

June 22, 2023

RE: Summary Report of Visioning Session for new Brentwood Borough School District

Brentwood Borough School District is in the process of designing a new K-5 elementary school. The goal is to integrate merge two existing elementary schools into a single facility that will be an enriching learning environment for students and teachers. The program is complex with multiple stakeholders and uses in a multi-story building with limited outdoor space. One strategy to mitigate the design restraints is to embed informal, museum-like experiences into the daily routine of the school. While there is a lot of overlap between children's museums and elementary schools, they are not the same and each bring its own set of design criteria, amenities and challenges. Finding the right balance of each will make this new facility a unique resource within the district that can be a place to experiment with this new model for blending formal and informal learning practices.

1. CMP led a visioning session with teachers from both elementary schools to help identify key factors that are most valued by the school community and develop strategies to include these elements in their new school. The responses included:

1. Architectural Features

- a. Spaces for/to

- i. for 'brain breaks'
- ii. for indoor gross motor skills/play
- iii. to play outside
- iv. to work on the floor
- v. to scatter
- vi. to use the hallways for sensory experiences
- vii. to run
- viii. to display work
- ix. to create, mess up, and be kids
- x. for kids can have free choice of places to play
- xi. for collaboration
- xii. to learn in different areas
- xiii. for common areas that promote learning
- xiv. for art and music throughout the school
- xv. for deescalation, quiet room for students
- xvi. for calm, relaxation for adults

- b. Design elements
 - i. Comfortable seating
 - ii. Colors - cool and calming (blues and greens)
 - iii. Nooks and niches
 - iv. Windows that open; bring outdoors in
 - v. Tactile/touchable surfaces
 - vi. Different types of window shades, darken, light filtering
 - vii. Lots of control over lighting – dimmers
 - viii. Art in the hallways
 - ix. Stairwells are important places and need to have design elements
 - x. Use floors, walls and ceilings as teaching moments
 - xi. Control over temperature, windows that open
 - xii. Sense of bringing the outdoors inside

- c. Outdoor spaces
 - i. Connect to classrooms
 - ii. Nature
 - iii. Shade structure very important
 - iv. Highly flexible
 - v. Gardens
 - vi. Chickens
 - vii. Growing own food
 - viii. Balance with technology

- d. Amenities
 - i. Parking
 - ii. Natural light
 - iii. Organized places for kids stuff – coats and bags that can be monitored well and cleaned regularly.
 - iv. Music in each classroom – blue tooth speakers
 - v. Ceiling fans (good climate control)
 - vi. Lockers in the hallways; Need individual lockers and cubbies, rather than open cubbies.
 - vii. Good visibility to bathrooms/Teacher bathroom on each floor
 - viii. Sinks in the hallways
 - ix. Break out spaces
 - x. Sound control/baffles
 - xi. Floor surfaces conducive for standing
 - xii. Writable surfaces
 - xiii. Sensory room
 - xiv. Books
 - xv. Plenty of storage – special interest in “closed” storage where season- and subject-specific things are out of sight
 - xvi. Water feature

2. FFE (furniture, fixtures and equipment)
 - a. Lego walls/room
 - b. Objects for tinkering
 - c. Active, chain reaction, Rube Goldberg walls
 - d. Variety of seating choices, including wobble chairs
 - e. Room with lots of toys “especially for little kids.”
 - f. Tech and computers, but many expressed a desire to be away from them.
 - g. Magnetic exploration – open ended, self-guided items
 - h. Soothing sounds
 - i. Flexible seating
 - j. Scooters
 - k. Fidgets, tactile, sensory experiences
 - l. Bugs and Flowers
 - m. Storage
 - i. Floor to ceiling storage that’s out of kids’ sight
 - ii. We underestimate the amount of stuff elementary teachers have
 - iii. Pull out storage drawers
 - iv. Students are not overwhelmed with materials; looks clean, organized
 - v. Classroom libraries with shelves
 - n. Technology
 - i. should be a support, there in the background rather than the centerpiece
 - ii. is a support, easily implemented by staff or kids. Teachers will be comfortable with the tech.
 - iii. Tech is invisible so we can focus on kids. Create through tech. Focus on the creation, not the tech.
 - iv. Something that demystifies the world – data, math in the building: How does it work?
 - v. clear box so you can see inside technology
 - vi. STEAM labs on every floor
 - vii. IT infrastructure working smoothly
 - o. Furniture
 - i. Want nice desks with storage.
 - ii. New, functional
 - iii. Chairs that don’t tip or break
 - iv. Flat desks
 - v. Small group tables
 - p. Accessibility and Space for calming
 - i. Space for meltdowns
 - ii. Peace, de-escalation, calm down
 - iii. UDL

3. Intangible Features/learning objectives (qualitative features)
 - a. Comfortable
 - b. Stress-free environment
 - c. Comfortable (x2; Homey, relaxed, comfy)
 - d. Home away from home
 - e. Not too bright
 - f. Not too loud
 - g. Engaging and memorable
 - h. Inspirational messaging
 - i. STEAM
 - j. Independence
 - k. Art
 - l. Curiosity
 - m. Choice and agency for students and staff
 - n. Happy; joy; laughter; fun
 - o. The magic of a kid who loves to come to school, feels excited
 - p. School should be a space for friendship and learning
 - q. Safety
 - r. Know the benefit of failing; failing is important for success
 - s. Exploring
 - t. Kids will demonstrate what they do and don't know beyond assessments
 - u. Kids can be kids; organized chaos
 - v. Real – not like social media
 - w. Let kids run with it and see what happens
 - x. beyond boundaries to be creative
 - y. Creative – turn something into something else
 - z. Want the school building ready to support the group, casual learning
 - aa. Have spaces where kids can lead the experience Let the kids be kids
 - bb. More physical and health activities
 - cc. Joining communities together
 - dd. Magical experiences
 - ee. Quiet, calm, safe
4. What we DON'T want:
 - a. Do NOT want to feel like you're on an island.
 - b. Don't want the factory model of schooling, institutional design
 - c. Don't want to be inflexible for the future.
5. The new school in Brentwood Borough Elementary School is
 - a. State of the art
 - b. Comfortable
 - c. Welcoming

SEE PHOTOS OF VISIONING SESSION AT END OF DOCUMENT

ANALYSIS: Upon review of the discussions, we have the following observations and recommendations. Flexibility and sustainability will be key measures of success for this project. This approach can be applied in practical ways via FFE selections and do not have to impact the budget.

- INTERIOR SPACE: fixtures, finishes and furnishings will consider 1) sustainability and environmental impact (described as materials and costs). 2) ease of operation (described as flexibility) and 3) universal design principles (described as inclusive and accessible for all users). These strategies are meant to create opportunities to expand/change the learning experiences/teaching moments and programs. The overall approach to the design is to create dynamic play and learn experiences throughout the building, specifically looking at spaces outside of the classrooms.

The following is an outline of the program elements, amenities and qualities that are characteristic of informal learning spaces. Next steps will be to build this into a framework for the design team to use with the end-users (teachers and administrators who will facilitate the experiences with the children) to make choices for the FFE phase and guide any VE (value engineering) process.

1. Shared spaces
 - a. Ceiling elements – allude to nature, sky, outdoors.
 - b. Floor design – patterns and/or images, sensory paths, games, measuring tools.
 - c. Walls - materials and finishes that can be interactive and functional.
 - i. Magnetic peg board
 - ii. Lego walls
 - iii. Sensory walls (variety of materials and textures)
 - d. Stairwells – use all surfaces as teaching moments
 - i. Steps as measuring tools/STEM
 - ii. Sensory experiences on walls, railings.
 - iii. Layer images/information on the windows
 - iv. Use color and design elements to differentiate between floors – connect to the learning community each level
 - v. Active shared space - place to connect community/SEL messages
 - e. Outdoor spaces – functional learning in the landscaping, play equipment and furnishings.
 - i. Rooftop space needs shade structures. This can be temporary movable umbrellas or other fixtures like hooded/canopy seats.
 - f. Art direction and environmental graphics; interior signage and wayfinding.

2. Flexible furniture
 - a. Designed to fit in multi-configurations, allowing students and teachers to change the layout based on programmatic needs.
 - b. Variety of seating options that can be selected by students easily for different activities and for their personal comfort.
 - c. Tables on casters of various heights that can be reconfigured based on need.
 - d. Storage cabinets that can be available in the space for immediate needs, but also look finished and safe from the kids and visitors.
 - e. Outdoor furniture that is movable and flexible to allow for both fine and gross motor activities.

3. Content themes, narrative
 - a. Open-ended, abstract design approach
 - i. Align with maximum flexibility and is more timeless.
 - ii. This approach puts more emphasis on color and materials in the design.
 - iii. Allow for opportunities to add more specific narrative experiences as layers on top of a strong, well-designed foundation. This strategy keeps the space fresh over time by allowing for small updates rather than needing a full renovation.
 - b. Inspiring messages that support a sense of community and belonging.
 - c. Provide space for the following elements:
 - i. gross and fine motor skill activities
 - ii. collaborative and solitary play
 - iii. Digital vs analog (virtual vs tactile)
 - d. Informal learning experiences that support formal curriculum
 - i. Art and making
 - ii. STEAM; Digital interactives/AR
 - iii. SEL (social – emotional learning)
 - iv. Sensory Experiences (sound, light, color, water)

APPENDIX: PHOTOS OF VISIONING SESSION June 8, 2023











