

Seattle Daily Journal of Commerce

BACK TO SCHOOL

K-12



September 25, 2025

ADVANCING STUDENT WELLBEING THROUGH DATA-INFORMED DESIGN

Post-occupancy evaluations provide key insights to cultivate student health, belonging and learning outcomes in K-12 school projects



BY JOANN WILCOX HINDMARSH, BRENDAN CONNOLLY AND SEAMUS KELLY MITHUN

As the new academic year begins, students are entering the classroom with mounting pressures amplified by current political, environmental and social forces. Aspects such as rapid advancement in technology, digital fatigue, lingering impacts of the pandemic, chronic absenteeism and declining engagement are taking center stage in the conversation on student health and wellbeing.

Given these challenges, a proactive and integrated approach to student wellbeing is necessary, and schools are responding with both programs and places designed to improve students' mental health. The responsibility for promoting student wellbeing and healthier school environ-

Staff feedback on shared learning areas at an existing school informed the design of L-shaped classroom clusters at Blakely Elementary School, improving visual connection between spaces.



ments is a collective one, but how do we know if what we are doing is working?

One effective strategy is to embed data-informed practices within the school environment. More than ever

before, design for wellbeing has become an overt conversation and an urgent need in school environments, and

communities are asking for data-driven performance metrics to ensure effective investment.

Informed by proven results and lessons learned, public and private schools can better harness the power of design to help temper these mounting pressures with space-based strategies that accommodate physiological needs — connecting students with place and people in more intentional ways.

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ON THE COVER

Montlake Elementary School's renovation quadrupled the building's footprint, growing from the 16,500-square-foot historic building to 90,500 total square feet with a 74,000-square-foot, three-story addition including a gym and multiple levels of play space.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SKANSKA

DJC TEAM

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: SHAWNA GAMACHE • SECTION DESIGN: JEFFREY MILLER
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APPLIED STUDY

Established research points to the effectiveness of wellness design strategies, such as elemental human needs for daylight and connections to nature. For example, studies show a 12-24% increase in learning outcomes, as measured by test scores, when learning is conducted in balanced daylight environments with views of landscape and nature.

This is one layer of a larger set of strategies that encompasses IEQ, acoustics, lighting and accommodation of neurodivergent learning needs.

There are many examples of effective strategies to amplify wellness, and equally

important is the evolution of measurement tools to understand how these design approaches are influencing learning outcomes, student health and overall building and landscape performance. Together, applied research and measurement tools, such as the Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE), serve as vital design feedback mechanisms to ensure student and educator voices are heard and valued, to evaluate effectiveness of programs and places in practice, and to help identify the most effective implementation of well-being strategies.

POEs offers a structured way to uncover building performance and pinpoint opportunities for improvement, enabling districts and independent schools to prioritize strategies that matter most to their students and communities. A well-executed POE delivers a dual benefit: optimizing how systems and spaces are used today, while building a knowledge base that shapes tomorrow's designs. By identifying what's working — and why — designers and educators can fine-tune spaces to better meet current needs while informing the next generation of school facilities.

To gain a complete picture, Mithun's POE process blends observational studies, stakeholder interviews and questionnaires. This approach captures both quantitative data — such as acoustics, daylight levels and thermal comfort — and qualitative experiences, such as feelings of safety, belonging and ease of navigation.

The most effective evaluations are tailored around a focused set of questions, whether investigating flexible learning zones, outdoor space utilization, or how inclusive features support diverse learners.

MEASURING PROJECT IMPACT

After the first year of operations at Washington School for the Deaf's (WSD) new academic and gymnasium buildings, our team conducted a comprehensive POE to evaluate the project's performance using measures of success established at the beginning of the project.

From the outset, the Skanska + Mithun progressive design-build project had a clear charter: create a facility that best supports the unique cognitive and linguistic needs of deaf and hard of hearing students, while fostering psychological well-being and a warm, safe, community-focused environment. Using these goals as benchmarks, we conducted

on-site interviews, observational studies and an online questionnaire to assess performance and identify which design elements most impacted learning, well-being and user experience.

The results are compelling. Seventy-five percent of educators observed improvements in student focus, behavior and engagement, reflecting the benefits of aligning spatial design with lived experience. Eighty-three percent reported a stronger sense of belonging, citing the integration of Deaf cultural elements, references to WSD's history, and visual representations of the school community. Consolidating learning communities under one roof and visually connecting shared spaces strengthened relationships and created a more unified campus culture.

Visual comfort and sensory reach were also critical. Glare-controlled lighting — both daylight and electric — earned an 88% satisfaction rating.

Sightlines throughout the building improved spatial awareness, interpersonal interaction and supervision, with 75% of survey respondents reporting greater safety and security. Select technology, such as two-way video doorbells and a mass notification system, supported communication, and respondents' feedback will inform future system integration.

WIDELY APPLYING INSIGHTS

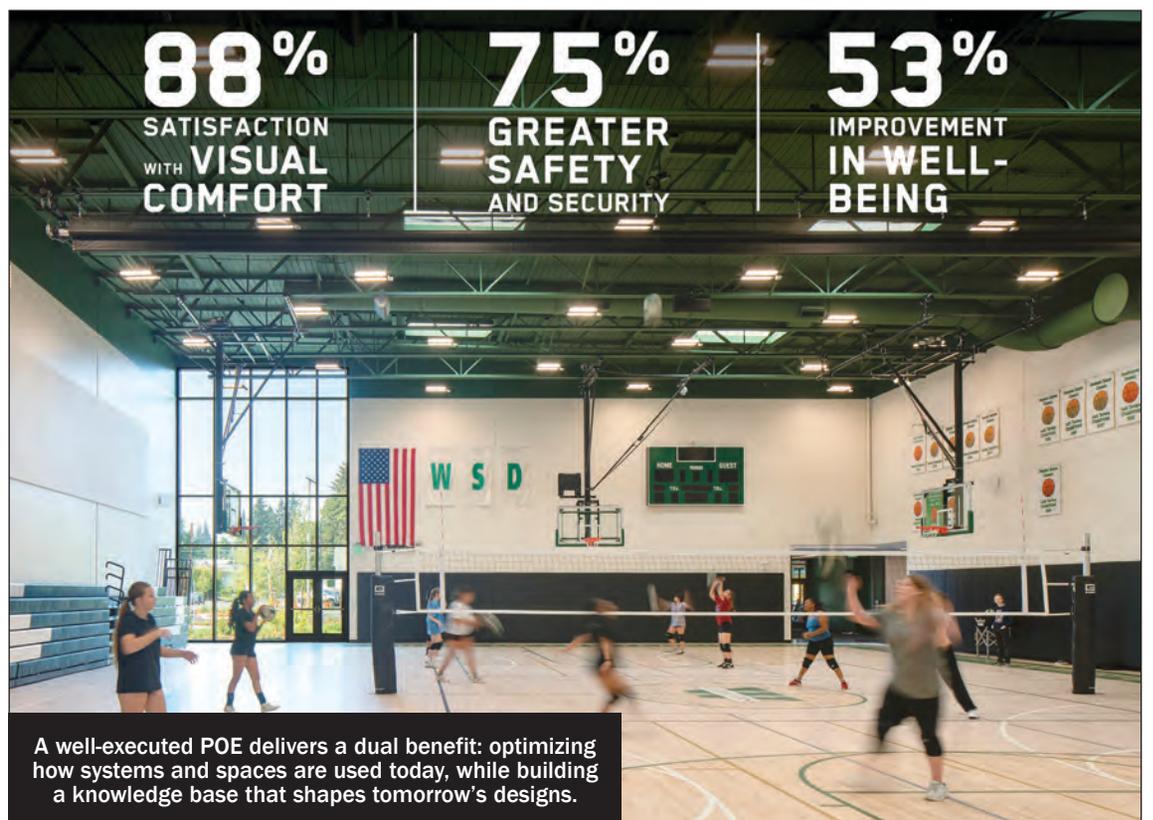
The value of occupant input and data-driven design can be leveraged to impact multiple buildings and refine future design solutions. For example, Blakely Elementary School on Bainbridge Island evolved directly from district feedback on an earlier school design. Staff identified the importance of equal access to shared learning resources, which informed the folded classroom cluster layout at Blakely that gives every classroom a direct line of sight to a shared learning space.

Restrooms — historically one of the least supervised areas in schools — have also undergone meaningful change based on POE insights. Traditional school restroom layouts created conditions for bullying, vandalism, and other negative behaviors, leaving some students avoiding them altogether. A new model increases privacy within individual stalls but opens circulation and sink areas to public zones.

This design improves safety, reduces supervision chal-



Post occupancy evaluation (POE) findings highlight student inclusion and learning benefits at Washington School for the Deaf.



A well-executed POE delivers a dual benefit: optimizing how systems and spaces are used today, while building a knowledge base that shapes tomorrow's designs.

PHOTOS BY LARA SWIMMER/ESTO

lenges and fosters a more psychologically secure environment. Lake Washington School District piloted this open circulation concept at an existing high school, where students reported feeling safer and administrators spent less time actively monitoring facilities, confirming that thoughtful restroom design can have a measurable impact on student comfort and safety.

DESIGNING FOR IMPROVEMENT

As schools and communities look to enhance places and programs to best support student wellbeing, implementing data-driven design and using applied measurement tools like POEs in com-

bination develop a quantitative understanding of building performance and uncover key areas of improvement.

This provides designers and school administrators a way to prioritize the most relevant strategies for creating safer and more supportive learning environments that reduce stress, enhance mood, support health and foster belonging. It also offers a more consistent and comprehensive way to both learn from projects and apply that learning to future efforts.

Data-driven design strategies that improve learning outcomes, like those that enhance wellbeing and learning engagement, can also be powerful tools to communicate the effectiveness of

facility design on educational outcomes and increase voters' support of bond programs, laying the foundation for continued progress.

JoAnn Hindmarsh Wilcox is a partner at Mithun and education practice leader with national influence on PK-12 and higher education design. Brendan Connolly is a partner at Mithun and a champion of integrated, multi-disciplinary design thinking for K-12 schools, higher education, environmental education and cultural projects. Séamus Kelly is a principal at Mithun with a passion for crafting inclusive and high-performing educational environments from early childhood learning through higher education.

ALKI ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: REDUCING EMISSIONS THROUGH MASS TIMBER

Using mass timber for the three-story, 83,000-square-foot school reduced embodied carbon by 30 percent and created a warm, welcoming environment for students.

For the replacement and modernization of Alki Elementary School, Mahlum was challenged to nearly double the existing school's floor area to accommodate increased enrollment at the smallest school site in Seattle Public Schools' (SPS) district. Situated between a public park to the north, a steep hillside to the south, and public streets on either side, the only expansion option was to build vertically. Mass timber turned out to be the ideal material to meet the district's needs.



BY JOE MAYO
MAHLUM
ARCHITECTS

The existing 1954/1967 school had long become unsuitable for the community's needs, and students expressed resounding dislike for the building's institutional, unwelcoming character and antiquated condition. While a full renovation was unfeasible, the design did preserve and integrate the existing 1954-era gym and community center at the east end of the site into the new structure.

A NEW FOCUS ON EMBODIED CARBON

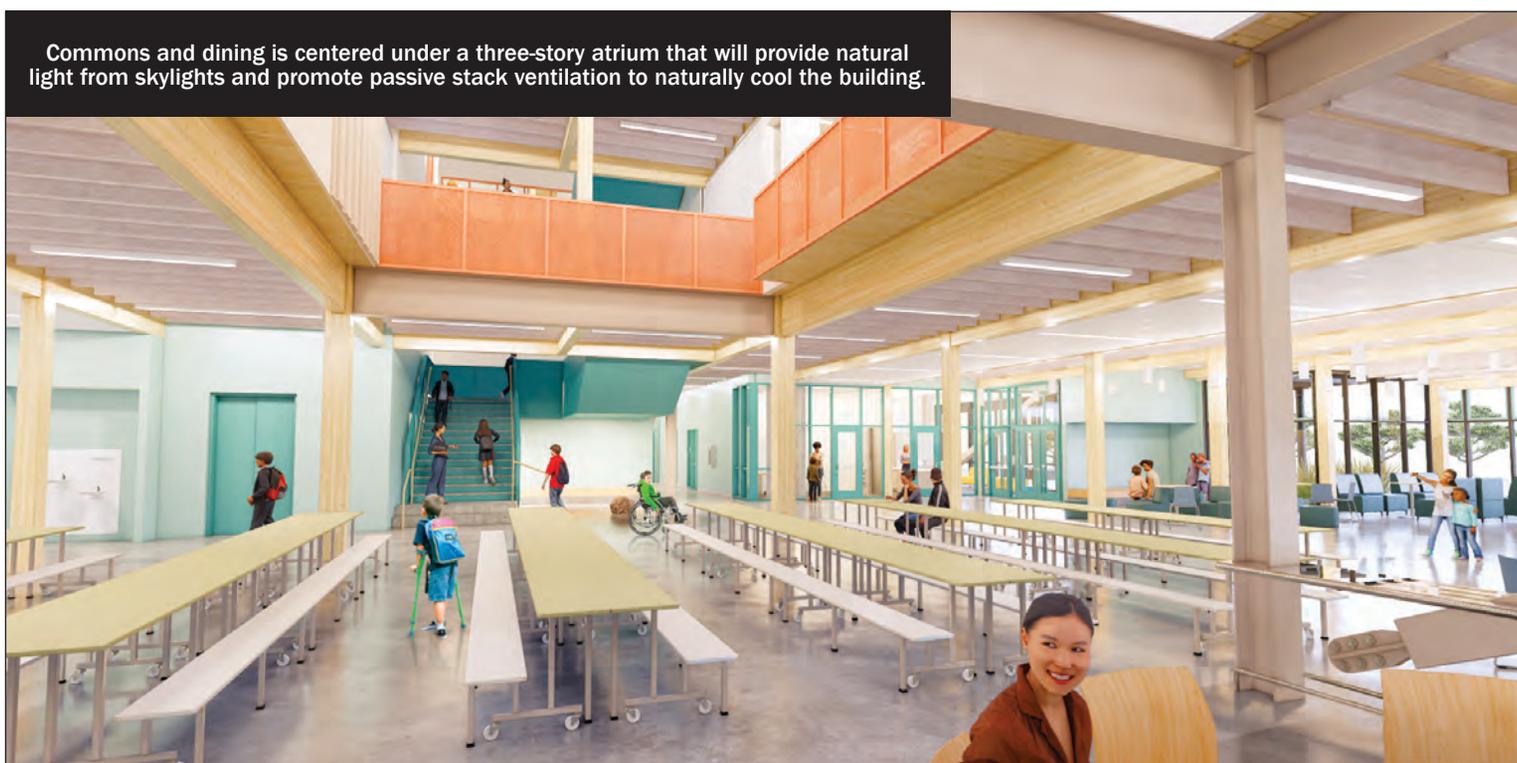
When the Alki Elementary School replacement project began, SPS had recently published the McLennan Report for SPS 2020, Sustainability Vision, Goals and Strategy which aligned with the district's Natural Resource Conservation Policy and Green Resolution. This report proposed the International Living Future's Living Building Challenge (LBC) as a certification system for the district.

The LBC at the time mandated a minimum embodied carbon reduction of 20% below typical construction. To understand if such a reduction was possible for Alki Elementary, Mahlum used early carbon assessment tools like EPIC (now c. scale) to quantify big-picture strategies for embodied carbon reductions.



Alki Elementary School creates a new welcoming front entry for students, staff, and the community.

IMAGES BY MAHLUM ARCHITECTS



Commons and dining is centered under a three-story atrium that will provide natural light from skylights and promote passive stack ventilation to naturally cool the building.

This early analysis suggested that a ~20% reduction in embodied carbon was possible by optimizing concrete mixes and using mass timber in lieu of structural steel.

MASS TIMBER TO REDUCE EMBODIED CARBON

Mass timber is a way of building with large, solid,

engineered timber elements that can replace steel and concrete. Based on successful mass timber projects and a recently completed Wood Innovation Grant studying mass timber and K-12 schools, Mahlum recommended the use of mass timber as a key strategy to reduce embodied carbon emissions, while also creat-

ing a warm, welcoming environment where students will thrive.

Building a three-story, 83,000-square-foot school from steel and concrete is typical, while using wood for this height and area is not. Mass timber design is significantly different from other construction types. Fortunately, along with Mahlum

and SPS, the project structural engineer, PCS Structural Solutions, and General Contractor/Construction Manager, Cornerstone Construction, had experience with mass timber.

The team worked collaboratively during schematic design to determine the most efficient mass timber layout for the project. The

team ultimately chose a typical timber grid of 11' x 28' and a three-ply cross-laminated timber (CLT) floor and roof deck.

This approach minimizes intrusion of columns into learning spaces, while keeping the timber volume low and reducing costs. Compared to a baseline 30' x 30' grid using five-ply CLT panels, the approach taken for Alki Elementary reduced timber volume by over 30%.

The team used Tally, a Whole Building Lifecycle Assessment (WBLCA) tool to quantify embodied carbon reductions for structural elements. To demonstrate reductions, there must be a baseline building design to compare the actual design results. The baseline building in this case is an optimized structural steel school of the exact same size, area, height and functional use – a typical design in the Pacific Northwest.

EMBODIED CARBON REDUCTION RESULTS

Confirming earlier assumptions, the Tally WBLCA results indicate that mass timber and optimized concrete reduced embodied carbon emissions signifi-

cantly. Early EPIC analysis estimated ~20% reduction, while Tally showed an even greater reduction of the actual design, at 30% lower global warming potential (GWP) for the mass timber option versus the baseline steel option.

The biggest decrease between the two options was in the product manufacturing stage (A1-A3). The mass timber option has a 68% reduction in GWP from the steel option for modules A1-A3.

This substantial difference is due to lower manufacturing emissions of wood-based elements, as well as the fact that this LCA study accounts for the biogenic carbon (carbon sequestered from the atmosphere during biomass growth) stored in the mass timber elements. For Alki Elementary, all wood is sourced from sustainably managed forests (PEFC certified), so the design team felt comfortable accounting for biogenic carbon.

For the steel building option, the structure was the largest contributor to embodied carbon. In contrast, for the mass timber building, the interior finishes were the largest contributor to GWP. Within the interior finishes, gypsum wallboard was the single most impactful material in the mass



The three-story mass timber structural frame allowed for the 83,000-square-foot building to be erected in just one month's time.

timber building, followed by cementitious gypsum-based topping for the CLT floors and then carpet.

Utilizing Building Transparency's EC3 tool, the specified carpet for the project represents a 62% reduction in GWP compared to the 2021 CLF baseline. The Gypsum Wall Board specified for the project represents a 36% reduction in GWP compared to the 2021 CLF baseline. These product-specific

reductions are not accounted for in the Tally WBLCA results. Consequently, these product choices reduce Alki Elementary Schools' overall carbon impact below what is reported by Tally.

SPS recognizes that measurement is critical for improvement. The analysis done here is to support that goal by demonstrating measured reductions in embodied carbon emissions through purposeful design,

collaboration, and the use Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) tools. Reducing embodied carbon emissions in Alki Elementary School brings SPS one step closer to achieving their resource conservation goals.

Joe Mayo is an associate principal and mass timber specialist at Mahlum and the author of "Solid Wood: Mass Timber Architecture, Technology and Design."

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DESIGNING FOR COGNITIVE DIVERSITY: A CASE FOR NEURO-INCLUSIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

Inclusion in the built environment means creating multiple pathways of learning supported by sensory-sensitive environments, quiet zones, and visual and tactile learning tools.

A variety of seating options support a broad spectrum of sensory needs at the Jewish Leadership Academy in Miami, providing students with a diverse range of textures and postures to select from.

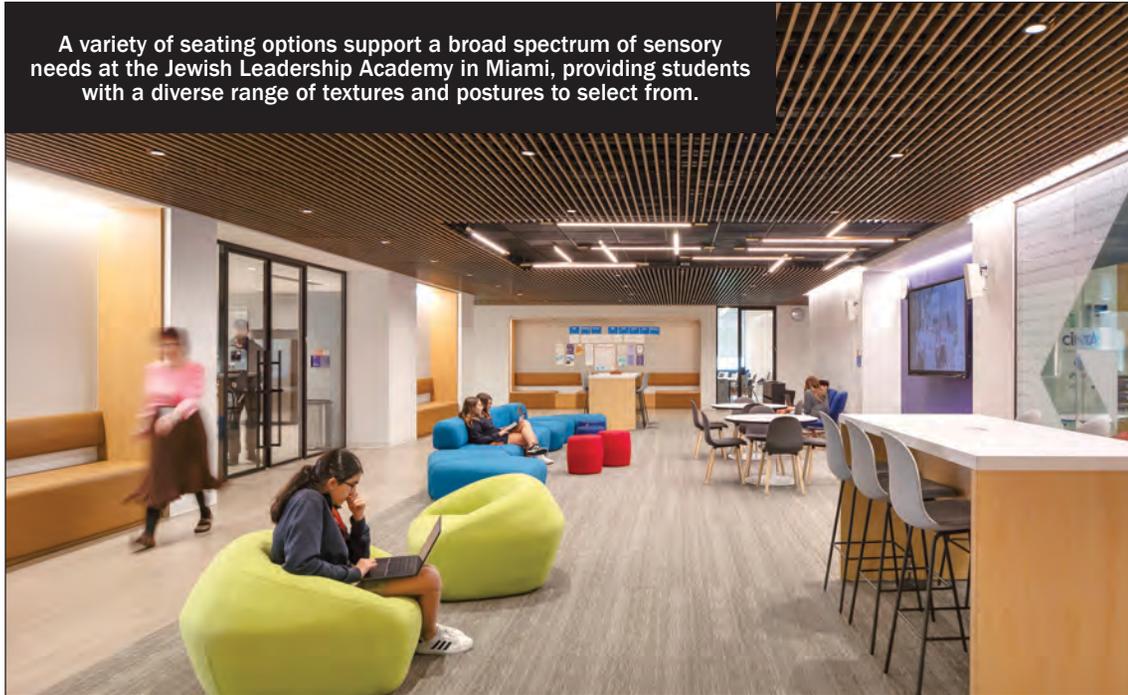


PHOTO BY JAMES EWING



Inclusive design is undergoing a transformation. Historically, schools were built around a narrow set of cognitive norms, often overlooking the diverse ways students experience and interact with their learning environments. Today, as our understanding of inclusion in the built environment expands to encompass cognitive diversity, the focus is shifting from purely physical accessibility to a more holistic approach — one that considers both body and mind.

BY MEAGHAN BEEVER GENSLER

The latest estimates from the World Health Organization suggest approximately 20% of the global population is neurodivergent. Neurodivergence includes diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, dyslexia, Tourette syndrome, and other conditions that describe behavioral, learning, and communication-related neurological variations.

With a significant portion of the population already diagnosed with a neurodivergent condition and the prevalence of diagnoses only expected to rise, it is increasingly critical to design educational spaces that accommodate variations in the way our brains process sensory inputs, informational cues, and social interactions.

Challenging the myth of the “average learner,” Gensler’s research has explored the value of designing for multiple pathways of learning, aligning with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles which include:

- **Multiple Means of Engagement** – designing for autonomy, motivation, and emotional connection
- **Multiple Means of Representation** – offering varied ways to access and process information
- **Multiple Means of Action and Expression** – enabling diverse methods for demonstrating learning

In the design of educational spaces, these principles are often supported through sensory-sensitive environments, quiet zones and breakout spaces, and visual and tactile learning supports.

TAKING INSPIRATION FROM WORKPLACE DESIGN

Many of the same principles of neuro-inclusive design that are being tested in school settings mirror those being implemented in the workplace.

Sensory-aware spaces: Offices are incorporating biophilic design and acoustic zoning. Schools are following suit with calming color palettes, natural light and quiet zones.

Flexible layouts: Just as modern offices offer a mix of collaborative and solo workspaces, classrooms are being reimaged with movable furniture, breakout areas and student choice in seating.

Wayfinding and clarity: Clear signage and intuitive layouts reduce cognitive load in both settings, helping individuals navigate spaces with less stress.

Autonomy and control: In the workplace, employees are often given agency to adjust lighting or choose where to work based on their sensory preferences or the cognitive resources required for a given task. In schools, students are being given similar control— over their tools, their space, and even their schedules.

Participatory design: Employers are recognizing a return on investment when workplace environments can be co-created with neurodivergent employees through workshops and feedback loops. Likewise, schools are increasingly involving neurodivergent students, parents, educators and specialists in the design process, soliciting early involvement of furniture and sensory design experts to ensure that environments are both functional and inclusive.

WHY IT MATTERS

Neurodivergent students face disproportionately high drop-out and unemployment

rates when it comes time to enter the workforce. According to the CDC, only 21% of autistic adults are employed full-time, but inclusive school environments can contribute to a reversal of this trend.

By supporting sensory, cognitive, and social needs, schools can help neurodivergent students focus on learning rather than coping with discomfort. This fosters confidence, self-advocacy, and executive functioning — skills that translate directly to the workplace.

In recent years, employers have turned their attention to creating neuro-inclusive workplace settings to support their neurodivergent employees — and for good reason. The business case for neuro-inclusion is compelling.

Companies like SAP, JPMorgan Chase, and EY have reported significant gains and innovation boosts from neurodiversity programs. For example, SAP saved \$40 million on a single project due to a neurodivergent employee's contribution, and JPMorgan found that neurodivergent employees in their program were more productive and completed tasks faster than their peers.

Moreover, studies have shown that psychological

safety in the workplace is a key predictor of both career satisfaction and team performance. For many neurodivergent employees, the pressure to conform to majority cognitive norms often leads to masking behaviors — an indication of low psychological safety, or the sense that a person can be themselves without fear of judgement.

This lack of psychological safety significantly hinders productivity and well-being. In contrast, teams that cultivate psychological safety consistently demonstrate stronger performance outcomes.

Additionally, Gensler's research on neurodiversity in the workplace highlights an "impact gap" between the workplace experiences of neurodivergent and neurotypical employees. Sensory inputs accumulate throughout the day, often requiring neurodivergent individuals to exert greater effort to regulate and recover. This disparity underscores the need for environments that proactively support neuro-inclusion, addressing the sensory, cognitive and emotional needs of neurodivergent individuals.

FROM CLASSROOM TO CAREER

Neuro-inclusive school environments have been

The Student Success Center at Western Oregon University reduces cognitive load by using a clean, uncluttered design, simple furnishings, and clear signage and semi-enclosed booths.



PHOTO BY HEYWOOD CHAN

shown to improve focus, reduce anxiety, and enhance academic outcomes. The goal is not merely to accommodate neurodivergent students, but to empower them — preparing them to thrive in inclusive professional environments. Neuro-inclusion creates a pipeline for inclu-

sive employment, by nurturing neurodivergent individuals from early education through to the workforce.

Key benefits of neuro-inclusive school design include:

- **Developing transferable skills:** Inclusive schools provide neurodivergent students with environments that

accommodate their sensory, cognitive, and social needs. This allows them to focus on learning while fostering skills like self-regulation and executive functioning that are directly transferable to the workplace.

COGNITIVE DIVERSITY — PAGE 22



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Embracing mass timber in school construction...



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...for faster and safer construction



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WOOD GOES BACK TO SCHOOL

AEC professionals can help schools overcome traditional mass timber impediments so they can build better learning environments for students, faculty and the earth.



PCS helped reduce insurance risk at Alki Elementary School by providing insurance brokers with examples of successful CLT school projects.

PHOTO COURTESY OF MAHLUM ARCHITECTS

As we pack backpacks and lunches, students and parents around the Pacific Northwest are looking ahead to another exciting school year. As structural design partners, our thoughts turn to the types of schools in which our children learn. Will they be the traditional buildings of our youth, or better environments for learning and student health?



BY ALEX LEGÉ
PCS STRUCTURAL SOLUTIONS

The materials we use to build our schools matter for our students. We can create beautiful, open spaces that use biophilic design to improve physical and mental well-being by leaning into the materials common to the Pacific Northwest. Mass tim-

ber, long overlooked by public schools, is finally becoming a material of choice for districts looking to create exceptional learning environments for students, faculty and their communities.

Wood buildings have multiple benefits, delivering healthier buildings for students and the environment. Students and faculty benefit from the biophilic features of wood buildings through better indoor air quality and environments that promote lower stress, resulting in better learning outcomes and higher staff satisfaction.

A highly sustainable material, mass timber delivers up to a 30% reduction in embodied carbon over steel. Improved forestry, including thinning for wildfire protection, doubles the sustainability benefits.

MODERN MASS TIMBER

While large timbers were used in local schools at the



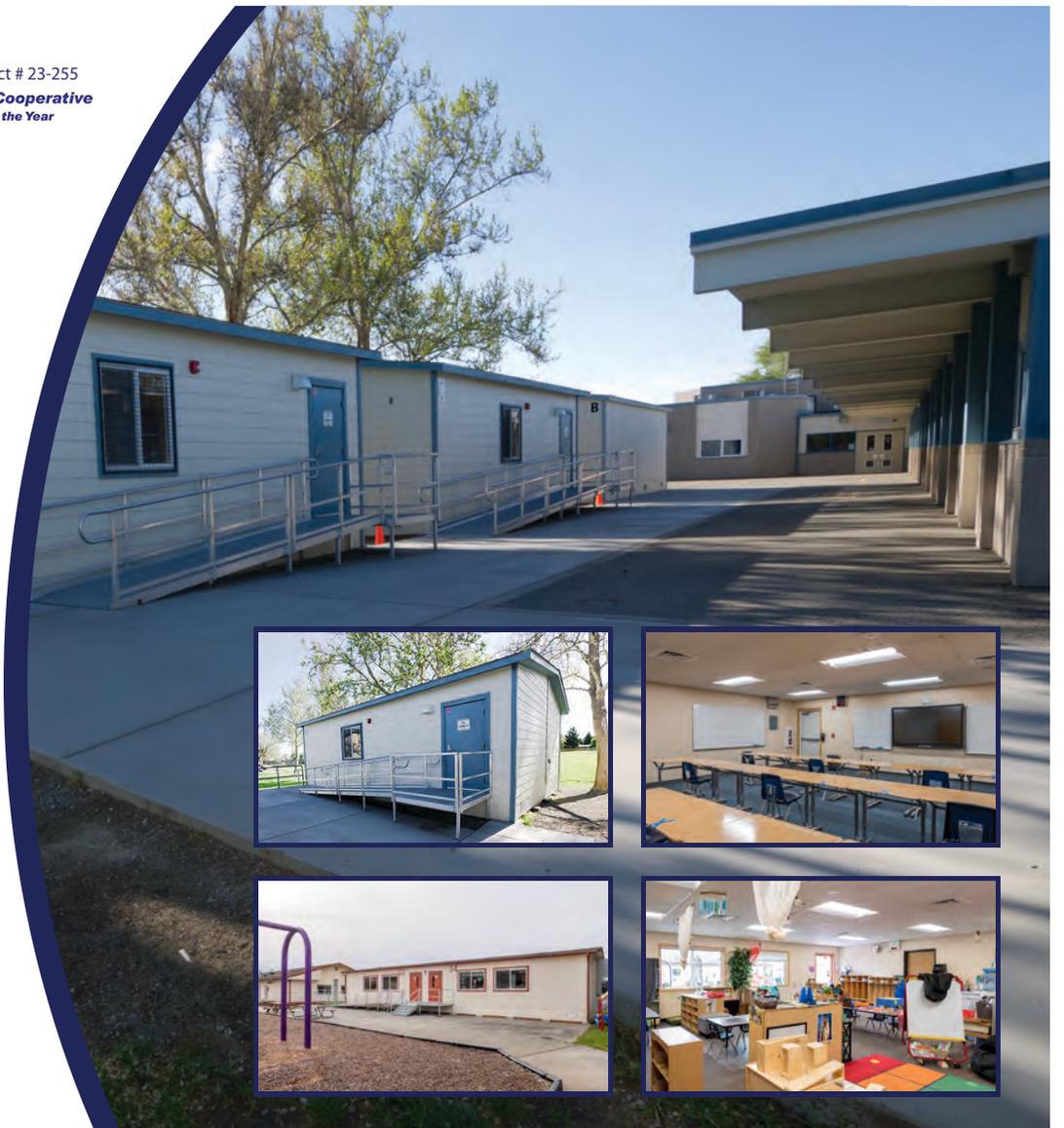
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start of the 20th century, modern mass timber is a new approach using large, engineered panels created from smaller glued timber pieces. The new material includes permutations such as Cross Laminated Timber (CLT), Dowel Laminated Timber (DLT), and glued and laminated beams and columns (Glulam).

Experienced teams have already developed and proved solutions to technical problems when building with mass timber, such as the building envelope, fire safety and seismic resistance. However, real and perceived challenges unique to school construction keep many schools using traditional construction materials.

These challenges are centered around three core issues: insurance, maintenance and construction costs. Fortunately, project advocacy by design professionals can help districts deliver mass timber schools that overcome these challenges and realize new benefits.

INSURANCE

Builder's Risk insurance is a specialized type of insurance that protects buildings and materials during construction. Unfortunately, because the use of mass timber is so new, insurance providers don't yet know how to price it and typically put a massive premium on the risk.

However, by starting to work with insurance brokers early in design, structural engineers at PCS have helped school districts navigate complicated paperwork and talk to brokers about our experience with mass timber schools, greatly reducing Builder's Risk insurance costs.

At Seattle Public Schools' 83,000 square-foot Alki Elementary, our team provided the insurance brokers with examples of successful schools, walking them through the real risk profile for the use of CLT and Glulam. The resulting policy cost was substantially lower than the initial quotes.

Joseph Mayo, associate principal at Mahlum, noted that "building experience in mass timber is critical. At Alki, demonstrating mass timber expertise was essential for attaining lower insurance rates and keeping mass timber on the table."

MAINTENANCE

Some district facilities staff shy away from mass timber due to worries of vandalism and damage to exposed surfaces. However, having com-

The Washington School for the Deaf Divine Academic Building in Vancouver, Wash. used a rigid simple grid system of CLT panels and glulam which reduced overall costs for a beautiful, open learning environment.



PHOTO BY LARA SWIMMER/ESTO

pleted many schools with exposed timber, the PCS team has seen that students actually treat the wood structures with respect, more so than traditional drywall.

Some districts have taken a smaller-scale approach to incorporate timber construction. For example, Edmonds School District elected to use CLT panels and Glulam for their new 50,000 square-foot elementary school, and traditional steel for the remainder of the project at the College Place campus. The district wanted to reap the benefits of a mass timber learning environment but opted to take a lower-risk approach to see how the school would perform over time with younger students.

Similarly, North Thurston School district used DLT panels in their new student commons at River Ridge High School to take advantage of exposed structural wood with acoustic properties in the school's premier space.

COMPARING COSTS

When structure alone is examined through a traditional cost per square foot lens, timber appears more expensive than steel, but



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A DECADE OF DESIGN COLLABORATION: EASTSIDE PREPARATORY SCHOOL AND THE MAKING OF A CAMPUS

How comprehensive master planning transformed a 1980s office park into a vibrant, light-filled campus designed for connection, curiosity and belonging.

Eastside Preparatory School was designed by PUBLIC47 Architects over 10 years and multiple renovations.



PHOTOS BY LARA SWIMMER

A central plaza built in 2018 along with TALI Hall introduced generous outdoor spaces for gathering and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, became an invaluable place for students to eat and socialize.



This year marks the 10-year anniversary of PUBLIC47 Architects' design collaboration with Eastside Preparatory School (EPS), an independent college preparatory school in Kirkland serving grades 5 through 12. What began as a collection



BY JEFF BOONE
PUBLIC47

of low-rise office buildings in a 1980s office park is now a cohesive, pedestrian-friendly campus alive with the energy of the students and teachers. Over the past decades, the school and our design team have transformed nondescript, low-ceiling office suites into light-filled, interconnected spaces for learning and building community.

The project is more than a series of building upgrades. It is a case study in how comprehensive master planning can turn an unlikely site into a vibrant educational campus, one that expresses the identity of the school through spaces designed for connection, curiosity and belonging.

FROM OFFICE PARK TO OPPORTUNITY

When Eastside Prep acquired its first buildings, the site hardly resembled a campus. It was a typical suburban office park: small two-story buildings filled with dentist offices and accounting firms, surrounded by parking lots with no pedestrian flow between them. Inside, the spaces were dark and generic, constrained by low ceilings and minimal natural light.

There were also regulatory challenges. The property was organized as a planned unit development, which meant that each new intervention had to work within strict building footprints. The question became: how do you transform these modest structures into a cohesive, walkable and

inspiring environment for education?

DESIGNING FOR LEARNING, CONNECTION AND BELONGING

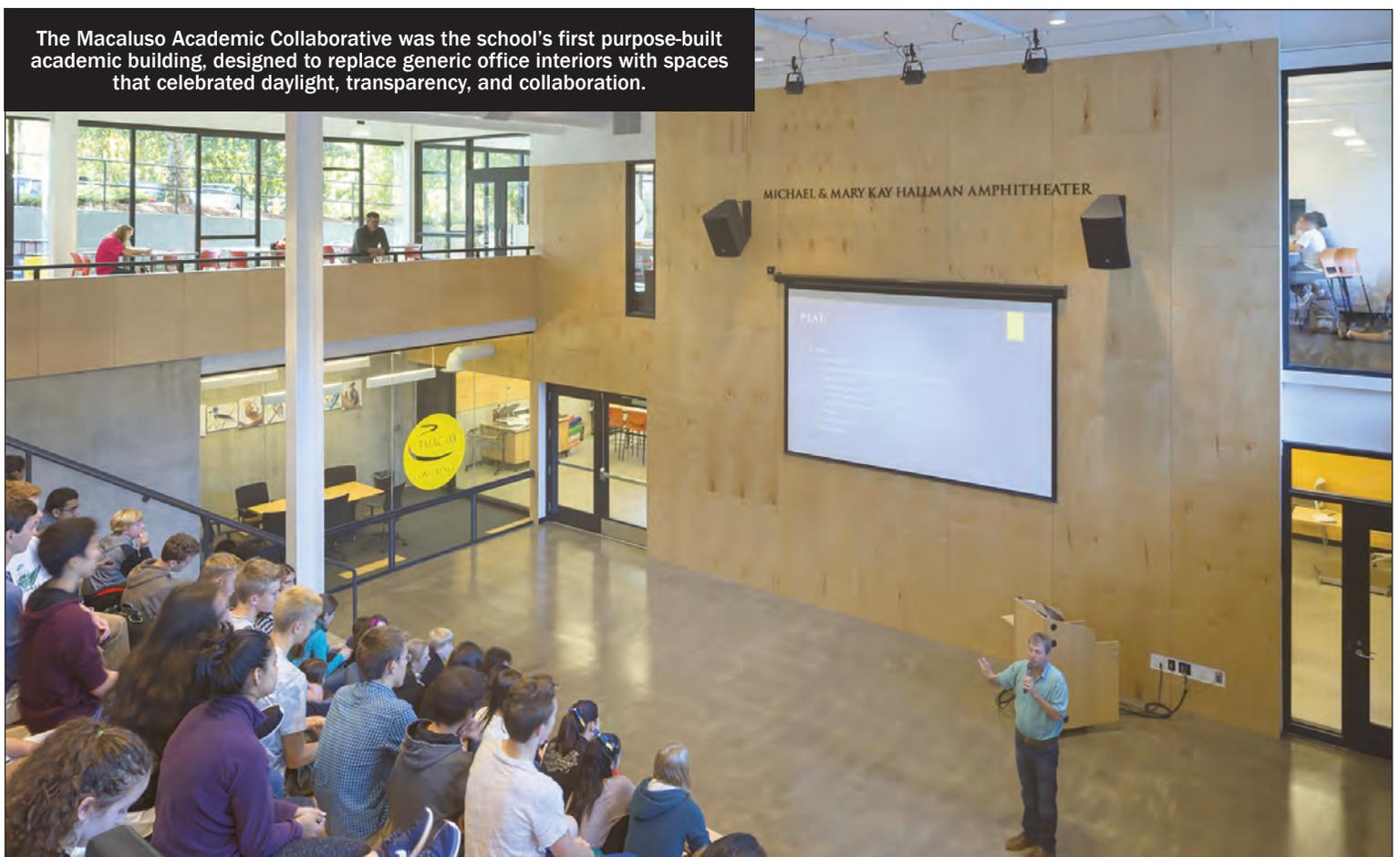
The vision took shape in 2015 with the Macaluso Academic Collaborative (TMAC). At 20,000 square feet, TMAC introduced science labs, digital fabrication spaces, classrooms, an amphitheater, and a 10,000-square-foot gym. It was the school's first purpose-built academic building, designed to replace generic office interiors with spaces that celebrated daylight, transparency, and collaboration. TMAC established a design language for the future campus: openness, flexibility, and community at the core.

As the school grew, so did the campus. In 2018, Eastside Prep added TALI Hall, a 96,000-square-foot facility named for the school's motto: Think, Act, Lead, Innovate. The project expanded learning and performing arts spaces, and it also added a central plaza. This area addressed a 12-foot grade change across the site, creating a pedestrian-friendly and fully accessible connection. The plaza introduced generous outdoor spaces for gathering and, during the COVID-19 pandemic, became an invaluable place for students to safely eat and socialize outside.

Inside TALI Hall, the theater became both a design challenge and a centerpiece. The school needed a fully functioning black box theater that could seat up to 600 people, a tall order on a tight urban site. Working with faculty, we developed a highly flexible performance space: retractable seating, a mezzanine that could open or close depending on the event, and acoustically sealed glass doors connecting the theater to the atrium.

With top-tier lighting and sound systems, the space supports professional-level productions while also hosting assemblies, science fairs and parent conferences. What could have been a massive, underused facility instead became a dynamic heart of the campus, equally suited to Shakespeare, dance classes, or a community banquet.

Subsequent projects continued to build on this foundation. In 2021, we completed a middle school renovation and addition with high-performance envelopes, natural ventilation, and optimized daylighting. In 2022, the Levinger-Poole Commons dining building renovations transformed an ordinary cafete-



The Macaluso Academic Collaborative was the school's first purpose-built academic building, designed to replace generic office interiors with spaces that celebrated daylight, transparency, and collaboration.

PHOTO BY LARA SWIMMER

ria into a vibrant hub where students and faculty gather across grade levels.

Across each project, the guiding principle has been the same: create an interlinked series of communal spaces, large and small, that encourage chance encounters and foster belonging. Whether in the dining hall, the atrium gallery, the outdoor amphitheater, or the informal seating nooks scattered throughout, the campus is designed to maximize the moments in between classes, where unplanned interactions spark community.

ARCHITECTURE REFLECTING SCHOOL VALUES

The architecture does not dictate the identity of Eastside Prep, it reflects and reinforces it. The school's pedagogy values community, collaboration, and organic interaction between students and faculty. Our role as architects has been to create the conditions for those values to thrive.

We designed a variety of spaces for different learning styles. For students who thrive in bustling environments, there are open commons and "rail car" seating areas on the edges of activity. For those who need fewer distractions, we created enclosed guided study halls and acoustically private "phone booths." By offering a spectrum of environments, the campus welcomes neu-



The 2021 middle school renovation and addition includes high-performance envelopes, natural ventilation, and optimized daylighting.

PHOTO BY CLEARY O'FARRELL

rodiverse learners and supports accessibility in all its forms.

Ultimately, the architecture of EPS is found not only in classrooms or labs but in the spaces between them — the thresholds, the courtyards, the plazas, the galleries — where informal connections shape a student's sense of belonging.

LOOKING AHEAD

Ten years in, the Eastside Prep campus is an example

of how to reclaim and reimagine suburban office parks for community use. The campus makes efficient use of limited urban land while transforming a one-car-dominated site into a pedestrian-focused environment.

Looking forward, EPS continues to acquire adjacent buildings as opportunities arise, always with an eye on how each piece fits into the whole. Growth for growth's sake is not the goal. The goal is to sustain the school's mis-

sion and adapt the campus to meet the evolving needs of students over the next 50 years.

What began as an unlikely site has become a thriving campus, and the collaboration between Eastside Prep and PUBLIC47 continues to show how architecture can elevate not just a place, but the values of a community.

Jeff Boone is a partner and co-founder of Seattle-based architecture firm PUBLIC47.

The University Cooperative School's upgraded brick exterior reflects the building's historic character.



PHOTOS BY CLEARY O'FARRELL

THE UNIVERSITY COOPERATIVE SCHOOL'S JOURNEY OF REUSE AND INNOVATION

The school's phased renovations were carefully coordinated with a whole-building seismic retrofit, allowing the school to modernize, expand its programs, and maintain full operations during construction.

The University Cooperative School (UCoop) is a progressive learning environment serving pre-K through 5th-grade students in Seattle's North University District. The school inhabits the historic Maxwell Auto Garage, a 100-year-old landmark that embodies the character of the surrounding neighborhood. The adaptive reuse of the building brings pride to the school in both preserving history and shaping its future.



BY STEFAN HAMPDEN
CAST
ARCHITECTURE

Over the past decade, a series of carefully planned renovations was coordinated with a whole-building seismic retrofit. This allowed the school to modernize the facility, expand programs, and safeguard the building for future generations. Sensitivity to the school calendar was paramount—maintaining the school's operations while coordinating the construction with minimal disruption

to student life.

Originally built in 1925, the Maxwell Building has undergone a complete transformation from a commercial auto garage into a vibrant learning community. To honor its historic character, the design approach demonstrated sensitivity to the building's distinctive features — celebrating its industrial character, steel sash windows, and structural framework — while upgrading it to meet current codes and the needs of 21st-century education.

Original brick, a beloved feature, was preserved to celebrate the building's industrial past. The layout and circulation align with the school's progressive curriculum, creating spaces that encourage movement, collaboration and creative exploration. The newly upgraded Pre-K entrance brings an additional entry for the school's youngest children, and the incorporation of an exterior mural brings a sense of joy and energy on arrival.

A hallmark of the school's ongoing renovation effort is its leadership in resilience and seismic upgrades. In 2025, UCoop became the first school in Seattle to com-

plete a full seismic retrofit and be officially removed from the city of Seattle's Unreinforced Masonry (URM) list. Using the city's URM ordinance as a framework, the team developed a phased plan to complete the work in tandem with the teaching calendar, budget cycles and other planned improvements.

The seismic upgrades were coordinated with each phase of the renovation, including a whole-building roof replacement, ensuring the efficient use of resources and minimal disruption to school operations. The retrofit was coordinated as a whole, but executed phase-by-phase with a corresponding renovation. This reduced redundant work and kept the team moving forward in digestible steps towards the larger goal.

In 2013, the lower level was expanded to include a multipurpose gym, music studio and additional restrooms — spaces that are actively used for performances, community gatherings, and creative activities. The gym accommodates games, music, and larger theater productions, all reinforcing school values of creativity and skills building.

PROJECT TEAM

Client: University Cooperative School

Architect: CAST architecture

Owners Representative: Westlake Consulting Group

Contractor: Sellen Construction

Structural Engineer: Swenson Say Fagét

Electrical Engineer: TFWB Engineers

Estimating: Rider Levett Bucknall

Special Inspections-Mayes: Terracon

An open and bright stairway connects the two levels and offers an informal gathering space on the large risers.

In a 2018 renovation, a dedicated second-grade classroom was created, the first-grade classroom was enlarged, and the commons area was renovated by reorganizing existing spaces. With the North walls of the building exposed, new shearwalls were added to reinforce the hollow clay party wall.

The most recent renovations were carried out in two phases over consecutive summers. In 2023, the art room was relocated to the lower level with reworked storage, counters, a kiln room, and workspace tai-

lored to students and staff. The garage door of the art room opens to flex space, which, in turn, is an eddy space on the edge of the large, multipurpose commons.

The design balances creativity and community by providing flexible spaces for individual focus, small group activities, and full-school gatherings. Thoughtfully placed eddy spaces along the edges of larger areas support focused learning or collaboration while maintaining connection to the broader school environment.

The renovation of the final portion of the lower level marked the expansion of UCoop's Early Learning Cen-

ter, further extending its pre-K offerings. The phase also added a maker space, counseling offices, additional staff space, and student and adult restrooms. The robust ganged floor structure, once supporting cars, was sandblasted and exposed as a striking architectural element.

The following summer of 2024, renovations of the main floor were finished, which included a new science classroom, which took over the old art room, and a renovated language arts classroom. This phase also completed the final details of the seismic work, bringing the entire building up to the city's current structural standards.

Sustainability has been integral to the renovations and was a large part of the decision to undertake an adaptive reuse rather than new construction. The building incorporates daylighting strategies, low-VOC paints and finishes, Declare Red List-Free rubber flooring, and improved indoor air quality through energy recovery ventilators.

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, additional environmental improvements were implemented in 2021, including window replacements with operable glaz-

With an improv stage and flex studio, the new student commons offers areas for both small and large gatherings and activities, while encouraging creativity and self-expression.



ing to improve natural ventilation and complement the historic steel fenestration. Rooftop HVAC systems were upgraded with UV-filtration technology, further improving indoor air quality.

The collaborative work on

UCoop's Maxwell Building is a model of how thoughtful, phased renovation can preserve historic character while delivering safety and modern educational performance. Through adaptive reuse, seismic upgrades,

and sustainable design, the school has created a durable, healthy, and inspiring environment for students and teachers alike, ensuring this neighborhood landmark continues to serve the community for decades to come.

Since co-founding CAST architecture in 1999, Stefan Hampden has led community and residential projects across the western states and is a WAsafe Building Safety Evaluator.

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TWENTY-FIVE FEET OF GRADE CHANGE, 100 YEARS OF HISTORY: RE-IMAGINING SPS' MOST COMPLEX SITE

Montlake Elementary's new design brings a needed accessibility upgrade to the historic building while prioritizing flexible learning spaces and secure single-entry access.

The renovation quadrupled the building's footprint, growing from the 16,500-square-foot historic building to 90,500 total square feet with a 74,000-square-foot, three-story addition that includes a gym and multiple levels of play space.

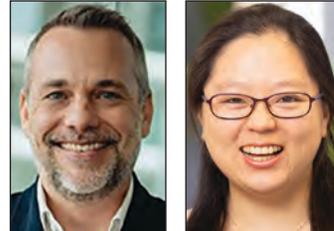


PHOTO COURTESY OF SKANSKA

The new ADA-accessible entry plaza unites past and present, with the landmarked 1924 building standing alongside its 2025 companion, ready to serve another generation of students.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LPD ENGINEERING



BY TODD FERKING & LILY SIU
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

With 25 feet of grade change, zero lot line constraints, and just 1.65 acres, Montlake Elementary's addition and historic preservation presented challenges more typical of downtown construction. Under the urban site conditions emerged a design serving current and future needs, while honoring the historic character.

IT STARTS WITH THE STUDENTS

"Every student. Every classroom. Every day," says Richard Best, executive director of Capital Projects for Seattle Public Schools, describing the district's strategic plan motto. With 50,000 students speaking 150 languages and 5% of the student population experiencing homelessness, each design decision carries weight. "How am I creating academic success for students? What types of supports do they need?" Best asks.

For Montlake, that meant addressing nearly a century of barriers while building for the future. The original entrance was accessible only by stairs, leaving the site non-ADA compliant for its 100-year history. For nearly as long, portables had also occupied the grounds. The new design eliminates both issues, while prioritizing flexible learning spaces and secure single-entry access.

Support also includes energy efficiency. Money not spent on utilities can be redirected to curriculum and teacher resources, and healthy indoor air quality enhances learning outcomes. Montlake's combined projected Energy Use Intensity (EUI) of 20.2 will sig-

nificantly outperform typical schools, with the new addition targeting an ambitious 15 EUI.

EMBRACING TOPOGRAPHY AS A DESIGN DRIVER

The site's constraints demanded solutions you'd typically see in downtown commercial construction, not elementary schools. However, the challenging topography provided an opportunity to connect with the regional history. The nearby Montlake Cut — a man-made canal built in 1916 to connect Lake Washington and Lake Union — shaped both the physical and cultural importance of the Montlake neighborhood.

This transformation of terrain inspired the design team's approach to the school site. Rather than fighting the topography, they embraced it, applying a design concept they called "Carve."

A courtyard level was created by cutting into the site, solving multiple problems: at-grade loading access, an accessible plaza entrance, and integration between the historic building and new addition. The excavation at Montlake carved away layers to reveal new paths of flow and circulation. The 4,000 cubic yards of soil removed was shipped to John Rogers Elementary School (also designed by DLR Group and LPD Engineering) to build their fields.

ENGINEERING FOR CONSTRAINTS

The historic building required shoring on three sides during excavation, and coordination with Urban Forestry to preserve mature street trees led to various sidewalk and utility configurations that protected the existing canopy while maintaining functionality. Close coordination between the design team, GC/CM contractor Skanska, and the city was essential to navigate the complex site constraints, excavation in the right-of-way, and community concerns.

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DESIGN

The design process included over 75 community

engagement points, resulting in the project vision of a “verdant garden of change-makers” organized around four key themes: inclusive neighborhood network, spirit of place, holistic health and cultivating a resilient future.

Each theme came to life in the form of deliberate design decisions. Inclusive neighborhood network placed all community amenities at the accessible courtyard level. The spirit of place concept shaped both the material palette and the “Carve” design approach, drawing from indigenous traditions and regional history.

Holistic health prioritized natural daylight in 95% of spaces, and visual connections to nature, guiding the placement of the addition on the north side of the site, maximizing daylight for play areas. Cultivating a resilient future led to building systems designed for 100-year life with advanced energy management systems and controls, solar panels, and heat pumps to support the district’s clean energy goals.

Special attention was paid to social-emotional learning, with every nook designed as a space where students can regulate themselves when needed. The Family Room provides meeting space and storage for supplies, currently supporting PTA activities and staff development while being designed to accommodate families experiencing food or housing insecurity — demonstrating how flexible design can anticipate changing community needs.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION: INTERIOR AND EXTERIOR

Montlake’s landmark designation protected not only the historic building’s exterior but also the interior classrooms. While modernizing the facility and its building systems, the team had to maintain the historical integrity of original spaces while providing equity in amenities compared to new classrooms.

The original flooring, case-work, doors, pulleys and handles were all refurbished and restored to working condition. The historic windows were refurbished rather than replaced, and the feature arched windows were completely removed, restored and reinstalled.

By lowering the addition to create the courtyard, the new addition is held to the same height as the original historic building. This prevents it from visually overwhelming the original historic building, while respecting the overall scale and feeling of the

surrounding neighborhood, preserving sunlight access for neighboring properties.

LESSONS FOR URBAN SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT

On a site smaller than a typical city block, every square foot counts. The project quadrupled the building’s footprint, growing from the 16,500-square-foot historic building to 90,500 total square feet with a 74,000-square-foot, three-story addition that includes a gym and multiple levels of play space.

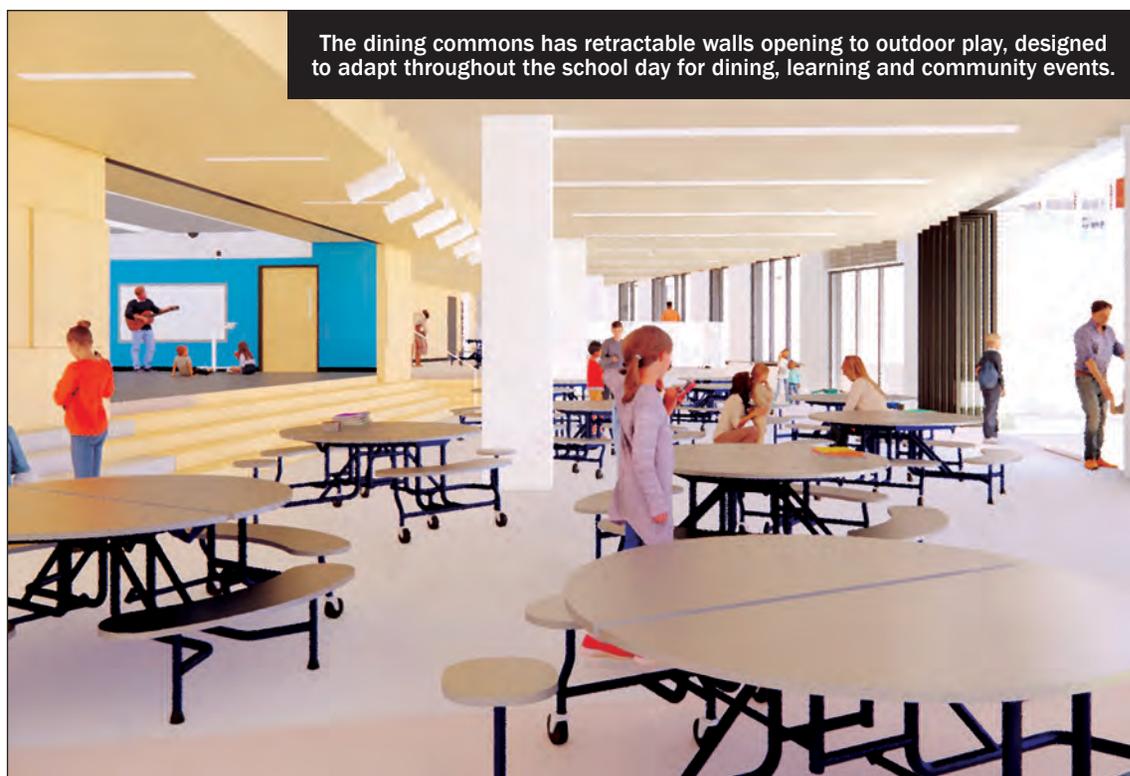
This approach provides ~25,000 square feet of additional outdoor play space across ground level, learning terraces, and a rooftop field above the gymnasium — the first one Seattle Public Schools has ever built. The courtyard playground structure is mounted on the lid of the underground stormwater detention vault, exemplifying the project’s efficiency and coordination across disciplines.

Large operable folding glass doors between the dining commons and the courtyard enable seamless indoor/outdoor flow, creating one large flexible space for dining and activities.

As students settle into their new classrooms this fall, Montlake Elementary shows that site constraints can drive innovation rather than compromise quality. For a school district serving one of the nation’s most diverse student populations, the project illustrates how thoughtful design can serve both immediate needs and long-term educational goals.

In a city where development pressure continues to intensify, Montlake Elementary offers a roadmap for maximizing educational opportunity on every available square foot.

Todd Ferking is national K-12 education design leader and principal at DLR Group with 25 years of experience creating student-focused learning environments that integrate emerging technologies through collaborative design. Lily Siu is a senior project manager and civil engineer at LPD Engineering with nearly 15 years of experience and a focus on sustainable civil engineering solutions for urban infill and constrained sites.



The dining commons has retractable walls opening to outdoor play, designed to adapt throughout the school day for dining, learning and community events.

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Who should attend:
Subcontractors, suppliers and local businesses interested in the commercial construction industry!

Women and Minority-owned businesses are encouraged to participate!



Light refreshments will be served.
Please plan to arrive before 11 to sign in.
Questions: Meriann.talbert@bayley.net

BEYOND THE BOND: CREATIVE WAYS SCHOOLS ARE FINANCING CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS

Districts have options beyond traditional bond financing for school projects, and they may discover opportunities for broader community connections.

In recent years, school districts across Washington state have faced challenges achieving the 60% supermajority required to pass bonds to fund major capital projects within their districts. Without this traditional form of funding, districts have explored alternative strategies for generating capital dollars to address their most chronic infrastructure needs. They have also viewed these infrastructure investments as an opportunity to strengthen community trust by underscoring how these improvements directly benefit students and demonstrate responsible stewardship of public funds.



BY MELISSA MCFADGEN
NAC ARCHITECTURE

SHIFTING FOCUS TO CAPITAL LEVIES

Capital levies offer one such mechanism to generate funding for many of the 295 school districts within Washington state. With the typical levy duration lasting 3-6 years as opposed to a 20-30 year bond (think car loan versus a home loan), levies generate funds quickly to support smaller projects.

A key component of capital levies is the 50% majority required to pass versus the 60% super-majority for a bond. However, levies require careful planning. Dollars are collected two times per year over the duration of the levy; in lieu of lump sum amounts that are generated in a bond. While the cash flow dictates the size and schedule of projects, levies are vital to addressing urgent infrastructure and growth needs.

These safety measures might include security cameras, access controls or secure vestibules, large scale maintenance options such as reroofs, playground repairs, or repurposing outdated classroom spaces — like computer labs—to support

current educational needs.

After their 2024 bond to replace three schools failed, West Valley School District in Spokane Valley, Wash., turned to capital levies. With these levies, they were able to fund critical district repairs and improvements to add small classroom additions to address growth. Building on the success of the initial capital levy, they passed a second levy which will construct new bus loops to separate parent and bus traffic, creating safer campuses for students, families, and staff. These projects demonstrated to the community wise use of tax dollars, building on the foundation of trust in the district for future bond and capital levy measures.

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF GRANTS

When a school bond does not pass, a school district cannot ask for state assistance due to unhoused students or age eligible buildings, therefore as the passing rate for school bond measures has declined so have the dollars requested by school districts from the state for “matching funds”. This reduction in spending on state “matching funds” associated with bonds has translated into some additional grant funding opportunities for school districts. These grants provide another avenue to address minor capital projects that don’t require an election and can offer an infusion of capital dollars to enhance a district’s ability to maintain or expand their facilities. Understanding the timelines for grant application, along with the criteria to apply for the grants, is critical to success. Some grants are open ended, while others are more specifically focused on replacement of systems, such as an upgrade/replacement to an outdated HVAC system.

Most grants include at least two phases. The first phase is typically a planning grant to study the need, define potential solutions, and develop a project budget to achieve the potential solutions. This phase serves as

Spokane's West Valley School District used capital levy dollars to replace the Ness Elementary School library, allowing for former library space to be converted into much-needed counseling and staff support spaces.



PHOTO BY JONATHAN PECE

the basis for subsequent grant requests to fund the design and construction of the project. This may mean that the planning grant and the capital grant can extend over multiple budget cycles. This type of grant process may not address the urgent needs some districts are facing, therefore exploring grant opportunities, such as the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) urgent repair grant. This may be more aligned to address immediate district needs. Ultimately, grants provide another pathway for districts to acquire dollars to improve and maintain their facilities to best support students and the broader community.

ADDITIONAL GRANT CONSIDERATIONS

Grants are often focused on school districts with specific characteristics. These factors could include tribal, small (1,000 or fewer students), and rural districts, along with those looking to expand early learning classroom spaces. Other grants require some form of match or in-kind contribution from the district. This varies from

grant to grant and often changes between each issuance of the grant, so it is critical for districts to read each application thoroughly to optimize potential for success.

Grant funding is also available to address other unique conditions such as seismic, environmental, or energy efficiency. These dollars could be used for testing or analysis for lead in water remediation and performing ASHRAE Level 1 assessments in preparation for the Clean Building Act. Like capital levies, the size of these grants often supports targeted improvements, but they are not sizeable enough to fund a full-scale replacement project. Some example grants funded through OSPI can be found here: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/school-buildings-facilities/grants-funding-resources-non-scrap>

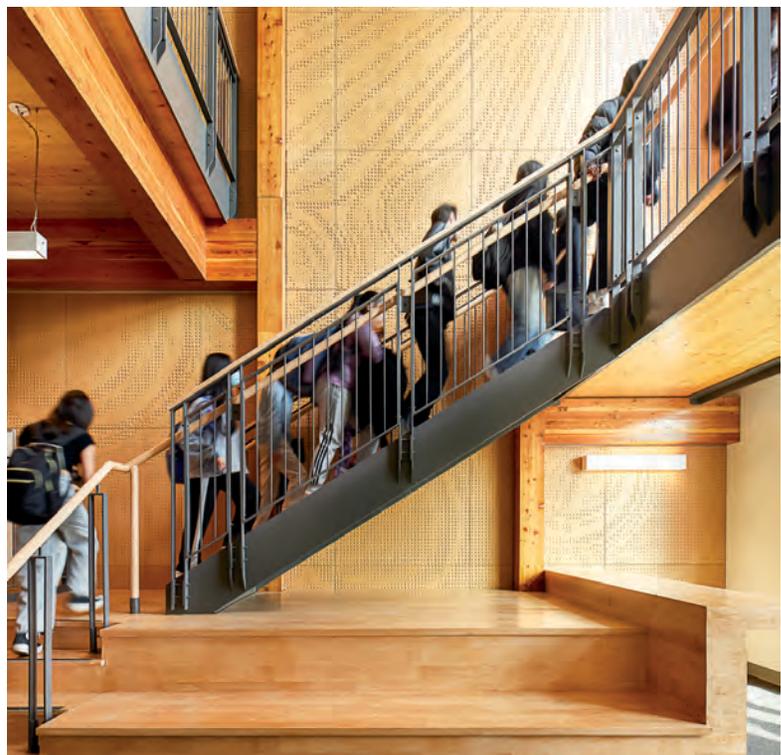
BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Collaborations with local partners — such as public libraries, parks and recreation departments, and healthcare providers — extend community resourc-

es while broadening opportunity. Strong partnerships expand services, reduce costs, and strengthen communities through mutually beneficial programs.

These collaborations come in many forms, depending on community needs. For example, a public library may partner with a school district’s library system to share collections, giving students broader access and easier book checkout and return. Co-located health or dental clinics on campuses improve student access to care without the need to leave school. Similarly, partnerships with parks and recreation departments can mean shared athletic fields and maintenance costs. During the school day, playfields support academic programs; after hours, they serve clubs and community recreation, maximizing use and reducing long-term operational expenses.

These partnerships also allow for multiple organizations to share in development costs. This may look like a school district and a library system running a shared capital development



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More than \$10.2 million was reinvested into the Tahoma community during the construction of Tahoma High School and Regional Learning Center.



PHOTO BY BOOMER'S PHOTOGRAPHY

MORE THAN A SCHOOL: HOW LOCAL INVESTMENT BUILDS STRONGER COMMUNITIES

School building projects should include a commitment to local businesses, broadening student horizons and engaging with the larger community.

When a school bond passes, it's a powerful statement. Voters have chosen to invest not only in their students' futures but also in the long-term vitality of their communities. School construction is about more than beams, bricks and buildings; it's also about relationships, opportunities and creating lasting community impact.



BY BRIAN URBAN
SKANSKA USA
BUILDING

Communities place a great deal of trust in the general contractors building their schools. That trust should extend beyond safely and efficiently delivering the school on time and on budget. It should include a shared commitment to maximize the impact of every tax dollar and keeping as much of the project's economic activity within the local community as possible.

This belief drives our focus on "local spend," which includes awarding contracts to area subcontractors, hiring from the community, and even tracking how much is spent at local businesses during the course of the project. This isn't just good PR, it's good business, and it's the right thing to do.

LOCAL DOLLARS, LOCAL IMPACT

Tahoma High School and Regional Learning Center

One shining example of this approach was our work on the Tahoma High School and Regional Learning Cen-

Local businesses helped make the construction of Vashon Island High School a success. Approximately \$1 million in documented local spending went to island businesses.



PHOTO BY LARA SWIMMER

ter in Maple Valley. Skanska and the district identified ZIP codes that defined "local," set spending targets, and tracked subcontracts, purchases, and labor accordingly. The result? More than \$10.2 million was reinvested into the Tahoma community, from local lumber to lunches bought at local restaurants.

Bryant Montessori

At Tacoma's Bryant Montessori, we nearly doubled our local investment goal,

achieving nearly 57% local spend on a project that aimed for 30%. This investment not only contributed directly to the local economy, but also helped strengthen relationships with local subcontractors, many of whom have gone on to work with us again.

Central Kitsap High School & Middle School

In Kitsap County, our team launched a five-week bidder readiness workshop to help

prepare local businesses to successfully bid and work on the GC/CM project to build the new Central Kitsap High School and Middle School. Two companies, Sablehaus Painting and Viking Fencing, were new to GC/CM and new to working with Skanska. They not only submitted bids (as did every company that attended the workshop) but also won sizable contracts and have continued bidding and winning work with Skanska on multiple projects since.

Vashon Island High School

For the Vashon Island community, a tight-knit, ferry-access-only island of roughly 10,000 residents, local impact wasn't just a hope, it was a mandate. When voters approved the bond to build a new high school, they did so with the understanding that as many dollars as possible would stay local. During Skanska's interview process, the district asked tough questions about how we planned to deliver on that

promise. With limited local business infrastructure to support large-scale construction, we had to think creatively. Our team developed a strategy to right-size bid packages in line with Washington state law, making it easier for small, local firms to participate. We hosted three town hall sessions with residents to understand who could contribute, then tailored our buyout strategy and sourcing accordingly.

The result? Approximately \$1 million in documented local spending went to island businesses. From materials at Vashon True Value and Island Lumber, to wood handrails crafted by Vashon Forest Stewards, to concrete from Cal Portland's Vashon ready mix and aggregate plant, the project supported the local economy at every level. Even fuel for trucks came from a local supplier, Williams Heating.

Perhaps most memorable was the school cafeteria's daily contribution. The student-run "Crow's Nest" became a beloved breakfast and lunch spot for workers arriving early after long ferry rides and became a genuine connection point, as well as proof that impact goes well beyond dollars.

BUILDING HANDS-ON EDUCATION AND CAREER OPPORTUNITIES

While tracking local dollars is one measure of success, the real impact goes far beyond the bottom line. When we build a school, we're also building relationships with students, teachers and community members. On many of our projects, we work with educators to develop real-world learning opportunities, from jobsite construction project-related math lessons in the classroom to student-led mural projects. We've helped create scholarship funds, supported coat drives, and hosted students as "superintendents for the day."

We even go a step further. For many high school students, the question that

looms large is "what comes next after high school?" To help students navigate this path, Skanska works with groups like the ACE Mentor Program and Construct-Diversity, and hosts Youth in Construction events with Seattle Public Schools to showcase the breadth of career paths available within the construction industry.

Through these programs, we give students the opportunity to do some fun, hands-on learning and get exposure to a career path they may not have thought about.

Importantly, these programs share information on the varying ways people enter the construction industry, as there is no one-size-fits-all path, especially given the diversity of roles available across the broader AEC industry. While many roles do require a college education, just as many begin with a high school diploma, a willingness to learn and hard work. Whether it's apprenticeships, on-the-job training, or other learning and career growth opportunities, all continue to afford millions of people in the construction industry a well-paying future with good benefits.

One of the most exciting developments has been our work integrating the Student and Community Workforce Agreement (SCWA) into our projects with Seattle Public Schools, most recently with the Montlake Elementary School modernization project we just completed. For us, the SCWA is a shared commitment to create career opportunities for our neighbors who need them.

From the start of the project, we integrated SCWA into our overall approach to procurement and workforce planning. This included incorporating SCWA requirements into our trade partners' contracts, reinforcing priorities during preconstruction start-ups with trade partners, coordinating with local unions to ensure requirements were considered when dispatching labor, reviewing expectations at foreman meetings, and

monthly check-ins throughout construction.

Pre-apprenticeship training classes also are an important component of the SCWA program, and Senior Superintendent John Amdal demonstrated his personal commitment to the community by volunteering his time to three local pre-apprenticeship programs over the course of the project. At his training sessions, John shared the criteria that he and other superintendents use to evaluate and hire workers on our jobsites.

Following John's training, several of these pre-apprentices found work on

the Montlake Elementary project, and two were hired directly by Skanska.

BUILDING COMMUNITY THAT LASTS

At the end of the day, schools are more than just buildings. They are anchors in our communities. They serve as hubs for learning, connection, and opportunity. When we invest in new educational facilities, we have a responsibility to build not just for students, but for everyone in the community who made that investment possible.

By keeping dollars local, opening doors for small businesses, engaging with students, and listening to community needs, we can ensure that our projects create long-lasting value well beyond the school walls. Because investing in a school isn't just about what happens inside the classroom. It's about building up the entire community.

Brian Urban is a vice president and account manager at Skanska with more than 30 years of experience in the industry, providing strategic leadership to the company's K-12 practice.

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The school's retrofits included the addition of more than 6,000 yards of concrete for new footings, and shear walls throughout the building.



PHOTO BY FRANCIS ZERA, ZERAPHOTO

TRANSFORMING A BOTHELL OFFICE BUILDING INTO A PRIVATE K-12 SCHOOL

Converting the former office building required a significant seismic retrofit and reimagining the space with classrooms, teacher support areas, a gym, a theatre and a cafeteria.

Two 30-ton trusses were hoisted into the building in thirds to be field assembled and preloaded before installation in the gym.

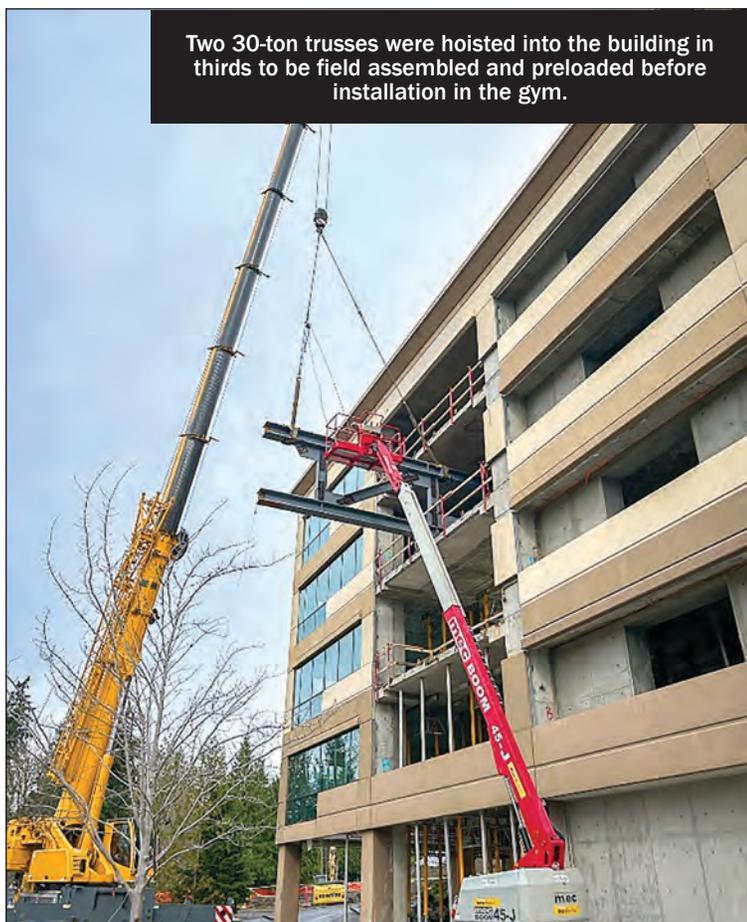


PHOTO COURTESY OF CORNERSTONE



BY MELANIE DEITCH & AARON BESMER

CORNERSTONE GENERAL CONTRACTORS

Cornerstone General Contractors recently completed a unique adaptive reuse renovation for BASIS Independent Bothell, a private K-12 school owned by Spring Education Group. This transformation of a 124,637-square-foot commercial office building into a school campus required strategic planning and expertise to repurpose the former office space into a modern educational facility serving students from kindergarten through 12th grade.

Cornerstone, with a background of having constructed more than 80 school facilities in the region, led the

critical structural upgrades for the project.

"Repurposing this building allowed us to create a thoughtfully designed, state-of-the-art campus in the heart of Bothell," said Toby Walker, vice president of schools for BASIS Independent Schools. "Transforming an existing structure gave us the opportunity to reimagine every inch of the space to meet the needs of our students today and in the future, while also making an investment in this growing community."

Utilizing the former office building required a significant seismic retrofit to change occupancy to an education facility. These retrofits included the addition of more than 6,000 yards of concrete for new footings and shear walls throughout the building. Beyond the seismic renovations, careful thought and planning were put into the layout of the building and how it could best accommodate the needs of a school with classrooms, teacher support areas, a gym, a theatre and a cafeteria. Inhabit Design served as the designer for the project.

The most challenging component of this adaptive reuse was the gymnasium, where portions of two post-tension slabs were removed to accommodate the required ceiling height. This process involved exposing, isolating, de-tensioning and recapturing bundles of existing post-tensioned cables before the level 2 and 3 concrete slabs were safe to remove.

Supporting the load of the fourth floor and the roof where the existing slabs and columns were removed, now stand two 30-ton trusses that were each hoisted into the building in thirds to be field assembled and preloaded.

"It's exciting when a project leaves people wondering 'how did they do that?'" reflected Aaron Besmer, Cornerstone's project manager for the BASIS renovation. "The coordination, sequencing and creative thinking of our entire team - to create a full-sized gym inside this building - made for a very challenging structural scope that was executed incredibly smoothly," Besmer continued.

Adjacent to the building on both the northwest and

southeast sides of the property, the project team made use of excess parking areas to create a new synthetic turf soccer field, basketball court and multi-age playgrounds. A new storm structure was also placed beneath the turf field.

Now the six-acre BASIS Independent Bothell campus features a refreshed building with state-of-the-art labs; specialized classrooms for drama, music, visual arts and engineering; a gymnasium with locker rooms; a café with a warming kitchen; outdoor sports courts and fields; and a playground to support a comprehensive student experience.

The school welcomed its students in early September and plans to grow into its new space, which can hold up to 900 students. The Bothell location adds an 11th campus to the roster for BASIS Independent Schools which has campuses in California, New York and Virginia, as well as one in Bellevue.

“This project highlights the incredible possibilities when you combine innovative construction techniques with adaptive reuse principles,” said Dave Flynn, Cornerstone’s president. “We are proud to deliver a facility that not only meets the unique needs of a private school pro-

gram like this one for BASIS Independent Schools but also contribute to revitalizing existing infrastructure right here in our Bothell community.”

“This renovation underscores Cornerstone’s dedication to quality craftsmanship and collaborative project delivery for our local educational client partners,” continued Flynn.

This project is one of five local educational facilities that Cornerstone completed this summer for the start of the 2025/2026 school year. The other projects include new schools for Asa Mercer Middle School in Seattle’s Beacon Hill neighborhood for Seattle Public Schools, and Evergreen High School in the White Center community in Seattle for Highline School District; a new gym building and track for Explorer Middle School in Everett for Mukilteo School District; multiple campus additions and renovations for Newport High School for Bellevue School District; and new locker rooms at The Bear Creek School in Redmond.

Melanie Deitch is marketing and communications manager. Aaron Besmer is project manager for Cornerstone General Contractors.

The most challenging component of this adaptive reuse was the gymnasium, where portions of two post-tension slabs were removed to accommodate the required ceiling height.

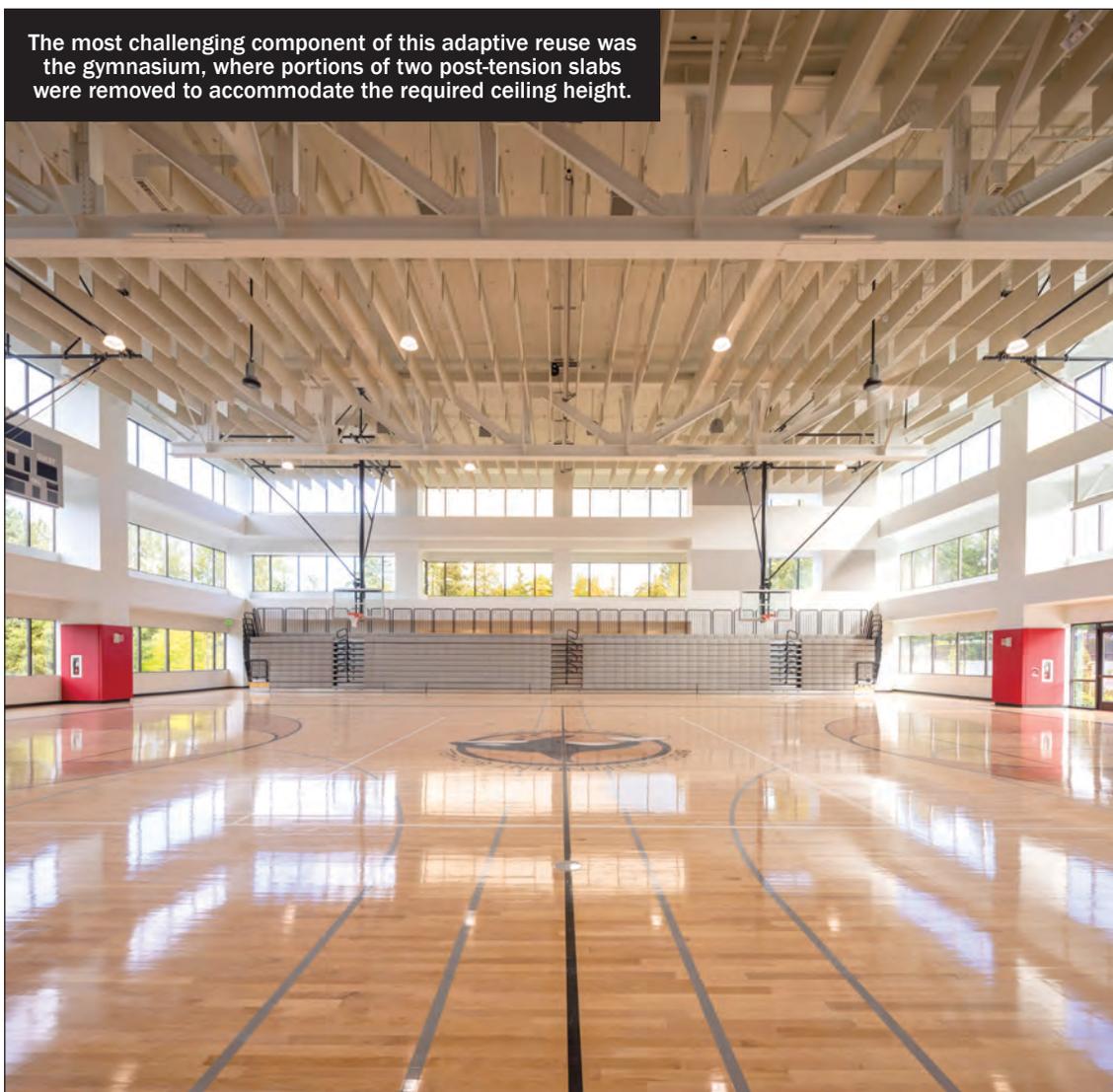


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WOOD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

when we look more closely at the real, holistic costs of both materials, timber becomes much more cost-competitive. Mass timber buildings are lighter, reducing foundation costs and the size of lateral bracing. They can also be constructed 25% faster on average than structural steel, with prefabricated assemblies driving construction efficiency and safety.

At Highline School District's new Evergreen High School, PCS performed a holistic comparison of structural steel and mass timber. We factored the ability to deliver a highly efficient structural system, reduced finish costs and construction efficiencies to see the real cost differential. Looking at the final costs of construction versus only the first cost of material, CLT panels and glulam were clearly the more cost-effective choice for the three-story 90,000 square-foot building.

Kristian Kicinski, principal architect at Bassetti Architects, reflected on the project: "We saw a real schedule benefit by using CLT. Erection of the mass timber took about seven weeks, compared to 10-12 weeks that steel erection would have taken. That's not including the time for metal deck and concrete deck pours; you can walk on the CLT decks right away. It was a boon to the construction team."

"As our general contractors get more familiar with mass timber, we expect they will get more confident about including the schedule advantages into their pricing, and that will keep mass timber competitive with the cost of steel," Kicinski said.

MORE EFFICIENT BUILDINGS

PCS worked with our design partners to develop structural layouts that work with a breadth of programming options, reducing the complexity of the structural system and significantly reducing costs. Achieving the cost advantages requires early collaboration between structural designer and architect to adapt the program to fit the simpler structural system.

As Matt Everett, senior

project manager with Cornerstone General Contractors said, "The team matters—choosing an experienced team and engaging in early planning delivers the greatest impact in reducing project costs, preventing downstream maintenance issues and streamlining the builders risk procurement process."

At the 50,500 square-foot, two-story Washington School for the Deaf Divine Academic Building in Vancouver, Wash., PCS collaborated with design-build team Skanska and Mithun to deliver a rigid, simple grid system of CLT panels and glulam which reduced overall costs for a beautiful, open learning environment.

JoAnn Wilcox, project designer with Mithun explains: "WSD is designed with a focus on functionality and flexibility that optimizes the use of wood fiber for cost performance. The design enhances the efficiency of mechanical system routing and reduces the building's overall height while maintaining high ceilings, improving daylight penetration and ensuring even illumination of the wood surfaces. This system enhances both Deaf education and occupant wellbeing — reducing stress and increasing engagement in a home-like learning environment."

Schools are a public resource that impacts thousands of students, parents, educators and the broader community. Kicinski summarizes: "As staff and students began occupying [Evergreen High School], I was struck by how often they said they loved the wood structure. The wood structure appeals to them viscerally; it makes them feel good. That's very powerful."

These examples prove that school districts can deliver better learning environments within their limited construction budgets while attaining the natural benefits of our most plentiful local construction material.

Alex Legé is an industry expert in mass timber design and principal in PCS Structural Solutions' Seattle office.

COGNITIVE DIVERSITY

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

● **Modeling inclusion:** When students experience environments that respect their neurological differences, they internalize the value of inclusion. These students are more likely to seek or create inclusive work environments.

● **Reducing drop-out and unemployment rates:** School environments that support neurodivergent learners increase the likelihood of post-secondary success and long-term employment.

● **Building partnerships:** Programs like SAP's Autism at Work and Microsoft's Neurodiversity Hiring Program often collaborate with educational institutions, creating clear pathways from school to career.

● **Normalizing neurodiversity:** Inclusive schools help all students understand and value cognitive diversity, shaping future workplace culture.

When students experience diverse learning environ-

ments, they internalize the value of cognitive diversity. These future employees and leaders are more likely to advocate for inclusive practices in their careers, helping to build workplaces that continue to embrace neurodiversity.

Meaghan Beever is a senior strategist at Gensler, where she applies a research-based, user-centered design process to challenge assumptions about what makes a good workplace experience.

BEYOND THE BOND

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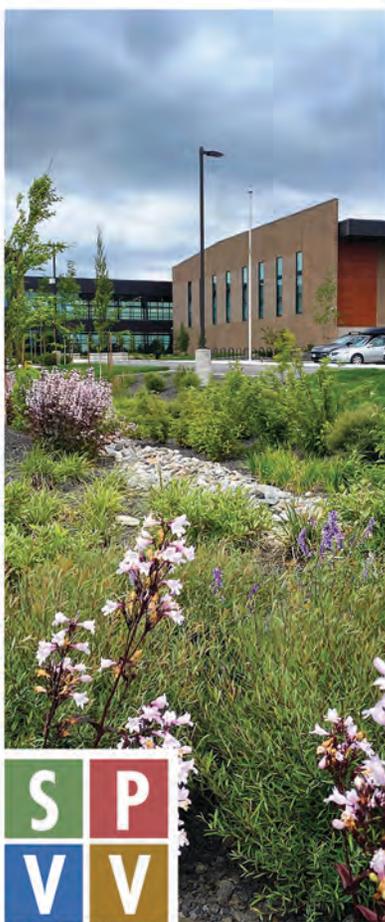
bond. Funding may be increased with diversified ownership/management because of broader ability to apply for grants. These partnerships improve access to services, keep students in school by offering resources directly on campus, and open new funding opportunities that wouldn't be available to a single agency acting alone.

LOOKING AHEAD

In a constantly changing landscape, school districts are facing both new and familiar challenges in passing bonds. At the same time, they are pursuing innovative strategies

to address capital projects while showing their local communities a strong commitment to responsible stewardship of public funds. With their ever-present focus on serving students and communities, school districts continue finding creative ways to provide environments that support students socially, emotionally, and academically.

Melissa McFadgen, a principal at NAC Architecture, has dedicated her 26-year career to designing educational facilities, including nearly 50 Pre-K through grade 12 schools and has presented throughout the U.S. on educational facility design.



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buildings in the Spring District were on the market. Of the two, Block 5 remains

Runstad and Shorestein Properties, who have sold other buildings there in the past.

Last week, Broderick Group said in its fourth-quarter Eastside office report that Block 6 has sold for \$270 million. King County hasn't yet recorded any such deal at 1646 123rd Ave. N.E. (That's on the east side of the campus.)

Says Broderick, "The project garnered strong interest, numerous tours, and multi-

The apartments opened in phases, beginning in 2009, then first sold in 2010

319 Redmond trade for \$147

By BRIAN MILLER

Giovanni Napoli, Phil.

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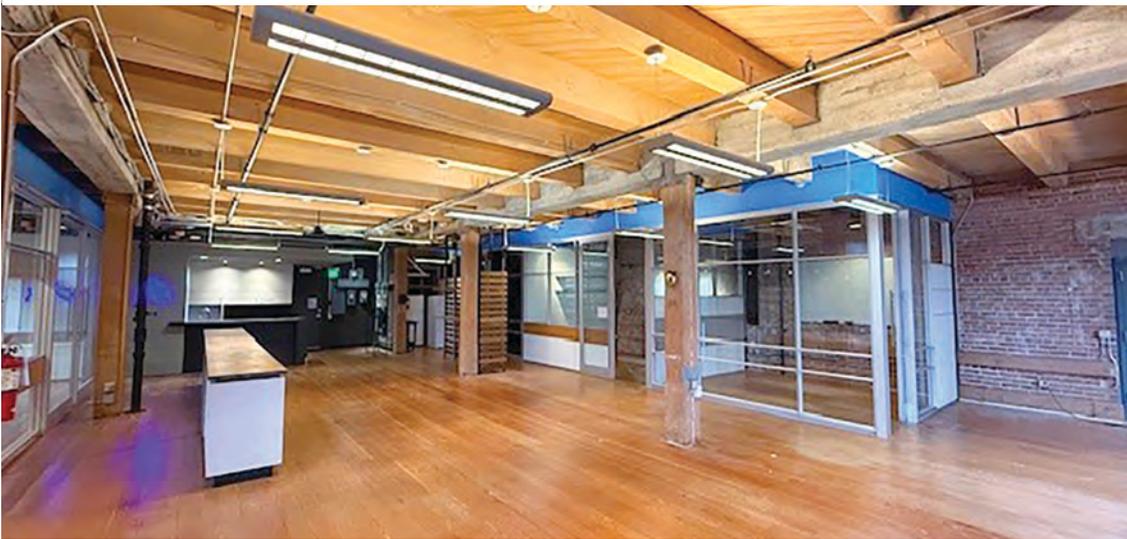
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