GEORGE WAGNER MIDDLE SCHOOL

Georgetown, Texas

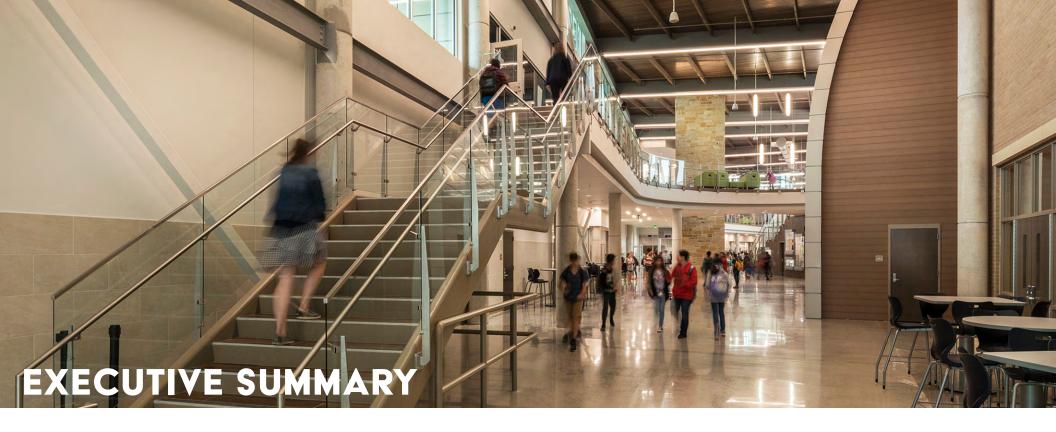


SOMETHING SPECIAL BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE...









2014

"What We Think, We Become." Georgetown ISD adopts a new strategic plan.

2015

From the strategic plan comes the Learner Profile—a set of student attributes established by the community.

Georgetown ISD had a clear view of their future and adopted a strategic plan with the concept in mind: "What we think, we become." One of the key takeaways from the strategic plan was to redesign the learning model to support choice, customization and innovation at all levels. Their strategic vision launched a campaign to secure community buy-in that would help shape the design of all future schools.

Community members, students and teachers participated in educational summits, surveys and interviews to take the strategic plan and develop a Learner Profile that would guide instruction throughout the district. Through this highly interactive process, they defined a Learner as an individual who:

- Communicates, collaborates and applies critical thinking
- Creates and innovates
- Obtains knowledge through inquiry and exploration
- Develops self-knowledge and personal responsibility
- Builds successful relationships





THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DESIGN AND THE LEARNER PROFILE CAN'T BE UNDERSTATED. YOU CAN STAND IN A SPACE. LOOK AROUND AND SEE THE LEARNER PROFILE REFLECTED.

Lindsay Harris Principal, Wagner Middle School

2015

Planning / design kicks off and is inspired by the Learner Profile and themes of flexibility and learnercentric decision making.

2016 / 2017

Conversations center around professional development and how teachers will maximize their new space starting on day one.

2017

Wagner Middle School opens! Campus staff and students embrace their new learning environment.

The Learner Profile gave the team a lens from which to view planning and design. It was the jumping off point for Wagner Middle School, the first of four campuses to be designed to support the district's vision. As the team began the process, they developed two key questions that would shape their iteration of the Learner Profile. They asked: "How do we want to interpret flexibility," and "Is this decision for the learning needs of the kids or for the comfort of adults?"

The team took these questions to heart. The conversation on flexibility was comprehensive. One way it was interpreted was related to relevancy. It was critical that on day one, the building be just as relevant as it was on the day it was imagined, and that it maintained that relevancy 50 years down the road. Additionally, if a suggestion didn't lend itself to their definition of flexibility, if the solution wasn't learner-centric and, if the design wasn't reflective of the Learner Profile, the team challenged it. This led to thoughtful discussion and highly customized design.

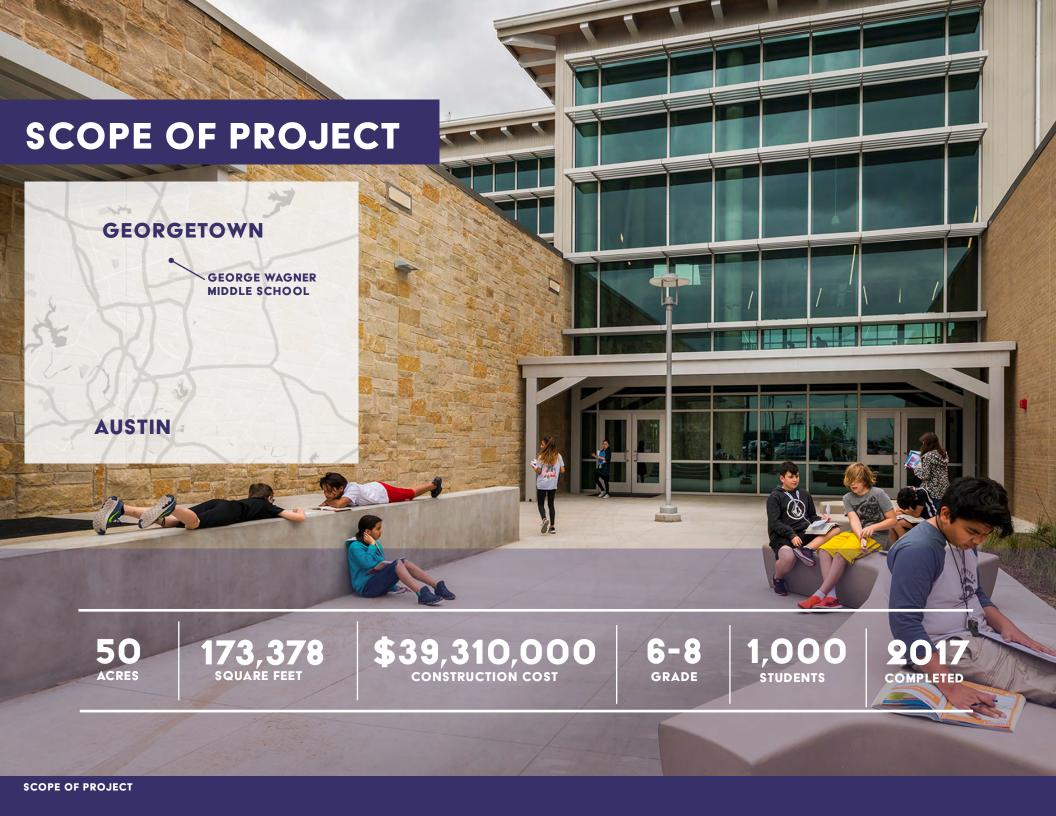
With a high level of customization and flexibility, it was critical that campus staff know how to utilize all aspects of the facility, and that they be all-in to a new approach to instructional delivery. While design and construction were ongoing, the team worked with district and campus staff to redefine the approach to professional **development and training.** GISD put the same fervor into the learning experience for adults as they did for the learning experience of their students.

When the campus opened, a change was immediately felt in how students built relationships and embraced the opportunity to design the learning experience. The same was true for teachers. They had designed a school and learning systems that fit like a glove. They had accomplished their goal to be agile not just in design, but in their approach to instruction. When the school opened, the Principal of Wagner said it best: "The relationship between the design and the Learner Profile can't be understated. You can stand in a space, look around and see the Learner Profile reflected."











Establishing the Learner Profile

After Georgetown ISD established a new strategic plan, they sought feedback from the greater community about how their **strategic plan translated into the learning environment.** They believed strongly in community accountability, and asking the community for buy-in was a big step in a grand vision that would evolve the way they delivered instruction. From a series of collaborative meetings, surveys, focus groups and more, the Learner Profile was established. It **outlined student attributes** that focused on critical thinking, collaboration, communication and relationship building. The community laid a foundation from which design of Wagner Middle School would soon come to fruition.

THE PROCESS

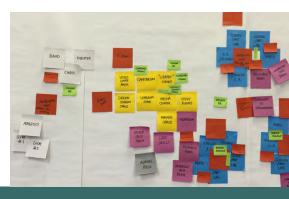
4 community educational summits to establish student attributes + online survey to prioritize responses + 15 focus groups of parents, students, teachers, staff and community for additional input

THE RESULT

A Learner Profile that is a **reflection of the community** and their desires for their kids.

The community embraced the process; they believed all students, regardless of economic circumstance, deserved the best they had to give.





The Foundation for Design

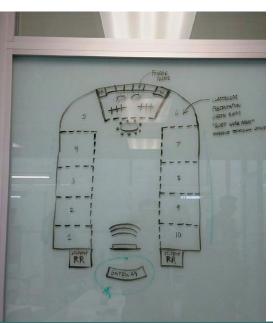
The Learner Profile started the discussion, and during planning, two additional questions related directly to the desired culture at Wagner Middle School were explored. The district wanted a high level of flexibility, but what did that mean? They also wanted a school that was learner-centric, which meant decisions had to be made for the benefit of learning and not for the comfort of adults. The comment, "it's always been that way," was thrown out the door.

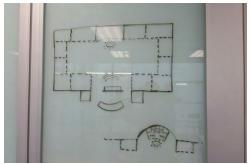
DEFINING FLEXIBILITY

Administrators, educators and design professionals explored the **interpretation** of flexibility. They focused on flexibility in relation to relevancy in their building, as it would need to be adaptable to shifts in learning in 10, 20 or more years. They removed classroom ownership and discussed how this impacted classroom utilization, developing a structure for learning communities and teacher design labs that permitted growth, multi-purpose use and customization in the learning experience. They prioritized transparency as a way to promote personal responsibility for students and passive supervision for teachers. And they adopted a use for all common areas and corridors, that with the help of furniture, would maximize space for learning.

HOLISTIC BUY-IN

Within these early discussions, they began shaping a culture of choice, trust and responsibility. They established desired beliefs and behaviors of students and adults that supported the Learner Profile. And, they explored how it all fit within the context of design. As decisions were made, they weighed them against their decision to be learner centric. This level of awareness about their culture led to meaningful conversations that helped further define the guiding principles for design. During a design charrette, two district teams were asked to establish adjacencies to fit their interpretation of the defined culture. Their results were nearly identical, exhibiting a great level of buy-in and understanding of a process that had been comprehensive and thoughtful.













STUDENT FEEDBACK

Wagner would be the district's fourth middle school. The team interviewed dozens of students from three existing middle schools to better understand social and learning behaviors and how those would translate into a progressive learning model. This added depth to the conversation and helped not only shape design, but shape the focus of professional learning.

STAKEHOLDERS

Community members, parents, non-parents, business leaders, volunteers, campus and district administrators and teachers participated in the planning and design process. While the district set the vision, the community defined the Learner Profile, which informed the design. A great diversity of stakeholders was a big differentiator. The district listened to many ideas and solicited feedback through personal, digital and group engagement. They combined this input with the expertise of the design team, along with research into the learning environment and feedback from teachers and campus leaders.

A Vibrant Community with a Rich Heritage





Georgetown, Texas is located 30 miles north of the Silicon Hills of Austin. It is one of the fastest growing communities in Texas. One that is steeped in pride and tradition, with a juxtaposition of modern amenities set against a backdrop of a historic town square in the charming Hill Country.

While the community is conservative when it comes to selection of materials and aesthetic for their schools, they embrace innovation and believe in the value their education system brings to all students. They eagerly accepted making an investment in a unique learning environment that would impact students for decades.

The district serves over 11,500 students with nine elementary schools, four middle schools, two high schools and two alternative campuses. The design team has been with the district for over a decade as these campuses have evolved. The process to reinvent the Learner Profile has been inspiring, rewarding and fruitful for everyone involved.



Community Connection



LOCAL MATERIALS

Local materials, neutral palettes and a traditional exterior reflect the aesthetic of the district and community. Innovation is found inside with a modern and progressive learning environment.



ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHICS

Georgetown, Texas is known as the Red Poppy Capital of Texas.

Environmental Graphics in the school pay tribute to the poppy fields that surround the community. In the library, imagery of historic town square gives brings even greater depth to the community context.



COMMUNITY NAMESAKE

The campus is named after an 18+ year Georgetown ISD mentor, George Wagner. He's a man that puts students first and was an ideal namesake for this learner-centric school.



Design Challenges and Solutions

OPERABLE WALLS

One design decisions was to establish three learning communities (nicknamed "dens" as a symbol of the mascot, the Wolf) which included classrooms, labs and teacher design labs. These spaces needed to be highly adaptable and include a great amount of mobile furniture, walls, technology and storage to support the culture. There was significant discussion between programming and design to understand the size of spaces that would be needed within these dens and how those spaces would be used.

The solution, was to create a system that was **nearly 100 percent modular and movable.** They wanted a quadrant of classrooms that opened completely as one large lecture area or closed to form four traditional classrooms. The team had to determine how the space would operate and how long spans of beams would be coordinated. Onsite coordination was required during construction to successfully execute the complicated design to deliver an easily maneuverable system.

ACOUSTICS

Movable walls were just one aspect of acoustics to be considered in a campus that was largely open. Movable walls required the **proper acoustical grading to create privacy when needed.** Open grids between spaces added to the challenge. In common areas, glulam beams and acoustical panels (accented with environmental graphics) contribute to the aesthetic quality of the building while providing **additional layers of sound control.**

NATURAL DAYLIGHT

The design wasn't a traditional double loaded corridor, leading to a challenge of how to get natural light into interior spaces. The design team incorporated glass into classrooms and the perimeter of core areas, situating the campus so **most glazing took in indirect north light.** Each side of the classroom quadrants also featured circulation paths, allowing more natural light to spill into instructional spaces. Without ceilings in these areas, the volume feels higher and helps **push light into the interior.**





The Vision that Inspired Wagner Middle School

Georgetown ISD paid great care to understand what students and teachers needed to be successful. The Learner Profile was a reflection of their process, and it outlined student attributes that would be the basis for all future design in the district.

The Learner Profile defined a learner as an individual who is communicative and collaborative, is creative and innovative, who can obtain knowledge through self inquiry, and who builds successful relationships.

The team was tasked with interpreting the Learner Profile into the design of Wagner Middle School, their curriculum approach and their professional development. Themes of **flexibility and learner-centric decision-making** were also prevalent and played greatly into establishment of the culture of the campus and the guiding principles of design. The team ended up with a campus that was fully representative of their beliefs and behaviors and the vision of the school district and community.

MATURING INTO CHOICE

Holistically, Georgetown ISD's vision for education starts with the youngest learners and progresses through to graduation. It's a vision that focuses on choice and making it available to students in the time, space and pace of their learning. For example, at Wagner, students can move throughout the building during class to access tools, materials and even other teachers who may provide expertise in the subject they're exploring.

The availability of choice is **introduced in elementary school on a smaller scale.** Choice becomes more prominent as students mature and learn to work within a system that puts them at the center.

At the middle school level, choice takes on more depth; students have more space to roam and more responsibility for their experience. To accommodate the shift, the team structured a single learning community for 6th graders (STEM and humanities are shared by 7th and 8th grade).

Within the 6th grade den, students are exposed to STEM and humanities curriculum. They share common areas with 7th and 8th graders, which allows them to see older peers engaging in customized learning and builds excitement and understanding for the choices they will soon make.

A Reflection of the Learner Profile

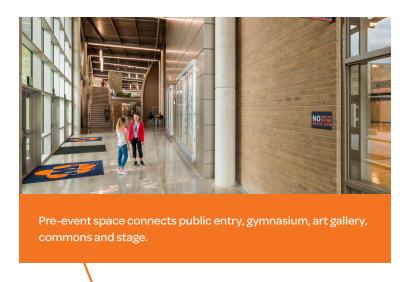
The design is a reflection of the Learner Profile and the student attributes it represents, as well as the culture of choice, trust and responsibility. Each space works cohesively within this learner-centric campus.

- Indoor and outdoor flex spaces and a commons that adapts to instruct, learn, play, dine and assemble, support student attributes of collaboration, relationship building and personal responsibility.
- A makerspace, video lab and access to books and technology in the library gives students space and flexibility to utilize multiple tools for research and to diversify how they exhibit mastery of certain subjects.

 They support student attributes of critical thinking, inquiry and exploration.
- Three dens (6th grade, STEM and humanities) create communities that support *student attributes of community* and knowledge sharing. Each features classrooms, labs, flex space, a teacher design lab and outdoor access.
- Administrators share office space, as do teachers. Teacher design labs are located in each den and a main design lab overlooks the commons, giving educators space to grow professionally with visual access to students at all times. This system supports communication and opportunities for innovation between adult peers.







The Main Spine

The commons connects the three dens and is a place students and teachers go to **collaborate and work independently.** The main teacher design lab overlooks the commons, with direct sightlines to the cafeteria. The dining area is also the school's auditorium. **The learning stair and second story balcony increase seating space** with the bonus of creating a more casual student union to support relationship building. The space is open, welcome and inviting. Wood is a strong element and adds warmth while neutral palettes soften the aesthetic.



One of four teacher design labs that allow passive supervision and shared ownership of all students.



Learning stair, viewing platform (outside of the library) and stage create a commons that can be used as an auditorium, student union, lecture hall or gathering space.



An (A) Typical Day



YOU DEFINITELY SEE OUR LEARNER PROFILE FLOURISHING AND RELATIONSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS HAPPENING WHEN YOU SEE STUDENTS WORKING IN FLEX SPACES. STUDENTS ARE ENGAGED, AND THEY ARE WORKING ON BUILDING RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER.

Teacher, Wagner Middle School

Each day starts in a den. Within these learning communities, teachers and students are charged with designing the learning experience. Students build on the experience through personal inquiry and exploration, utilizing all spaces within the campus to accomplish their goals





It doesn't take long after class begins to see students spilling into flex spaces. They are empowered to think critically about the space, pace and tools needed for learning... and act on it appropriately. Trust and collaboration are critical to this model. Students have access to all teachers; teachers are responsible for all students. Transparency allows students freedom to roam and gives teachers passive supervision.





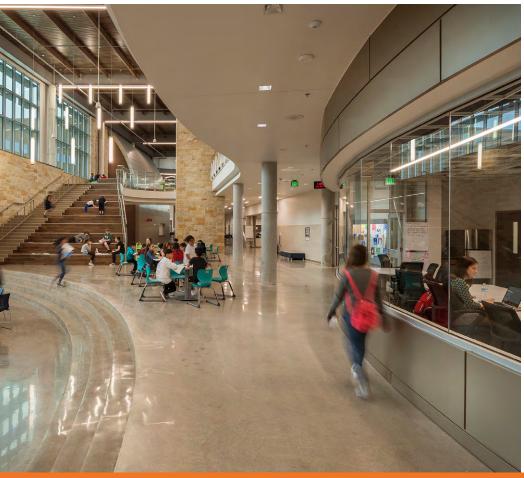
Teachers don't own classrooms, they share teacher design labs, which are hubs for collaboration and ideation. They are designed similar to spaces found in a professional environment. This reinforces the district's desire to invest in the profession of teaching. Through this model, students see their mentors working toward strong relationships, they see them sharing successes and failures.

Security and Supervision

There are layers of supervision and security in the school. **Teachers and administrators have sightlines into each common and core area.** Students are always monitored and teachers share a sense of responsibility for all students.

Within dens, an entry desk and adjacent teacher design lab allow for educators to see who is coming and going. This layer of oversight isn't overt or imposing to students, instead, it's a welcoming part of a culture that relies on trust and personal responsibility for success.







Maximizing Every Space

Every space (from commons to classroom) is maximized in this curriculum-responsive design. Flexible furniture and movable walls are used prominently, allowing students and educators to right-size their learning space to fit a specific activity. Utilizing common areas for flex space is highly encouraged. As a result, classroom space is freed up, increasing capacity and utilization.







Exhibition of Mastery

To help propagate the Learner Profile, curriculum is reliant on diversity in showing mastery. For example, if a student is asked to give a book report, they choose how that report is delivered—through discussion, PowerPoint, video, physical product, etc.

A space is provided for each possibility, allowing students to create and innovate in new ways. The library is the hub of creativity. Within and adjacent are a video lab, an art room, a makerspace, indoor and outdoor collaboration areas, soft seating, technology access and bookshelves.







Health and Wellness

The school experience is about more than what happens in the classroom. Personal wellness is critical, and this comprehensive campus provides **many spaces to support a healthy lifestyle.** Multiple, covered outdoor areas provide students space to spread out, relax and recharge.

A state-of-the-art weight room connects to a covered fitness patio, increasing usable space, minimizing interior square footage and providing opportunities for flexibility in PE curriculum. The weight room attracts campus and district staff as well and is used frequently after hours.

Fine Arts

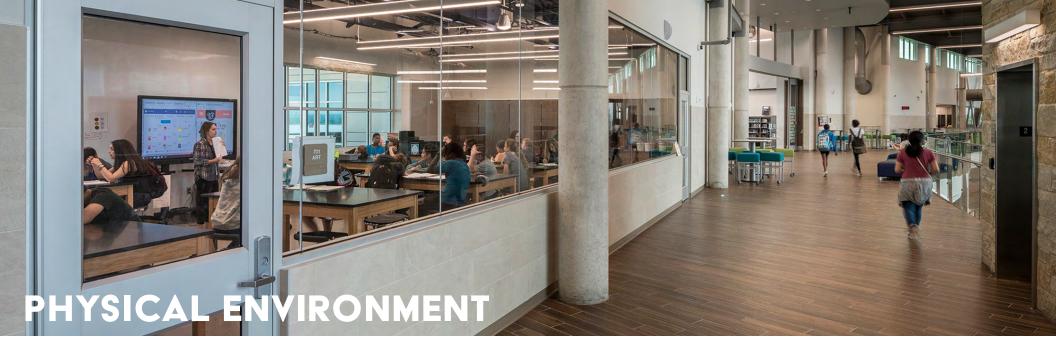
The commons is the core of the campus and is used for assembly, dining, learning and performance. At one end of the commons is a large stage which connects to a theater classroom and the fine arts wing. It's robust for a middle school, and while there isn't a dedicated scene shop, the amount of backstage square footage and a large adjacent classroom provide plenty of workspace for set builds and stage performances.

Another unique feature is a **central gathering space in the fine arts wing that is surrounded by practice rooms.** These rooms aren't assigned to a specific discipline, instead, they are **shared amongst band, orchestra, choir and theater students** (and tuned properly to accommodate variety in use). This **central space creates a lounge** where students can watch peers practice, socialize and prepare for performances.









Setting the Precedent for Design in the District

The configuration of Wagner Middle School is unlike anything that was existing in the community; however, it set the precedent for how learning environments are being designed (and re-designed) throughout the school district.

Aesthetically, the building matches well with existing buildings in the community, incorporating the favored Hill Country style. It also utilizes the more traditional and conservative material choices selected for all schools in the district, allowing for maximum funds to be spent on the learning experience.

What sets Wagner apart, is the **cohesive nature of how students move throughout the campus.** They move seamlessly

from dens into common areas, from formal to informal learning. Flexibility and abundance of transparency supports this behavior.

There is also respect for the **opportunities for relationship** building and personal growth that the functional aspects of the building provides. Students were awarded privilege passes on day one, and they take the responsibility of maintaining those passes seriously. Without a pass, they are limited in where and when they can go beyond their dens.

When imagining the school, the team knew that **design to** support variety was critical—that selection of materials, furniture and adjacencies would attract or deter students from a space. Each area—from classroom to corridor—is presented thoughtfully and supports choice, trust and responsibility.





Flexibility in Learning Experience

STUDENT CHOICE

Flexibility is critical to the success of the design. One way it manifests is in the variety of learning spaces that are available to students. From day one, students are **charged to pick a space that is most appropriate for learning.** This includes indoor and outdoor flex space, standing-height four-tops in corridors, soft seating in the library, a makerspace, the commons, classrooms and labs, etc.

CLASSROOMS AND LABS

There are three dens (learning communities) in the school. Each is configured in a similar way with classrooms, labs, flex space and a teacher design lab. Notably, the dens can be reconfigured using movable walls. They enclose to create 1, 2, 3 or 4 classrooms or open completely to make a large assembly space. The district "bought" 4,000 sf of classroom space, but because of the operable wall system, the classrooms are capable of so much more. This flexibility brings long-term value and adaptability to their culture and curriculum.

The same concept was incorporated into the science wing in the STEM community. There are **no assigned lecture rooms, prep rooms and classrooms.** It's all one singular space that can be adjusted to meet a variety of needs. Excess track was strategically placed to give campus staff even greater flexibility in configuration.



OUR TEACHING TEAM SAID, ALL RIGHT, LET'S DO IT, LET'S DIVE IN.

WE OPENED OUR CLASSROOMS INTO A LARGE FLEXIBLE SPACE,

BROUGHT OUR CLASSES TOGETHER AND HAD OUR LIBRARIAN

TALK TO THE STUDENTS ABOUT USING DATABASES FOR RESEARCH.

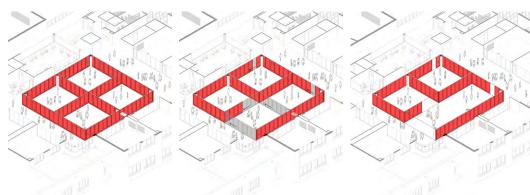
WITHIN THAT SAME SPACE, WE THEN TURNED OUR KIDS LOOSE TO START FINDING RESOURCES FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT. IT WAS HAPPENING IN THIS ONE FLOWING SPACE, AND THE THREE OF US TEACHERS WERE ABLE TO WALK AROUND AND HELP ALL OF THE KIDS WITH THE PROJECT.

Tim Schermbeck
Teacher, Wagner Middle School

















Transparency

There is a strong relationship between student autonomy and passive supervision.

Sightlines are located throughout the building in ways that are present by unobtrusive. Teachers believe it is up to all of them to support students in their journey to become responsible learners. Passive supervision is realized through the location of teacher design labs and use of glazing in all interior spaces.



Details and Materials

EXTERIOR

The exterior ties into the context of the region, which uses large amounts of local stone, brick and glazing. The team was strategic in the **use of glass to manage how natural light** was brought in (shading southern light and allowing north light to spill in).

INTERIOR

Structural elements are on display in the building, bringing interest to the space and exposing building systems to students as a learning tool.

The volume of the space is open and inviting. By minimizing spaces that are enclosed or encapsulated, students feel more freedom to spread out and work anywhere. The level of openness creates a safer environment where students are seen at all times. Linear wood ceiling systems add warmth and help with acoustics.

SUSTAINABILITY

- Maximizing north light, controlling south light and minimizing east and west light through use of louvers, shading devices and orientation
- 100% interior and exterior LED lighting
- Energy star colored roofs, energy efficient rooftop units
- Prominent use of locally-sourced materials
- Exposed structural materials—glulam beams, steel beams and polished concrete
- Tile, low maintenance and durable materials
- Condensation collection system used for irrigation
- Building automation controls













PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT | PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

Outdoor Learning

With warm temperatures year-round and sprawling views of Georgetown (courtesy of the rolling hills of Central Texas), **outdoor learning spaces create quiet and reflective zones** for students to utilize. Each den has access to outdoor learning. A large **second story patio connects the art room to the library and creates a unique lounge, creative space and study area.** A courtyard off of the commons provides space for older students to eat lunch. And, a courtyard leading up to the special events entrance expands space for assembly prior to events.







Intention, Trust and Agility

The process that informed Wagner Middle School was robust, intentional and highly successful. It involved a great deal of input from community members, teachers and students in an effort to create a space that was reflective of all users.

The team had a significant amount of time to dig into planning, to talk to the community and to gather feedback from teachers, administrators and students about how choice, trust and responsibility would shape design. As a result of the planning process and the work that went into professional development to prepare teachers for day one, the impact of the space was felt immediately.

The team had designed a culture, a learning system and a school that fit perfectly. They had accomplished their goal to be **flexible in function and in approach.** The community put their trust in the district to make an investment in students that would impart change for a lifetime. The goal was fully accomplished!

RELEVANCE

When the district defined flexibility, a key part was relevancy. They wanted to ensure they weren't opening a building that was already outdated. They needed a space that could adapt and adjust as learning styles shifted. Flexibility is scaled within the campus to meet this need—from the use of furniture within flex spaces to movable walls in classrooms, teacher design labs that support dynamic scheduling and availability of learning spaces in the library, commons and outdoors.

OWNERSHIP

Notably, students feel as if they too own the building. They aren't tied to one specific space, and so they show respect and care for all spaces that help shape their learning experience. As part of this ownership, student ambassadors frequently give tours of the school. With little prompting, they eagerly discuss the space, how they use it and what they love.

PRECEDENT

Wagner Middle School was the first of four projects in the district that used the Learner Profile along with a robust planning process to establish campus culture. Their success has informed the planning and design process of a new elementary school, middle school renovation and new central administration that mirrors collaborative professional learning happening at the campus level.

A Lasting Impact on Professional Learning and Culture



IT'S IMPORTANT FOR THE COMMUNITY AND PARENTS TO KNOW THAT EVERY SINGLE ADULT IN THIS BUILDING IS 100% COMMITTED TO HAVING POSITIVE, RESPECTFUL STUDENTS WITH STUDENTS.

Ashley Gaylor Teacher, Wagner Middle School

The design of Wagner Middle School embraced a number of culture shifts for the district, including how professional learning was approached. The district invested greatly in creating spaces for teachers and administrators that elevated the profession. These spaces are found at the campus level as well as in the new central administration building. Technology, flexible furniture and collaborative tools were prioritized.





At Wagner, the principal shares an office with two assistant principals and teachers share office space within their design labs. While counselors have their own offices, all other staff much check out rooms when privacy is required.





This model has increased communication and collaboration. It has allowed for innovation in how lesson plans have developed. And, it has reverberated to students as they see their adult mentors problem solving every day.

Through their investment in professional learning, they have also become of the most sought after campuses to teach at.