

A photograph of the Salish Coast Elementary School building, a modern structure with dark wood siding and a prominent overhanging roof. In the foreground, a curved concrete walkway is wet from rain. Two children are walking on the path; one is holding a bright blue umbrella and the other a colorful patterned umbrella. Tall, golden-brown ornamental grasses are in the left foreground. The background shows more of the school building and tall evergreen trees under a grey, overcast sky.

Salish Coast Elementary School

Port Townsend School District
Port Townsend, WA

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executive summary 01

This replacement elementary school in Washington state reflects and reinforces its community's close ties to the land and the surrounding Salish Sea. The school replaces an existing facility, Grant Street Elementary School, doubling capacity to 600 students from kindergarten through grade five, as well as pre-kindergarten programs.

The Port Townsend School District shares with its citizenry a rooted belief in the power of place to support learning, discovery, and foster stewardship in children. Their new school reinvigorates the aspirations of the local community by leveraging indoor/outdoor learning environments as a safe home base for students to use as a launching pad for exploring their world, while inviting the broader community into the daily lives of their children.

Three goals anchor the new school vision:

- meaningful, place-based collaborative learning
- commitment to engagement with the broader community

- recognition of an intimate relationship between their community and their natural setting

Collaborative Learning

This project took advantage of Washington State's new Class Size Reduction Measure to rethink traditional classroom sizes and relationships. Flexible learning settings were tested and adjusted to provide multiple activity zones within a larger framework. Operable walls, mobile partitions, transparency, and unique configurations provide flexibility in support of adaptable collaborative teaching.

Community Engagement

The new school needed to provide a seamless transition on site while enhancing many of the existing community assets, including relocation of a community garden, interconnection of walking and bike routes, protecting woodlands, and providing a variety of experiences, inside and out, welcoming to community members of all ages. The new building was constructed while students remained on site, necessitating a site strategy that placed the new

building on an upper terrace and further back from the street. The public spaces of the new school are placed up front, one floor below the main portion of the building while mediating an existing steep slope. The gardens and a series of bio-swales serve as a new fore-court. Play areas are relocated closer to the street, encouraging community use, while incorporating the existing slope into play activities.

Connection to Nature

The school district is committed to a number of community wide programs that place students outside of the classroom for real-world learning experiences. Most notably is the Maritime Discovery Schools Initiative which implements a central framework to anchor all subjects and grade levels in experiences of the maritime community. The design team was also challenged to create a facility to reflect a philosophy of **"No child left inside"**. The resulting school gathers around a linear courtyard with desire paths that bring students outside in their everyday movements throughout the facility. Desire paths are punctuated by multiple outdoor learning areas for organized curriculum and other specific program uses.



scope of work and budget 02

Student Capacity: 600, Pre-K - Grade 5
Building area: 70,000 SF
Site area: 11.5 Acres
Construction Cost: \$30M

- 1 Entry
- 2 Courtyard
- 3 Bioretention
- 4 Gardens
- 5 Playfield
- 6 Quiet Play
- 7 Forest
- 8 Bus Drop-off
- 9 Auto Drop-off
- 10 Service
- 11 Fire Lane



Site Plan

The collaboration between architect and Port Townsend community began in the pre-bond planning stage. The District had failed to pass several previous bonds, so the challenge to the team was to create a process that would bring multiple voices to the table, define and communicate a vision that was reflective of Port Townsend's cultural values, and provide an initial design solution that would generate the enthusiasm needed to pass a capital construction bond at the ballot box.

The scope of work defined during this period included GCCM construction of a new building while students remained on site, demolition of the existing school and several additional structures, relocation of existing community/school gardens, improvements along road frontages and all accompanying sitework.

The budget established during planning proved inadequate as costs during construction escalated rapidly beyond predicted levels across the northwest. The most significant changes made to accommodate this challenge were in building systems performance, simplifying of interior and exterior materials, and postponement of many of the site amenities and landscaping.



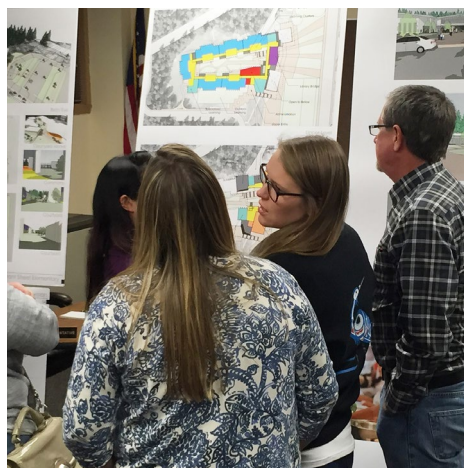


school and community engagement 03

The Port Townsend School District and its community began planning the replacement of their only elementary school in 2013. A year earlier, their new superintendent, Dr. David Engle, sought to draw the community closer to its schools and capitalize on the richness of its maritime community. This was the beginning of the District's place-based learning initiative, Maritime Discovery Schools, boldly implemented district-wide across all grades K-12.

For two years, a planning committee representing healthcare, public libraries, organic gardening, solar power, bikeable/walkable communities, and the maritime trades gathered to envision a school that is "grounded in what is around us" for all of their youngest learners. Each represented complementary values to be infused into the new school. Ready to go out for a bond again after failing to pass in 2008, the Port Townsend School District hired Integrus Architecture to help voters see how the vision for this new school can be realized in built form.

The process to create a new school facility began with understanding the ambitions of the District's place-based educational program and their belief in a correlation between student education and the health of their community. In a series of meetings, the District, its school leaders, and their planning committee relayed a vision of a school with a seamless connection



Community review was integral to the process



Groundbreaking was a community celebration



The town's close ties to the maritime trades is reflected in their place-based curriculum



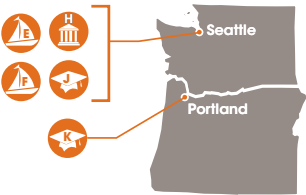
Port Townsend sits at the confluence of Puget Sound and the Salish Sea



to their community, nature, and the outdoors; sustainably designed and net-zero ready; welcoming to new families sending their child to school for the first time; reaching out to and welcoming in their many community partners; and including a vast community garden that is a free resource to anyone coping with food insecurity.

A concept design for the new school, strongly integrated with the affordances of its own site and of its greater community, was then co-created. We moved the indoor and outdoor educational program pieces around the existing site, exploring community connections that were in congruence with the City of Port Townsend's non-motorized transportation plan and reviewing how the building's systems and form itself could be a model of Port Townsend's sustainable future.

Educators met with designers and explained their place-based learning practices, including utilizing their existing site to observe and explore nature and a thriving school garden located in a nearby residential lot. The concept design was tested and infused with indoor and outdoor learning activities, providing details about visual connections and physical amenities needed to support their program. As the school's space list developed, the District would scrutinize whether a program would be better served outside, supporting their motto of "No Child Left Inside!"



NATIONAL PARTNERS



REGIONAL PARTNERS



Art

- A Writer's Workshop
- B Centrum Performing Arts
- C Copper Canyon Press



Civic

- A Jefferson County Historical
- B Jefferson Land Trust
- C Port Townsend Public Library
- D Jefferson County Chamber of Commerce
- E Skookum
- F Jefferson County Recreation
- G WorkSource Jefferson County



Education

- A Port Townsend School of Maritime Art
- B WSU Extension
- C Fort Worden Lifelong Learning Center
- D Goddard College/Peninsula College
- E Port Townsend School of Woodworking
- F NW School of Wooden Boatbuilding / Community Boat Building Project
- G US Maritime Academy
- H Cedaroot Folk School
- I Sound Experience
- J Crawford Nautical School (Seattle, WA)
- K NW Outward Bound School (Portland, OR)
- L Old Dominion University (Norfolk, VA)



Nautical

- A NW Maritime Center / Wooden Boat Foundation / Rat Island Rowing Club
- B Schooner Martha Foundation
- C Port Townsend Marine Science Center
- D Port Townsend Marine Trades Assoc.
- E Sea Grant Washington (Seattle, WA)
- F Sea Scouts (Seattle, WA)



Recreation

- A Olympic Peninsula YMCA
- B The ReCyclery

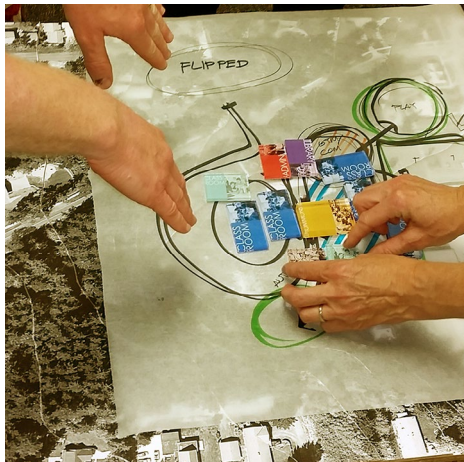
The new school also aimed to capture and reflect a future that belongs to and comes from the youth it serves. All current elementary school students in grades K-3, representing the learners of the new school, met in the school gym, and with scented markers and rolls of white paper, shared the school of their imagination. Their drawings and words were displayed throughout the existing school and shared with voters during community open houses. After failing in 2008, the school construction bond passed with 73% approval, one of the highest voter approval rates on record in Washington state.



Discussing "A day in the life" of students



Recording hopes & dreams for community



Planning committee envisions new school on site



Exploring images of school community



Locating learning activities inside and outside



School looks like we are in a forest!

Students share what they imagine the new school should look and feel like



I want to see outside into the trees!



I want sunlight and a garden!





educational environment 04

Superintendent Engle had experienced the design and construction process at other school districts. He knew first hand how the educational environments envisioned during those moments became the opportunities or the constraints of teaching and learning for decades to come. As soon as the construction bond passed, he called a meeting with educational leadership and the design team, challenging everyone to create a process that would result in a school embracing what is best and next in educational delivery.

What followed was a partnership and collaborative process of discovery tying together teacher professional development with an iterative approach to school design. The charge from the District was to create a highly flexible and engaging learning landscape that supported not only their place-based, outdoor learning program but could also help facilitate deep learning and collaboration student-to-student, student-to-teacher, and teacher-to-teacher.

The existing Grant Street Elementary School was already practicing a workshop model approach to education. Teachers would gather students together to introduce a lesson, then break them into small groups to complete hands-on, project-based work. At the same time, they were also researching collaborative teaching models. Within the existing elementary school, two classrooms connected by an operable wall



Highly flexible classroom pairing options support collaborative teaching

were already providing a team-taught, multi-age program for up to 50 students in grades 1-5.

A variety of diagrams were reviewed with the leadership team, ranging from rows of traditional, classrooms to larger, more open learning environments. They immediately saw traditional classrooms as reducing student agency by inhibiting collaborative teaching and learning models. However, they also understood that changes to teaching and learning didn't come automatically with a new building. They needed a solution that could flex and adapt with teachers and students over the life of the building.

From these discussions, the team explored how space could respond to individual learning needs throughout the day and school year. Simultaneously, Washington state began a measure aimed to reduce classroom sizes and student-teacher ratios, requiring an examination of how schools can support different sized groupings of teachers and students without

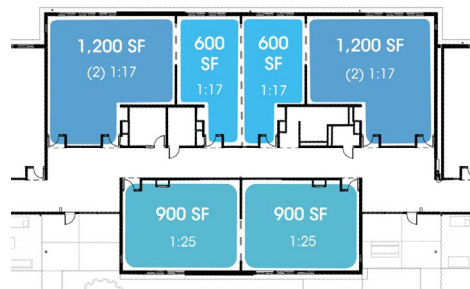
also changing their overall student capacity. The result of this exploration was blocks of flexible learning environments that supported multiple combinations of teachers and students in reconfigurable spaces.

Foster Deep Collaboration

The District recognized that their teachers needed ownership in the development of non-traditional classroom spaces. A series of meetings paired educator-only visioning sessions, rooted in developing collective teacher efficacy, with workshops with the design team that explored the built learning environment. Teachers were given large floor plans and movable furniture pieces, and they paired themselves in groups of two or three to explore how they could teach different sized groups of students together, arranging and rearranging learning settings, opening and closing operable walls, grouping and regrouping students during direction instruction and project time, and seamlessly using indoor and outdoor spaces.



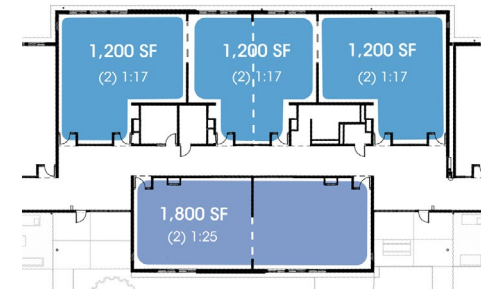
Teachers test layouts for collaborative learning



150 students, 8 teachers, 6 learning settings



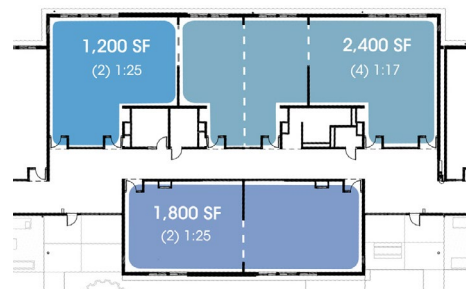
150 students, 7-8 teachers, 5 learning settings



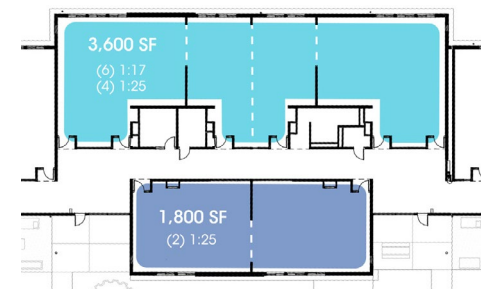
150 students, 8 teachers, 4 learning settings



150 students, 6-8 teachers, 4 learning settings



150 students, 8 teachers, 3 learning settings



150 students, 6-8 teachers, 2 learning settings



Learning settings include the ability to connect 3600SF of contiguous space



The central courtyard is accessible at multiple points through covered outdoor learning areas

The design team used their feedback to create the next iteration of flexible learning environments, and following another educator-only visioning session, would work with the teachers again. This practice of visioning, exploration, and iteration continued until the District and teachers were confident the new school design could both adapt with them over time and help them to adapt.

Seamless Connection to Nature

Each meeting with the teachers began first with a review of the site plan. The District's approach to place-based learning began even before students arrived at school. Connections to walkable, bikeable routes to the school were as much a part of the school design as the school building itself. When students arrive, they are greeted by a vast community and learning garden, a source for their daily nutrition as much as for their learning.

Each learning environment is arranged around an outdoor learning courtyard that spans the length of their previous play field. Two covered porches transition each block of flexible classrooms to the outside, allowing outdoor learning activities to continue to occur in the notably misty and wet Pacific Northwest climate. Adjacent to each porch is a gravel pad to support additional gardening benches, planting containers and other outdoor project work. An open air mudroom at the far west end of the courtyard provides a covered area that can accommodate an entire class in an outdoor science lesson or to prepare students before heading out towards the surrounding forest to find their sit spots and observe nature.

A Safe Place to Take Risks

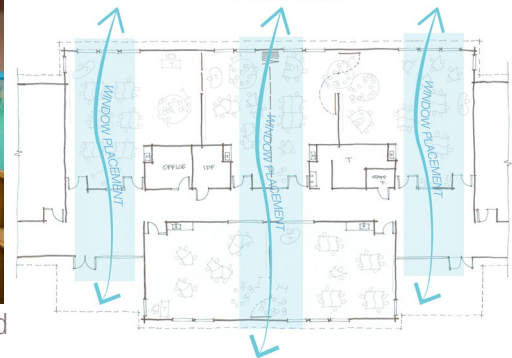
In order for students to learn, they need to feel safe and have a strong sense of belonging, both with their fellow classmates and with the caring adults around them. The design of the new Salish Coast Elementary School connects students and teachers not only to the outdoors and their natural environment, but to each other.



The “L”-shaped classrooms provide smaller scale areas with visual connections to the courtyard



Activity zones within and between classrooms



Classroom views to outdoor courtyard and forest

With a 50% free and reduced lunch population and many students suffering from trauma, including homelessness, the District saw the new school not just as a resource for their learners, but for their families and greater community as well.

Upon arriving, families are greeted with a Family Resource Center, connected to both the school's main reception area and a conference room which supports visiting services, such as a mobile dentist clinic. A classroom with a teaching kitchen directly off the Dining Commons supports the school's gardening program, and can provide adults with cooking and nutrition lessons, or house an intergenerational program, connecting the community's seniors with their youth. The school library, which bridges over the east end of the outdoor learning courtyard, was placed near the street to facilitate its use after hours as a regional branch of the Port Townsend Public Library system.

The Port Townsend School District believes that when you meet the needs of those who are in greatest need, you meet the needs of everyone.



Daylight and views to outdoor learning courtyard and the City of Port Townsend



*"If you have a garden
and a library, you have
everything you need."*

-Marcus Tullius Cicero

Quoted by City Librarian

physical environment 05

Existing site carved out of wooded slope

Port Townsend rises from its downtown waterfront, through its residential neighborhoods and into the forested hills beyond. As the town's only elementary school, Salish Coast is located above the bluffs on the edge of the town's older established residential area, with lower density housing development to its west and north.

The site was partially cleared and regraded in the 1960's for the previous school building's construction, leaving a large u-shaped stand of trees on the steeper sloping western third of the site. The site was then re-graded into an upper and lower tier separated by a steep slope of approximately 14 feet in height. The previous school was placed on the lower front (east) portion of the site along with parking areas, and outbuildings. The upper portion of the site was partially cleared for fields and outdoor play areas.

Although the old facility was in dire need of replacement, the school itself was a vibrant and integral part of the community. The organization of the new school and its site are designed to continue building on this heritage through enhancing its commitment to the community while taking advantage of the site's natural features to provide outdoor learning opportunities and intimate connections to the surrounding environment.

The new site configuration places the single-

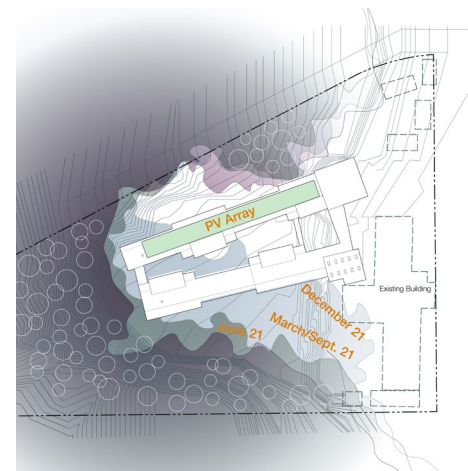
story academic portions of the building in a linear courtyard arrangement on the upper tier of the site embraced by the wooded slopes. The plan (see section 2) for this portion of the building places long portions of the internal corridors adjacent to the courtyard with multiple access points into it. Pathways and native plantings within the courtyard encourage students to move through the courtyard during their normal daily activities, while at the same time providing opportunities for exploration and discovery. Covered group learning areas are located outside of each access point to the courtyard.

A covered open-air **mudroom** caps the west end of the linear courtyard. This area opens to a planned **science exploration area** adjacent to the woods and has systems rough-ins provided for future **exterior discovery labs**. It also provides a protected connecting link between the two classroom wings. The science area also links to **discovery trails** that wind their way through the woods.

The building massing and its location on the site also are informed by a strategy for future net-zero operations. Analysis of sun patterns push the building to the north of the cleared portion of the site and the asymmetrical gabled roof form of the north academic wing provides the south-facing area needed for future photovoltaics.



Access from old school up to playfields



Locating the building for solar access



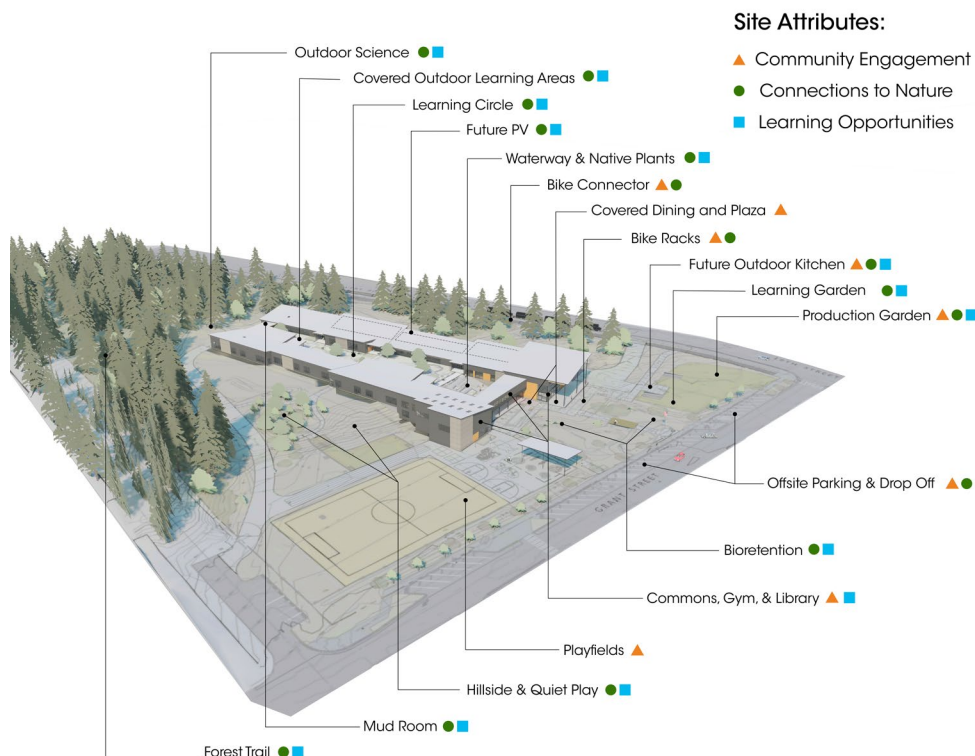
New building entry mediates the slope



Play areas and gardens flank the school's forecourt



Partial East/West Section



The community functions of the school are placed in a 2-story arrangement at the front of the site, mitigating the slope and presenting a welcoming gateway for the community. The school is intentionally set back from the street, eliminating the conventional auto drop-off area in lieu of creating an inviting processional approach to the building over a natural biofiltration swale flanked by **play areas and community gardens**.

The community production and learning gardens are given a place of prominence at the entry to the site and immediately adjacent to a large outdoor covered gathering area immediately outside of the school Commons. A teaching kitchen/community room adjacent to the commons also has direct exterior access to the gardens. The school continues to partner with The **Edible Schoolyard Project** to help in maintaining the gardens and integrate farm-to-school educational programs with students and the community.

The previous school's playfields were isolated at the back of the site and difficult to supervise. In the new configuration, the fields and play areas have been brought to the front of the site to encourage community use. This location also takes advantage of the steeply sloped portion of the site to create additional play opportunities. The Gym is located at the front of the site with its own exterior entrance. With the addition of a stage at one end and its own set of restrooms, this space can serve as a free-standing multi-purpose asset for the entire community.

The Library forms a literal bridge between the Commons and the Gym to create a symbolic entry portal into the school. Taken together, these community program areas can operate as an independent community building during non-school hours.

The District wanted to ensure that parents and families were welcome and well-served by the school. Recognizing that security concerns can often present barriers (both real and perceived)

physical environment 05

to community engagement, the reception area was designed as an open space configured to provide visual access in two directions to controlled vestibules. An open parent/family area adjacent to reception is provided with comfortable seating, a small coffee bar, messaging center, work space and storage – with an accompanying dedicated meeting room. The school partners with city programs on walkable and sustainable transportation alternatives. As part of this project, a major link in the regional bikeway network was completed to include paths to Salish Coast Elementary School, along with connections to existing walking trails.

A significant shift in the typical approach to site design limits automobile and bus drop-off areas to curbside on the two adjacent streets. This strategy reinforces the school's commitment to **walkable and bikeable communities** by discouraging auto traffic and, as importantly, minimizes site disruption and the vast quantities of impervious surfaces usually caused by long on-site queuing and bus turn-arounds.



Typical northwest weather doesn't inhibit walkers and bicycling





The parent/family area is a welcome spot adjacent to reception



process and project results 06

The new facility fits its school and community like a warm pair of Wellies on a walk through the morning mist.

Often a new facility is meant to be transformative in its impact on school and community culture. In this case, the community and school culture were already far out in front of what their current facility could support. Teachers were already seeking innovative ways to teach collaboratively, the school was already intimately entwined with the community, and the culture of the school and district had already established programs that tied students to the outside world and natural environment. Still, the new facility has not been merely supportive of the current culture of the school, it has in fact allowed the existing school culture to blossom and grow in ways it never could in their previous facility.

The School District's belief in the power of place to support learning and discovery, and the desire to provide a safe home base for students to use as a launching pad for exploring their world while engaging the broader community have been realized in the new facility. Likewise, the three goals that anchored the new school vision have been achieved: meaningful, place-based collaborative learning; commitment to engagement within the broader community; and recognition of their intimate relationship with the natural environment.



Multi-use teaching kitchen for school/community



Bridge Library looks over the town and courtyard



The abundant use of wood provides inexpensive and durable surfaces while also recognizing the role of the regional lumber industry



06 results of process and project



Visual and physical connections to the outside are emphasized throughout the school



"No child left inside"

As this project dossier is being written, we are all still assessing the effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic on our schools. Like all schools in the state of Washington, Salish Coast Elementary was closed for the school year beginning on March 13th of this year. As the district struggles with implications for their students in the upcoming school year, they are discovering alternative learning opportunities unique to this facility.

The larger and more flexible classroom areas provide the opportunity to re-imagine more adaptable arrangements of seating areas while still allowing for social distancing.

The linear courtyard arrangement that encourages outdoor circulation is a healthier and more engaging alternative than potentially crowded indoor hallways.

The outdoor learning opportunities, including the community gardens provide healthier spaces for group learning and, in fact, bring into question the perceived need to spend the majority of any school day inside a classroom.

The clear demarcation of the community-oriented areas of the building allow greater control and monitoring of community members' use of the building.

It is our hope that the current crisis passes quickly and the full potential of innovative school design can be realized, but until then, a facility that embraces outdoor and off-site learning, provides flexible and adaptable learning spaces, and maintains its close ties with the community provides the district with far greater options than a traditional classroom building.

The advent of the Covid-related school closure curtailed plans for Post Occupancy Evaluation this spring, nevertheless, several observations can be made.

PRIOR TO THE COVID-19 SHUT-DOWN:

Collaborative Learning

The large, sub-dividable classroom spaces were proving to provide the desired opportunities for team teaching and collaboration, and their unique plan forms have allowed teachers to experiment with a wide variety of furniture layouts and room combinations. Although several operable walls had been blocked by more permanent furnishings, the majority were clearly providing the intended flexibility. Informal

spaces throughout the building have been discovered and used for break-out and one-on-one instruction.

Community Engagement

The community gardens were in full bloom, the play field and playgrounds, once isolated, were in constant use, after-school programs and events kept the building in use almost continuously. The interconnection of walking and bike routes and the commitment to increasing the use of non-motorized transport have been embraced by the community as a reflection of their values and culture. The organization of both the site and the building have fostered a strong sense of ownership among community members of all ages.

Connection to Nature

The challenge of “No child left inside” has been met. Although budgetary constraints have postponed some of the planned outdoor learning area amenities, these areas were still under steady use. Curriculum programs had children exploring the natural areas of the site on a regular basis and the courtyard provided both the learning opportunities and site circulations patterns anticipated. The garden program was thriving for both community and school use, and the entry plaza’s connection to the bioswale was a daily lesson in water cycle and water management.

