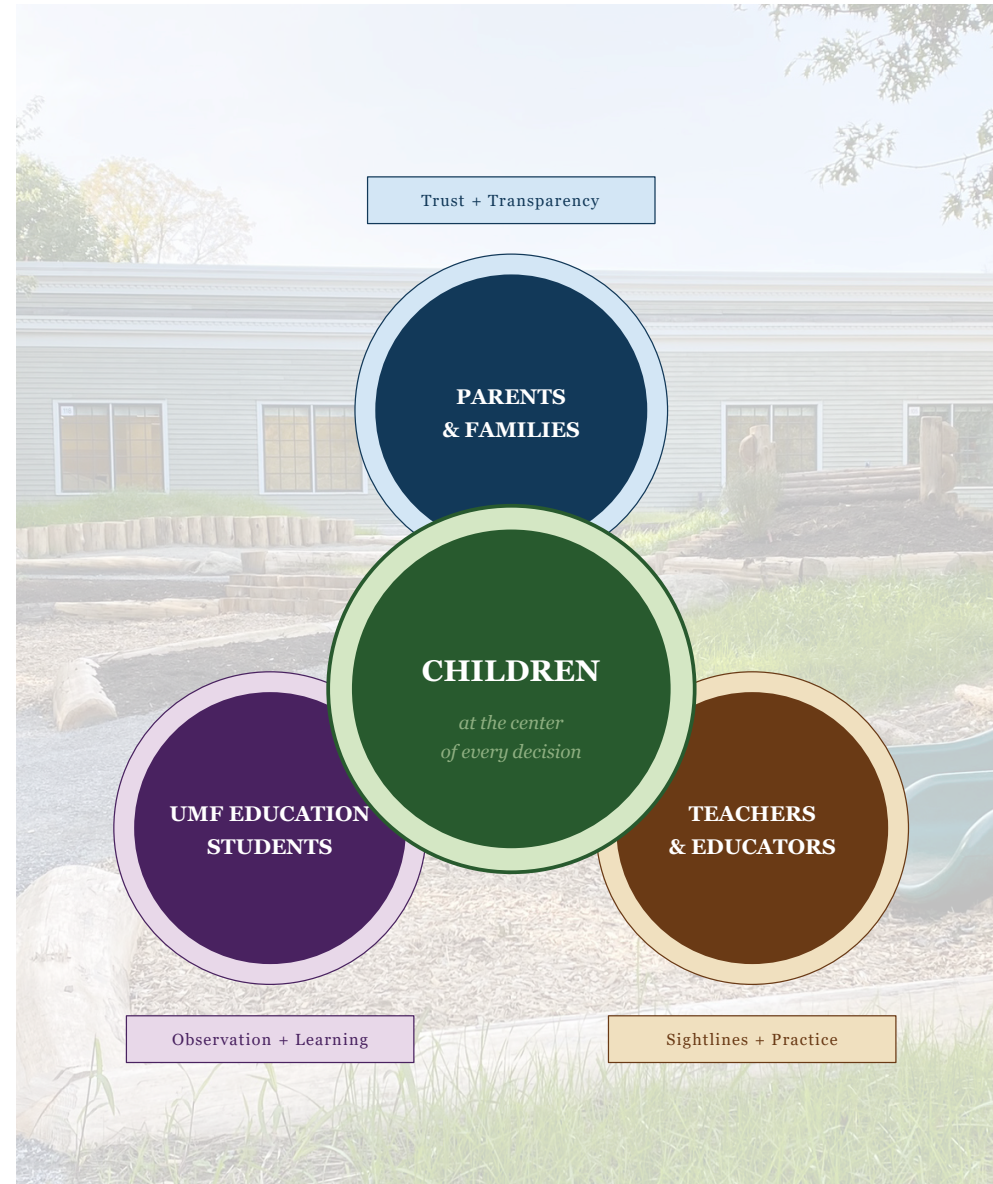
School & Community

Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center is not a conventional early childhood center. It is a live teaching school designed to serve multiple communities at once: the youngest children in western Maine, their parents and families, the educators who guide their days, and the University of Maine at Farmington early childhood education students who learn to teach by observing authentic practice.

This layered stakeholder model was shaped in part by the center's location adjacent to the University of Maine at Farmington campus. Farmington, the seat of Franklin County, anchors a rural region of roughly 30,000 residents spread across nearly 1,700 square miles. Families travel from Franklin, Androscoggin, Somerset, and Kennebec counties—often up to 30 minutes each way—to access reliable, high-quality childcare. At the same time, undergraduate and graduate students move daily between campus classrooms and the center, learning through direct observation. In a region where services are limited and waitlists are long, enrollment becomes an act of trust, and proximity to the university transforms that trust into a shared investment in both children and future educators.

That trust shaped every architectural decision. Children needed environments that invite autonomy, support self-regulation, and offer meaningful choice within safe boundaries. Families needed transparency to feel confident that their youngest children were held with care. Educators needed clear sightlines, designated documentation zones, and spaces to help carry the pedagogical load. University students needed proximity to real classrooms and the ability to study responsive, child-led teaching.

The result is a building that practices what it teaches. One-way glass and precisely aligned sightlines provide continuous oversight without constant presence. Children experience enclosure and chosen solitude; educators witness authentic, unperformed behavior; university students observe professional practice from a respectful distance. Architecture becomes pedagogy serving all, simultaneously.



All four stakeholder groups converge on a single design principle: architecture that serves each simultaneously—seen and unseen, connected and independent.

*Independence without isolation.
Oversight without intrusion.
Safety that supports development.*



Early Childhood Education Students
Observation in a Live Teaching Environment

Sweatt-Winter's partnership with the University of Maine at Farmington creates a rare multi-purpose learning environment. The building functions simultaneously as a childcare center, classroom, and professional training facility. Students enrolled in early childhood education programs are afforded sustained access to authentic early childhood practice through one-way glass, studying child-led learning without disrupting it.

Parents & Families
Community Trust, Demonstrated

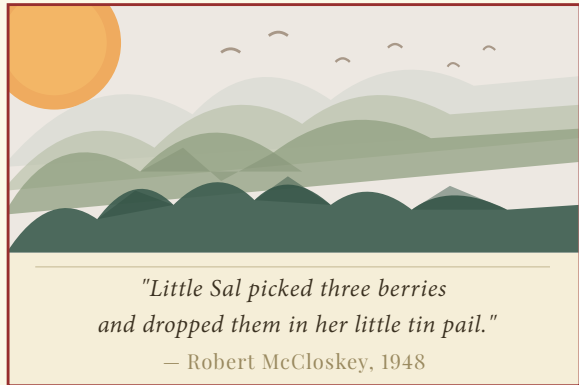
Families travel up to 30 minutes from four surrounding counties to enroll their children in Sweatt-Winter's preschool and infant and toddler care programs. Ninety-eight percent of enrolled families remain until their child transitions out of the program. As the director describes it simply, the center is "a calm and nurturing place." That response—felt before it is articulated—is what transparent, child-centered architecture produces.



My First Safe Space to Explore

*Infant Room:
Discovery Play*

LAYER 1 - LITERARY REFERENCE



BLUEBERRIES FOR SAL

MAINE MOUNTAINS AND FOREST CLEARINGS
NATURE AS A GENTLE FIRST ADVENTURE



The mountain meadow in McCloskey's western Maine foothills is the first landscape – vast enough to wonder at, close enough to feel safe. For an infant, the world begins here.

+
OVERLAID
WITH

LAYER 2 - VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE



MAINE COLONIAL DOUBLE GABLE SILHOUETTE

ARCHETYPAL SHELTER FORM
QUIET, PROTECTIVE, EMBRACING
ENDURING IN MEMORY



THE MERGE – HORIZON MEETS CANOPY
LAYERED SKYLINE SEEN FROM CHILDHOOD HOME

The blue-gray ridgelines of inland Maine do not advance; they recede. Layered like a pop-up illustration, the landscape establishes depth without urgency. This is a world meant to be observed first – a place where curiosity begins with looking. Adventure exists, but it remains close to home, buffered by distance and calm.

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YIELDS

LAYER 3 - DESIGN SYNTHESIS



DISTANT MOUNTAINS BEYOND A WARM HAVEN

THE INFANT ROOM'S FIRST LANDSCAPE REVEALS
WONDER HELD WITHIN SHELTER. THE WORLD IS BEAUTIFUL;
YOU ARE SAFE TO LOOK AT IT.

DESIGN TRANSLATION - CONCEPT TO SPACE

THE HOUSE FROM THE CEILING

A peaked M-shaped yellow ceiling forms the archetypal house, a universal symbol present in nearly every child's earliest drawings. A legible, comforting scale within the larger room: my cozy place.

LAYERED MOUNTAIN MURAL

Progressively softened silhouettes establish the depth of Maine's landscape without demand. A resting sun traces the quiet passage of time, reminding children that motion and calm belong together.

MATERIAL PALETTE

Sage green, slate blue, and warm taupe drawn from mountain, sky, and forest soothe rather than stimulate.

SPATIAL SEQUENCE

The infant who gazes from a sheltered nook toward a layered horizon is learning the first lesson of curiosity: the world extends beyond me.

My First Safe Space to Explore

*Infant Room:
Quiet Enclosure*

LAYER 1 - LITERARY REFERENCE



*"Goodnight moon.
Goodnight noises everywhere."
— Margaret Wise Brown, 1947*

GOODNIGHT MOON

*THE MOON TUCKING ITSELF IN
RITUAL, RHYTHM, AND REASSURANCE*



In Goodnight Moon, the moon is not observed; it is addressed. It is a companion in the ritual of letting go.

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OVERLAID
WITH

LAYER 2 - VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE



CLAPBOARD BEDROOM SILHOUETTE

*SCREENED SASH WINDOW
PERMEABLE, PROTECTIVE, CALM
SCALED TO THE CHILD*



*THE MERGE - ENCLOSURE MEETS VISIBILITY
GENTLE MOTION SEEN THROUGH THE SCREEN*

The vertical slat screen creates a soft boundary - a place where a child can withdraw without disappearing. Visibility is maintained in both directions; the child sees out, while caregivers observe within. Solitude is chosen, not imposed.

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YIELDS

LAYER 3 - DESIGN SYNTHESIS



QUIET ENCLOSURE AS EMOTIONAL SCAFFOLD

RITUALIZED CALM INTRODUCED THROUGH LIGHT, TEXTURE AND FORM. SECURITY THROUGH PARTIAL RETREAT, NOT ISOLATION.

DESIGN TRANSLATION - CONCEPT TO SPACE

M-SHAPED GABLE ALCOVES

Resting nooks replicate twin-peaked ceiling frame; the familiar form calmly shifts gaze from the curious horizon to the restful bedroom.

THE RESTING MOON

A round, peaceful form recalls Goodnight Moon's quiet lunar presence; softly closed eyes model calm behavior: rest is natural, and safe.

MATERIAL PALETTE

Soft yellows, quiet creams, and muted lunar hues create a hushed backdrop for rest. Diffused light illuminates soft, tactile surfaces, reinforcing a sense of calm and emotional safety.

SPATIAL SEQUENCE

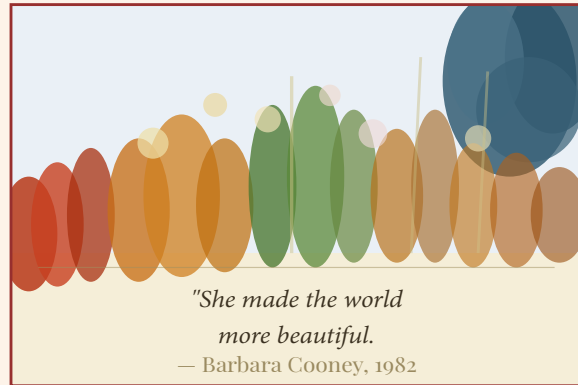
Settled beneath the M-shaped semi-enclosure, open sightlines gradually filter through a textured slat screen - a restful transition from shared awareness to chosen solitude.

The World is Full of Discovery

Toddler Room:

Active Play

LAYER 1 - LITERARY REFERENCE



MISS RUMPHIUS AND THE LUPINE FIELD

*Maine Coastline and Wildflower Garden
Wildflower as an Act of Beauty*



*Lupines are an emblem of early summer along
Maine roadsides of the coastline*

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LAYER 2 - VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE



MAINE BARN GABLE SILHOUETTE

*VERNACULAR AGRICULTURAL FARM
SIMPLE, HONEST, SHELTERING
ROOTED IN PLACE*



THE MERGE - NATURE MEETS FORM LUPINE FIELD SEEN THROUGH THE BARN GABLE

*The gable silhouette does not contain landscape - it frames it. Like a window cut into the hillside,
the familiar barn geometry becomes a threshold: a child steps beneath the peak and enters a world of bloom, color and discovery.
The architecture is the gardens edge.*

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YIELDS

LAYER 3 - DESIGN SYNTHESIS



WILDFLOWER GARDEN BENEATH THE BARN GABLE

*LANDSCAPE MEMORY FRAMED BY SHELTERING FORM.
DISCOVERY WITHIN BELONGING.*

DESIGN TRANSLATION - CONCEPT TO SPACE

GABLE ALCOVES
Reading nooks and gathering corners shaped by the barn peak geometry; sheltering sub-spaces within the larger room.

WILDFLOWER MURAL FIELD
Lupine, clover, and goldenrod depicted at child's eye height; the Maine meadow brought inside.

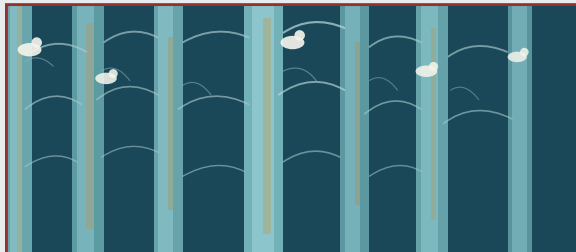
MATERIAL PALETTE
Warm terracotta, sage green, and lupine violet drawn directly from Cooney's watercolor illustrations.

SPATIAL SEQUENCE
Portal gives way to openness; each room a new meadow to wander, echoing Miss Rumphius's journey from coast to garden.

Stillness Has its Own Beauty

School-Age Room:
Quiet Reading

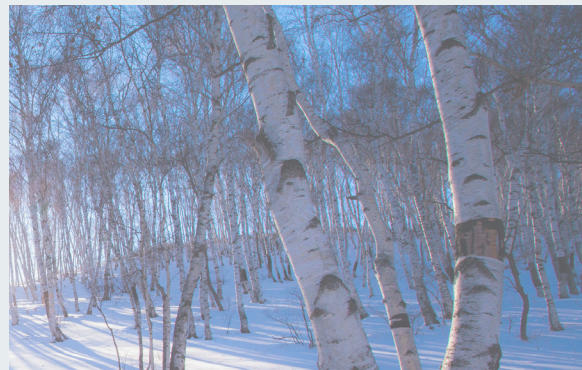
LAYER 1 - LITERARY REFERENCE



"When you go owling you have to be quiet. That's what Pa always says."
— Jane Yolen, 1987

OWL MOON

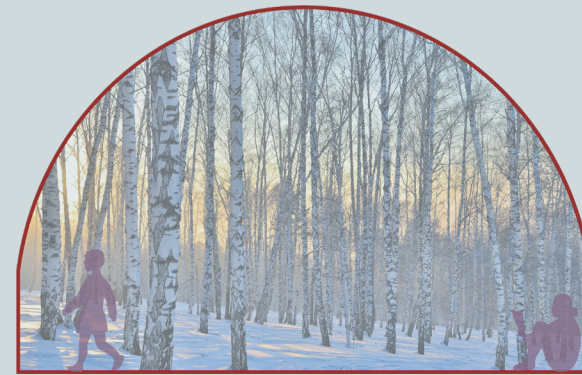
MAINE WHITE BIRCH AT WINTER DUSK
STILLNESS AS A FORM OF ACTIVE PRESENCE



Snow-dusted white birch trees rise against the long winter dusk in Maine's inland woods.

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OVERLAID
WITH

LAYER 2 - VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE



MAINE FARM BARREL SILHOUETTE

LEGIBLE BOUNDARY OF CALM
ENVELOPING, INWARD-FACING, HUSHED
CHOSEN STILLNESS WITHIN ACTIVITY



THE MERGE - FOREST MEETS NICHE WHITE BIRCH SEEN THROUGH A FOREST CLEARING

After the wildflower meadows comes the hush of winter woods. From a pause in the larger room, Maine's iconic white birch trees rise like columns, their distinct black markings forming an ordered rhythm. The landscape invites contemplative presence, teaching that there is activity within calm; quiet is not empty.

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YIELDS

LAYER 3 - DESIGN SYNTHESIS



FROSTED WOODS PAST THE SPIRITED REFUGE

STILLNESS OFFERED AS A FORM OF ENGAGEMENT.
QUIET REVEALED AS ITS OWN KIND OF BEAUTY.

DESIGN TRANSLATION - CONCEPT TO SPACE

READING NOOK
The rounded nook offset from the room gives place to stop and watch.

WINTER FOREST MURAL
White birch trees stand like columns in a natural cathedral, their vertical rhythm calming the space. Small birds rest quietly, gently demonstrating how to be still and watchful, present but quiet.

MATERIAL PALETTE
Winter white, soft charcoal, and layered twilight blues manifest winter's seasonal richness: clarity, simplicity, and discovery within stillness. Deep dusk-blue reimagines darkness as peaceful and cozy.

SPATIAL SEQUENCE
Movement through the larger room slows as the rounded nook emerges - a spatial pause that gives way to vertical rhythm, twilight light, and inward focus, where watching becomes an active state.

Curiosity Leads Somewhere

Preschool Room:

Active Play

LAYER 1 - LITERARY REFERENCE



*"Let the wild rumpus start!"
"And it was still hot."
— Maurice Sendak, 1963*

WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE

MAINE SPRUCE-FIR AND WHITE PINE FOREST
GAINING THE COURAGE TO EXPLORE DEEPER



Dense, shadowed woodland becomes a place where the unknown invites exploration.

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OVERLAID
WITH

LAYER 2 - VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE



SLOPED CANOPY SILHOUETTE

SLANT ROOF CAMP ALCOVE
DIRECTIONAL, INTENTIONAL, INQUISITIVE
MOMENTUM MADE TANGIBLE



THE MERGE - FOREST DEPTH MEETS SLOPED CANOPY
EVERGREEN LAYERS GATHERING BEYOND A TILTED FRAME

The skillion roof silhouette does not enclose so much as leans forward, mirroring the experience of venturing deeper into the forest. Beneath this angled canopy, space feels more suggestive - a realm where questions linger, and curiosity is encouraged to move ahead rather than settle.

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YIELDS

LAYER 3 - DESIGN SYNTHESIS



EVERGREEN FOREST AS LANDSCAPE OF INQUIRY

CURIOSITY SUSTAINED THROUGH DEPTH AND DENSITY.
UNDERSTANDING BUILT THROUGH INVESTIGATION
RATHER THAN IMMEDIACY.

DESIGN TRANSLATION - CONCEPT TO SPACE

LAYERED EVERGREEN MURAL

Multiple translucent watercolor washes create layered forest, teaching that surface view is not complete; some discoveries require patience.

DISCOVERY SHELVING

Integrated shelving holds pinecones, bark fragments, acorn caps, and found forest materials. Children's natural collections bridge the mural's two-dimensional invitation with three-dimensional inquiry.

MATERIAL PALETTE

Saturated hunter greens, rich emeralds, warm browns, and shadowed neutrals—the true colors of Maine's 90% forested landscape

SPATIAL SEQUENCE

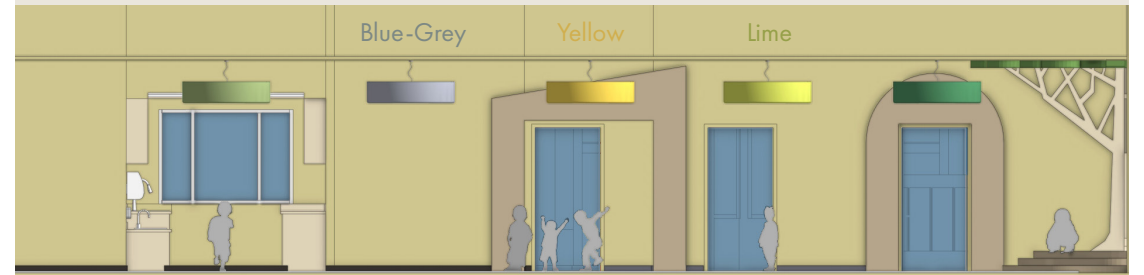
Tilted canopy draws the body forward, then releases into layered evergreen imagery and discovery shelving beyond - a progression from shelter to immersive inquiry, where looking becomes searching.

The Gathering Sky

Indoor Playtime: Central Circulation



THE CEILING AS LANDSCAPE



Color-coded pendants become wayfinding for pre-readers – spatial literacy through hue, rhythm, and landmark

A clear circulation spine runs through the building, but for children it reads less like a hallway and more like a journey: venture out, find your place, and return again. At its heart, the spine opens into a broad, sunlit commons linking four early childhood classrooms, a shared indoor sky where movement, meeting, and belonging are practiced daily. Overhead, large circular fixtures in meadow hues float like clouds at different altitudes, transforming institutional scale into a village commons. For pre-readers, this ceiling becomes wayfinding: “Meet me under the yellow light” or “I’m playing in the green circle area.”



This spatial strategy is social pedagogy. Children move from intimate niches to open common ground, shifting from parallel play to cooperation. The commons supports flexible programming and inclusive access, serving as a gathering place for shared activities and a reliable indoor setting for gross motor play when outdoor time is curtailed. High ceilings, abundant natural light, and colorful overhead elements sustain a psychological connection to open air and sky through the gray months. The commons gathers adults as well: families come together here for events like literacy nights and community showcases.

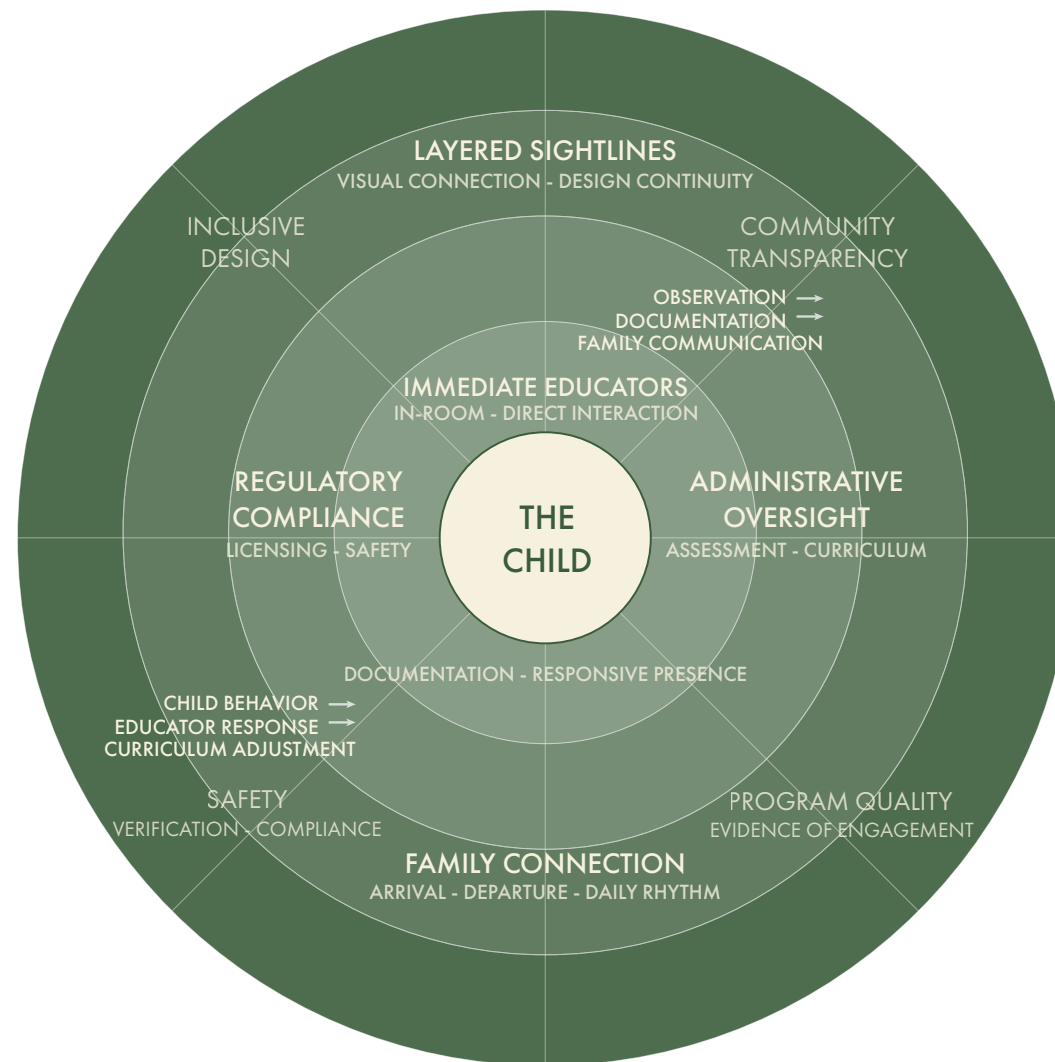
Seen and Unseen

*Subtle Oversight:
Learning Perspective*

Seen and unseen, connected and independent—this is the scene the Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center carefully composes. Early childhood unfolds best when it is supported, not staged. Children need room to test limits, negotiate peer worlds, and recover from frustration without constant adult presence directing every move. Yet educators, families, licensing reviewers, and the University of Maine at Farmington’s early childhood education students require visibility to support safety, quality, and learning.

That balance becomes an architectural ethic in two dedicated observation rooms: darkened, quiet spaces with expansive one-way glass overlooking bright classrooms. Observation here is not incidental; it is professional practice and assessment made spatial. Like a director watching a rehearsal, teachers witness the real work of childhood—executive function in motion, self-regulation forming, and peer dynamics unfolding—without becoming the audience children perform for. Educators document authentic behavior, study developmental progress, and intervene only when necessary. For teacher-education students, the view is doubly instructive. They observe not only children but also skilled practitioners who respond in real time, scaffolding language, guiding conflict, and protecting autonomy while meeting supervision expectations.

Throughout the children’s zone, carefully aligned sightlines extend the same principle. Children settle into scaled niches and quiet corners to retreat without disappearing, while adults maintain comprehensive awareness. Families experience transparency as trust; administrators and reviewers can verify quality without disrupting the day. This is architecture as pedagogy: independence without isolation, oversight without intrusion, and safety that supports—rather than interrupts—development.



Child Autonomy
Independence Without Isolation

Children choose to retreat into scaled niches, experiencing true enclosure and the comfort of solitude. Architecture supports stillness, privacy, and self-regulation without disappearance. This selective withdrawal is solitude that is felt, not imposed.

Educator Awareness
Oversight Without Intrusion

Carefully aligned sightlines enable comprehensive supervision without constant visible presence. Educators and early childhood education students observe authentic, unperformed behavior, allowing responsive teaching and professional learning to unfold without interrupting the child’s experience.

The Architectural Mechanism

Layered visibility operates as a unified architectural strategy. Children experience chosen solitude within niches, while educators and administrators maintain oversight from corridors and observation zones. The same glass surface conveys transparency to families while enabling licensing-compliant ratio verification.

Family Trust
Safety that Supports Development

Glass walls convey transparency without intrusion. Families witness engagement, care, and learning as they naturally occur, building trust in the center’s educational approach through visibility while preserving the integrity of childhood at play.

Make Your Own Mark

After children learn to inhabit landscapes, they are invited to make one of their own. The art nook shifts a child's role from moving through the story to leaving a mark on the page. Beneath a wood slat canopy that suggests a workshop or treehouse atelier, the message is clear: creativity is not an add-on here; it is part of the curriculum. Dual child-height sinks make a quiet promise that matters in developmentally appropriate, process-based early learning. Messy play is expected, accommodated, and respected.

The design of this space borrows from Italian atelier tradition, where the environment itself is considered a third teacher. Materials are organized, visible, and accessible, supporting autonomy and executive function through the processes of choosing, trying, and revising. Soft yellow walls provide an optimistic backdrop. Children move fluidly between observing Maine's seasons through glass and responding to that world through materials. Daylight and warm surfaces keep the space calm, letting children's work provide the color and energy. A simple display line strung beneath the wood battens holds work in progress like laundry on a line, celebrating iteration over perfection.

The art nook is embedded within the larger children's zone rather than isolated as a separate "art room," inviting shared and collaborative making. Children see their artwork change over time; educators document growth in fine motor control, planning, persistence, and expressive language; and families read the day's thinking at a glance.

This is where the child becomes both reader and author, discovering that their voice has a place within the story. Where earlier spaces said, "inhabit the beauty we created for you," the art nook declares, "now create beauty yourself." In this landscape of agency, children learn that ideas can become tangible and that art is not decoration but a way of interpreting the landscapes they live in.



Art Nook: Creative Workshop

THE DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNEY



WALL-SLAT CANOPY

Overhead battens reference outdoor atelier and treehouse workshop. These honest materials signal creative work is performed here.

DISPLAY LINE

Horizontal clothesline string beneath the canopy transforms work-in-progress into visible progress, celebrating the process of making.

CHILD-HEIGHT SINKS

Dual sinks at child scale announce the philosophy that mess is expected, accommodated, and respected during real work.

VISIBLE STORAGE

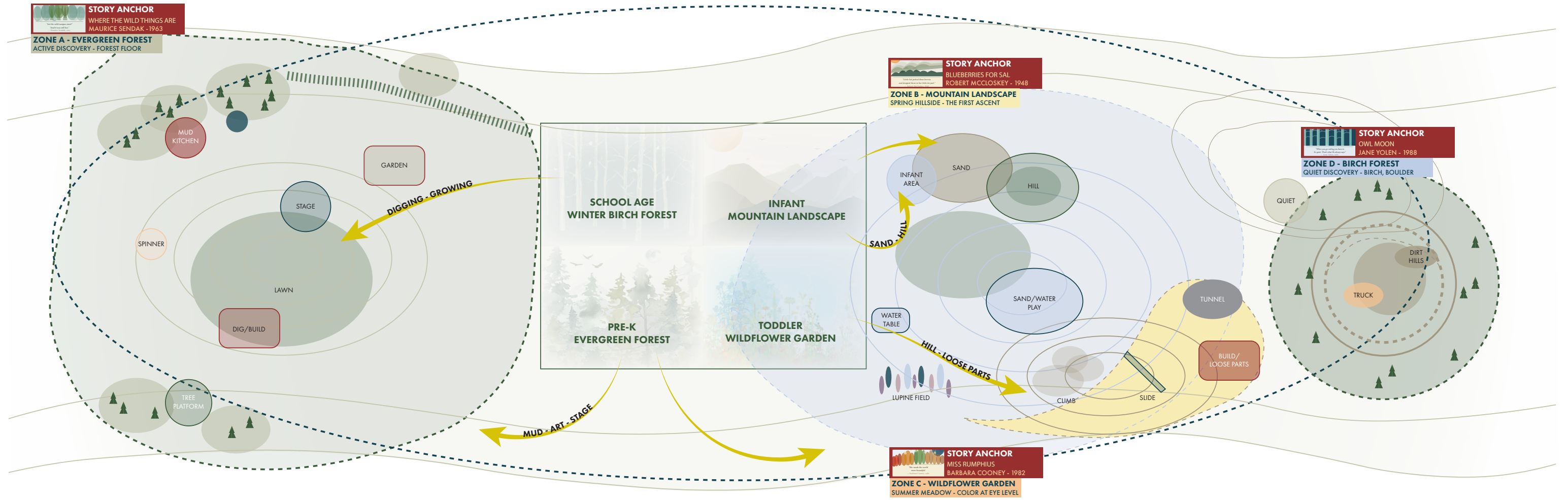
Elevated storage cabinets are accessible only to adults but remain in view for when a child needs something from them.

NATURE - ART PIPELINE

Adjacent window provides views to the outdoor seasonal landscape. Children observe then respond using art materials as investigative tools.

Where *Inside* Meets *Outside*

Design Theme:
Play Landscape as a Living Story



ZONE A - WEST - PRE-K

EVERGREEN FOREST

MAINE SPRUCE FIR CANOPY, FOREST FLOOR, THE UNDERSTORY WHERE YOUNG THINGS GROW

MUD KITCHEN | GARDEN BEDS | STAGE | DIG/BUILD | TREE PLATFORM

MURAL CONNECTION: EVERGREEN FOREST
DENSE SPRUCE AND FIR, FILTERED LIGHT ON FOREST FLOOR. THE OUTDOOR ZONE CONTINUES THAT CANOPY INTO LIVED EXPERIENCE.

STORY ANCHOR: WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE
CHILDREN WHO DIG, BUILD, AND GATHER IN THIS ZONE INHABIT THE MURAL'S WORLD. THE MUD KITCHEN IS THE FOREST FLOOR. THE PLATFORM IS A LOOKOUT IN THE CANOPY CROWN.

ZONE B - EAST - INFANT / TODDLER

MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE

SPRING HILLSIDE, ALPINE MEADOW IN BLOOM, THE MOUNTAIN'S EDGE WHERE COLOR BEGINS

SAND | WATER TABLE | INFANT AREA | HILL | QUIET PLAY

MURAL CONNECTION: MOUNTAIN LANDSCAPE
SOFT, ROLLING FORMS MIMIC THE COMFORT OF BEING HELD WHILE INTRODUCING GENTLE VISUAL COMPLEXITY

STORY ANCHOR: BLUEBERRIES FOR SAL
THE HILL IS THE MOUNTAIN'S FIRST SLOPE - GENTLE, VISIBLE, CLIMBABLE.

ZONE C - EAST - TODDLER

WILDFLOWER GARDEN

MAINE MEADOW IN JUNE, COLOR AT CHILD'S EYE HEIGHT, THE SCENT OF GROWTH

SAND/WATER PLAY | WILDFLOWER FIELD | LAWN | CLIMB | SLIDE

MURAL CONNECTION: WILDFLOWER GARDEN
LUPINE PURPLE, CLOVER PINK, GOLDENROD YELLOW. THE SUMMER MEADOW IN FULL BLOOM.

STORY ANCHOR: MISS RUMPHIUS
THE OUTDOOR ZONE MIRRORS A LUPINE STRIP AT THE MEADOW'S EDGE, SAND AND WATER AT THE CLEARING'S CENTER. THE PAINTED FIELD AND THE LIVING FIELD COMPLETE EACH OTHER - A CONTINUOUS MEADOW.

ZONE D - FAR EAST - SCHOOL AGE

WINTER BIRCH FOREST

MAINE FOREST PATH THAT LOOPS AND RETURNS, DIRT ROADS THROUGH BIRCH GROVE

TRIKE/BIKE LOOP | OFF-ROAD PATHS | TRUCK PLAY | DIRT HILLS

MURAL CONNECTION: WINTER BIRCH FOREST
VERTICAL WHITE TRUNKS WITH DISTINCTIVE BLACK MARKINGS. MAINE'S MOST RECOGNIZABLE TREE RENDERED AT SCALE.

STORY ANCHOR: OWL MOON
AREAS INVITE STACKING AND BALANCING. WHITE BIRCH TRUNKS REAPPEAR AS VERTICAL POSTS IN THE PLAY STRUCTURE. GLACIER-CARVED BOULDERS ECHO THE PALETTE. STILLNESS IS A DESIGN MATERIAL.

Playscape Materiality

The outdoor playscape at Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center extends the interior landscape into lived experience. After months of tracing evergreen layers indoors, noticing birch markings in quiet niches, and watching mountain silhouettes from infant rooms, children step into the Maine that those images prepared them to recognize. Here, rugged bark, smooth stones, and leathery leaves become both materials and teachers like familiar characters that have returned in an unfolding narrative of place.

Drawn from the same four interior landscape archetypes, outdoor materials reflect Maine's ecosystem itself, scaled for small bodies and big questions. Whole logs become climbable forests; glacial boulders invite geological inquiry; stump stepping stones create topography to navigate. Loose parts support open-ended invention: timber balances across stumps, corrugated tubing is arranged as rivers, and hula-hoop boundaries are drawn and redrawn. Together, these elements transform the playscape into an outdoor workshop where children plan, test, revise, and try again.

As children grow, the outdoor zones deepen in complexity, echoing the interior sequence of mountain landscape, wildflower garden, winter birch forest, and evergreen forest. The youngest children encounter sensory-rich materials close to the building edge, where textures can be examined at arm's reach. Older children venture farther into dirt hills, off-road paths, water play, and a trike loop that rewards independence and managed risk.

Indoors, murals and fixtures provide seasonal constancy when snow buries the ground; outdoors affirms that promise. Children observe a texture, return inside to represent it, then step back out to compare. The pedagogical loop closes as learning carries forward, with understanding extending just beyond the page.



DESIGN PRINCIPLE

GLASS AS A THRESHOLD, NOT A BARRIER

Each mural is positioned at a child's eye level so that looking at the wall and looking out the window become one gesture. Interior and exterior landscapes complete one another, forming a continuous world with a single pane of glass at its center.

MATERIAL LANGUAGE

NATURAL MATERIALS AS CHARACTERS

Log rounds, glacial boulders, sand, water, and loose timber are drawn from the same ecosystem depicted on the walls. The mud kitchen's ingredients come from this shared Maine landscape. Every material is a character in the story children write through play.

CONTINUITY OF EXPERIENCE

SEASONS AS AGE AND SPATIAL JOURNEY

The four murals trace a seasonal arc—spring mountain, summer wildflower, winter birch, evergreen permanence—that children move through as they grow. Outdoor zones deepen in complexity along the same sequence. With each step, discovery widens and understanding matures.

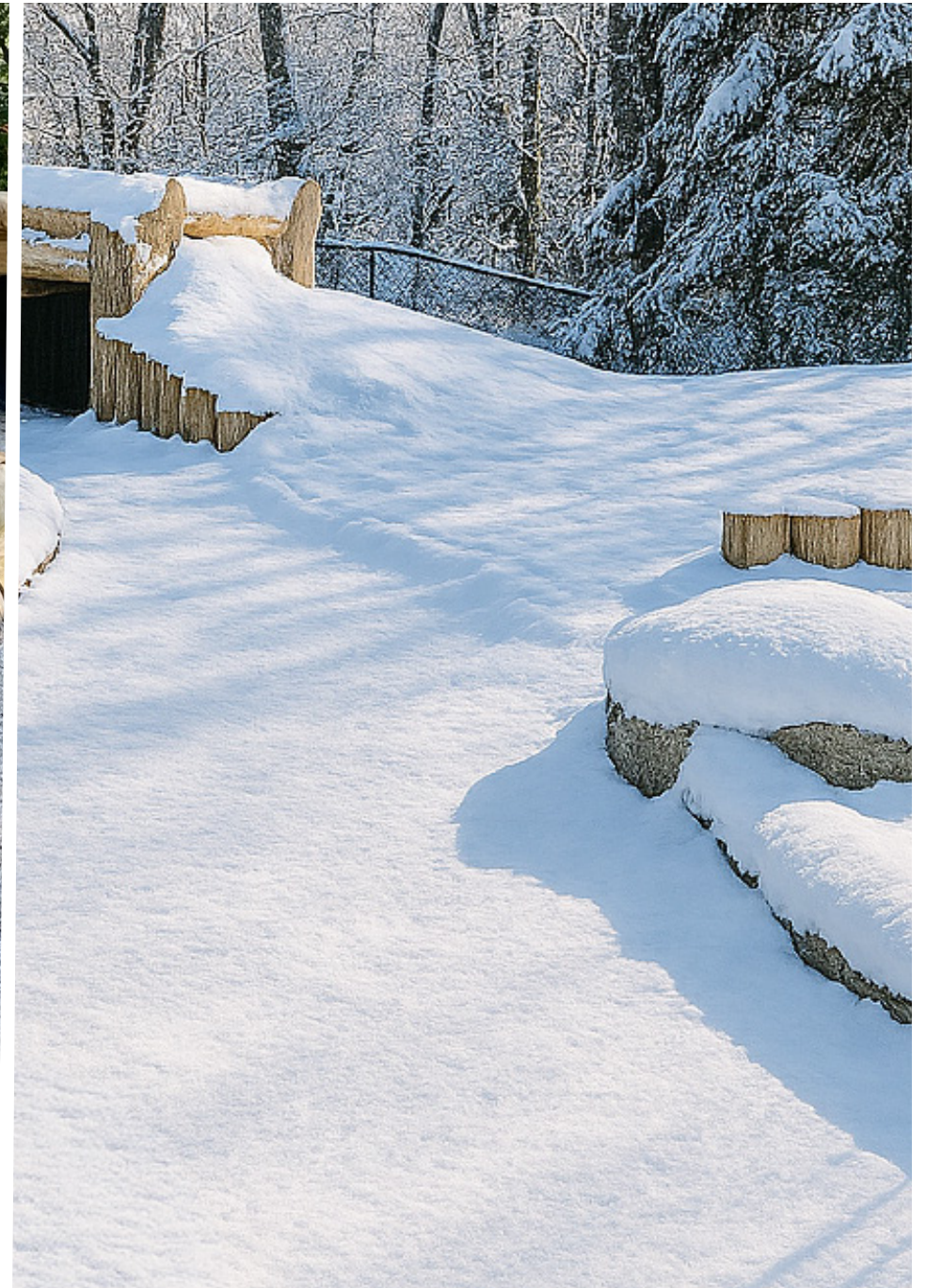


Seasonal Consistency



In Maine, the year arrives in layers—mud season, lupine summer, first frost, and the long blue hour of winter. Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center translates these seasonal shifts into an early learning environment that remains connected to nature, even when the weather does not cooperate. Windows keep children visually tethered to changing light, snow cover, and spruce-dark edges, while interior memory landscape classrooms echo the environments they will later explore outdoors. Diffused daylight, calm acoustics, and natural-toned materials support wellness when outdoor contact is limited. When bitter temperatures shorten outdoor time, especially for infants, the multipurpose area becomes a reliable counterpart for gross-motor exploration, preserving the daily rhythm of movement essential to self-regulation. Across age groups, the spatial sequence carries children from open horizons to sheltered nooks, reinforcing predictable transitions that support classroom calm and independence.

Sweatt-Winter serves 54 children at full enrollment, operating consistently at or near its licensed capacity. While the program has long maintained waitlists for its preschool classrooms serving children ages three to five, the expansion and relocation of the Center introduced infant and toddler care for the first time, an offering that filled immediately. Demand remains so high that some children age out of eligibility before a space becomes available. Families commit early, often before placement is guaranteed, to secure a place in a setting they trust will support their children’s foundational development, and 98% of enrolled children remain in the program unless they age out or relocate. In a region where most families travel from Franklin County and nearby Androscoggin, Somerset, and Kennebec counties—with commutes up to 30 minutes—this sustained demand and enrollment underscores both the urgency for early childhood access and confidence in a facility that makes Maine’s seasons legible, manageable, and developmentally supportive year-round.



“Families love the nature aspect that we provide, including risky and messy play, our child-led curriculum, and following the lead of the children.”

Erica Thompson
Director of Sweatt-Winter Early Care and Education Center

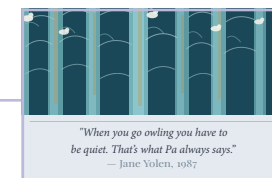
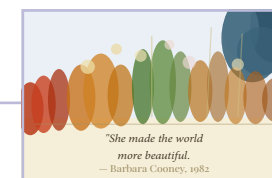
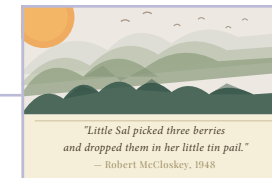
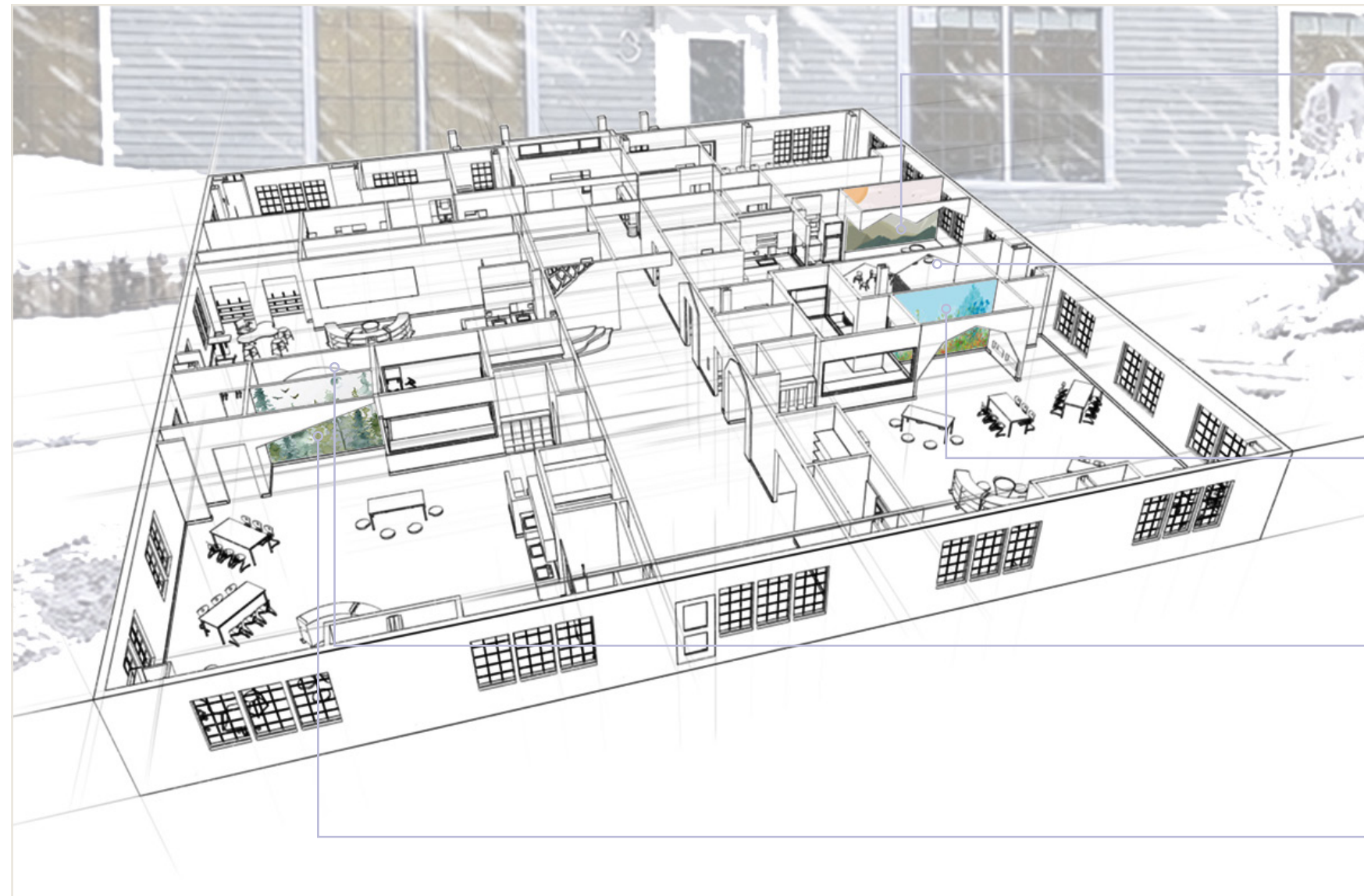
Memory-Making Anchors

The project's impacts are most visible at child height, in the small sentences that surface during the day: "Can we go to the birch forest today?" That question is more than enthusiasm; it is evidence of place attachment forming in real time. By organizing the facility as a series of Maine-specific memory landscapes—soft ridgelines, lupine meadows, paper birch at dusk, and spruce-fir depth—the architecture helps children practice the very skills early education aims to cultivate: curiosity, persistence, and the confidence to navigate both space and world.

Educators note that the environment supports self-regulation in ways that conventional classrooms rarely afford. Children independently find their way to chosen spaces, and many select alcoves and quiet areas when overwhelmed, using the building itself as a tool for regulation.

This is the developmental arc made tangible. Infants learn safety through calm horizons; toddlers learn that retreat can be chosen; preschoolers learn that attention can deepen into investigation. For Maine children who live with long winters, the design preserves biophilic continuity, allowing regional ecology to become curriculum rather than a generic nature theme. Differences such as birch versus evergreen or summer bloom versus winter hush become readable patterns. The result is both educational and impactful within the community: children build spatial literacy, creative confidence, and an emerging ecosystem knowledge rooted in their home state, while families see a clear developmental progression unfolding across the facility.

Over time, these memory-making anchors become points of reference that children carry with them as they move through the day and across years. A favored landscape is not left behind when classrooms change; it is revisited, reinterpreted, and understood differently as children grow. By offering constancy within change, the building allows memory to accumulate rather than reset, affirming that early learning is not a series of isolated moments, but a coherent story shaped by repetition, place, and belonging.



“Sweatt-Winter plays a huge role in shaping the children we serve into those ready to take on elementary school when they reach that age. We set a great foundation for learning in these children.”

Erica Thompson
Director of Sweatt-Winter Early Care and Education Center

Identity Through Environment

Architecture shapes memory; memory shapes identity. The Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center operates on the principle that environments in early childhood actively shape how learners regulate emotion, construct meaning, and understand their place in the world long before formal instruction begins. A child who practices self-regulation in a calm birch forest niche builds transferable emotional skills. A child who studies evergreen forms indoors and later identifies them outdoors learns that careful observation produces knowledge. A child who creates messy, iterative work beneath a wood slat canopy, using real tools, internalizes that their ideas are worthy of care, effort, and revision. These are not symbolic moments, but measurable learning behaviors embedded in daily experience.

The architecture becomes curriculum through sequenced, memory-making landscapes. The building's spatial progression mirrors developmental progression, supporting executive function, spatial literacy, and independence through environments children navigate intuitively. Regionally specific imagery and materials reinforce biophilic connection to Maine's ecology, preparing children to recognize, name, and reinterpret the landscape outdoors. Indoor murals act as companions to the natural world, forming a continuous learning loop of observation, representation, and return.

Layered visibility reinforces identity formation by teaching children how it feels to be trusted. One-way glass and embedded sightlines resolve oversight needs without interference. Children experience autonomy without isolation—space to try, fail, and recover—while remaining securely supported. Being observed without intrusion communicates a powerful message: independence is allowed, effort is valued, and care is constant. For educators, families, and regulators, visibility supports safety, accountability, and professional practice; for children, it establishes dignity and self-authorship.

This is the long view of early childhood investment: shaping foundational behaviors and relationships to places that persist well beyond the early years. If architectural spaces are a child's first books, Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center is a carefully written novel, beginning with legible pages for infants and unfolding chapter by chapter toward a conclusion with confident, creative, ecologically literate learners who know how to read the world and see themselves within it.





Sweatt-Winter Child Care and Early Education Center is a place where children learn that they are safe enough to pause, brave enough to explore, and capable enough to choose their own paths. Through landscapes that children return to again and again, early experiences become a first story that settles into memory, closing gently while shaping how children open every volume that follows.

