

Small Spaces, Big Impact:

How to Plan Responsive Environments
that Support Student Wellness

Meet Your Presenters



Matt Rice, AIA
ALEP, LEED AP BD+C



Rosemary Park, AIA
ALEP

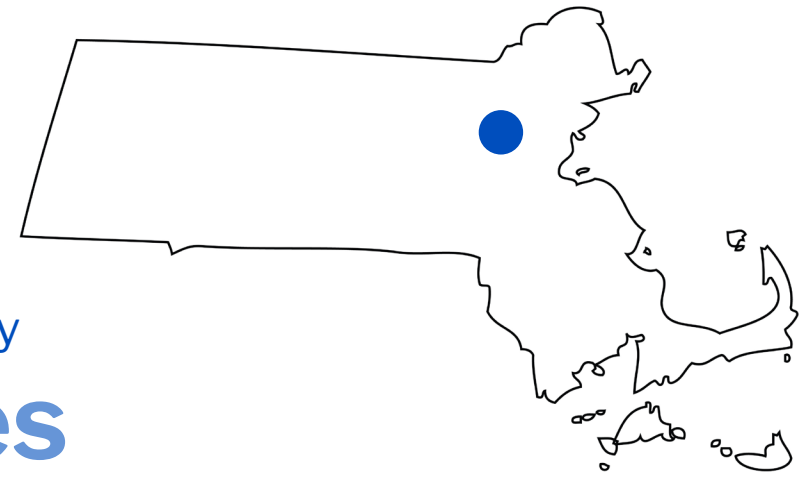
Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Learning Objectives
3. Lexington, MA Community
4. Lexington High School Project
5. Visioning and Programming
6. Alternative Learning Environments
7. Activity
8. Q & A

Learning Objectives

1. Identify how alternative learning environments—such as Wellness Rooms, Sensory Gardens, and non-traditional activity spaces—can **support innovative pedagogy and diverse learning styles** in K–12 schools.
2. Explain how educational visioning and predesign planning can **translate whole-child learning goals into spatial strategies**, using Lexington High School as case examples.
3. Evaluate the pedagogical value of integrating spaces that support both relaxation and structured learning, and how these **environments enhance student engagement, creativity, and self-regulation**.
4. Apply planning principles for distributing small, high-impact learning environments across a campus to **support flexibility, inclusivity, and modern teaching practices** without relying on one-size-fits-all solutions.

Lexington, Massachusetts



Approximately
10 miles
from Boston

Town population
34k +

LHS enrollment
2,395

Lexington High School

*"It's inclusive but **intense**. I am constantly impressed by the talents these kids have: academic, music, singing, sports, art, dance, everything."*

— Survey, Community respondent

"It's a public school outside of Boston that functions like a prep school—actively grappling with big questions around equity, identity, pressure, and what meaningful learning actually looks like in a high-achievement environment."

That tension between excellence and humanity is very real."

— Survey, Staff respondent

#131
of 20,664
Best Public High Schools
in America¹

#4
of 368
Best Public High Schools
in Massachusetts¹

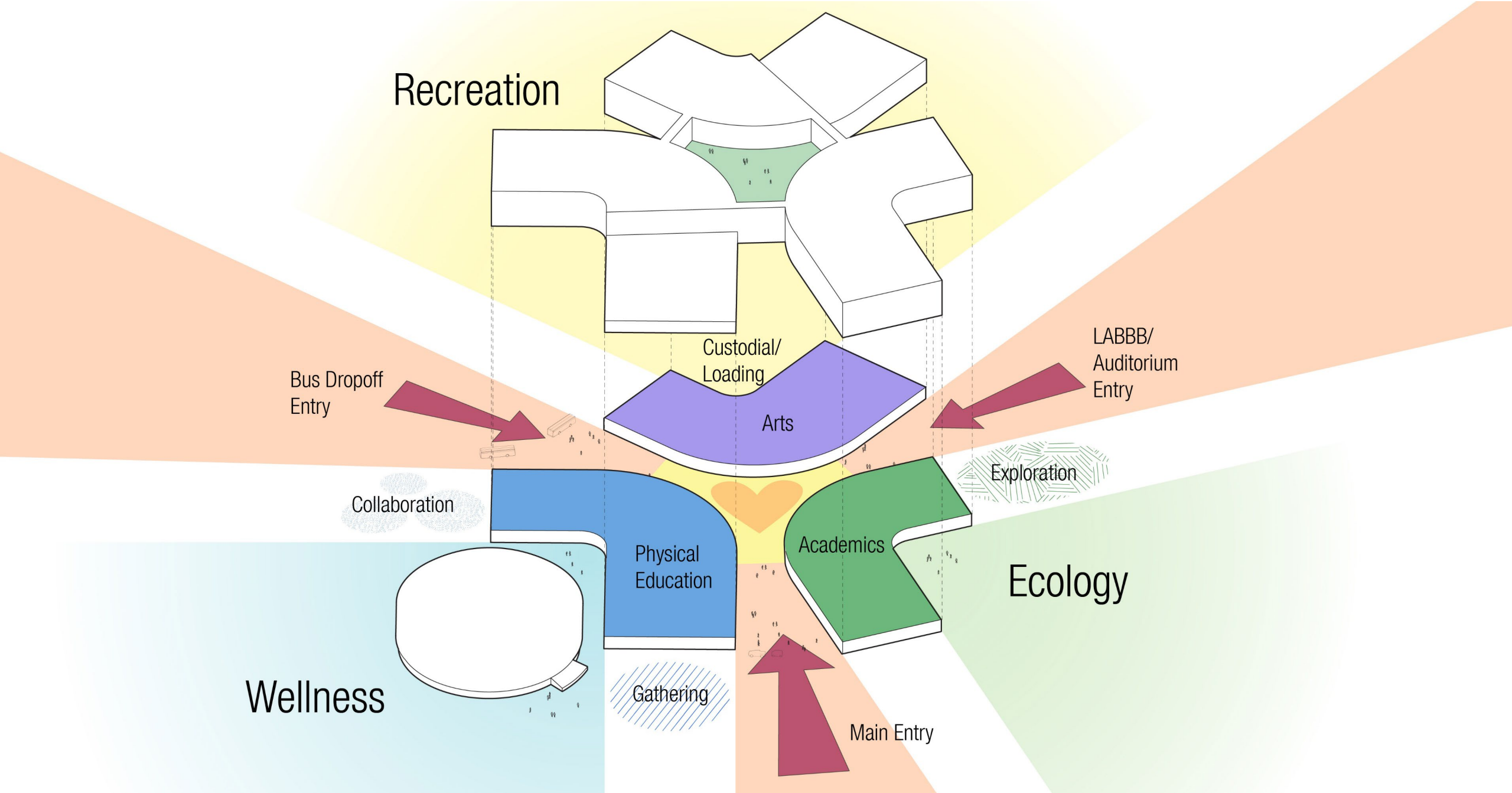
¹ 2027 Niche Best School Rankings

Rankings are based on rigorous analysis of key statistics and millions of reviews from students and parents using data from the U.S. Department of Education.

Lexington High School / Site

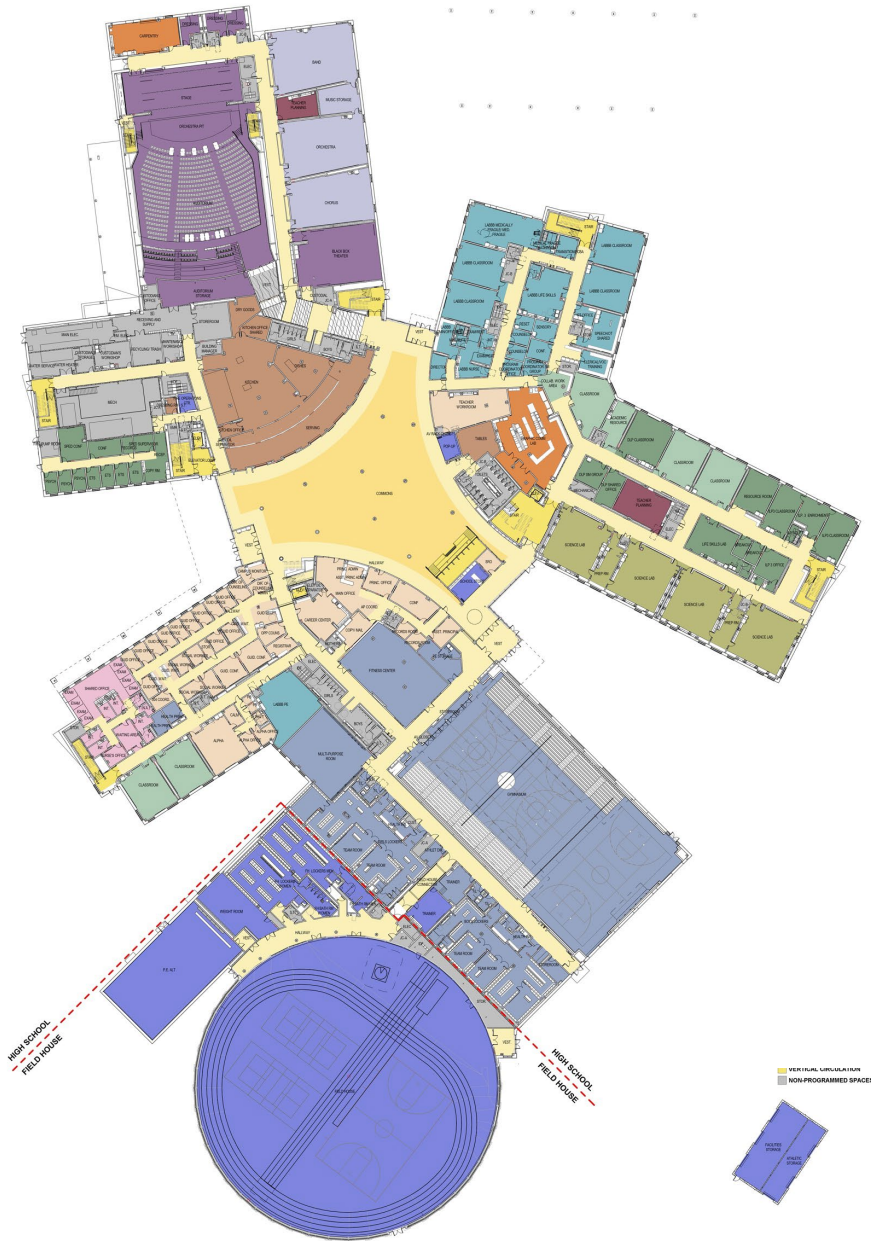


Lexington High School / Parti Diagram



Lexington High School / Floor Plans

Level 1



Level 2

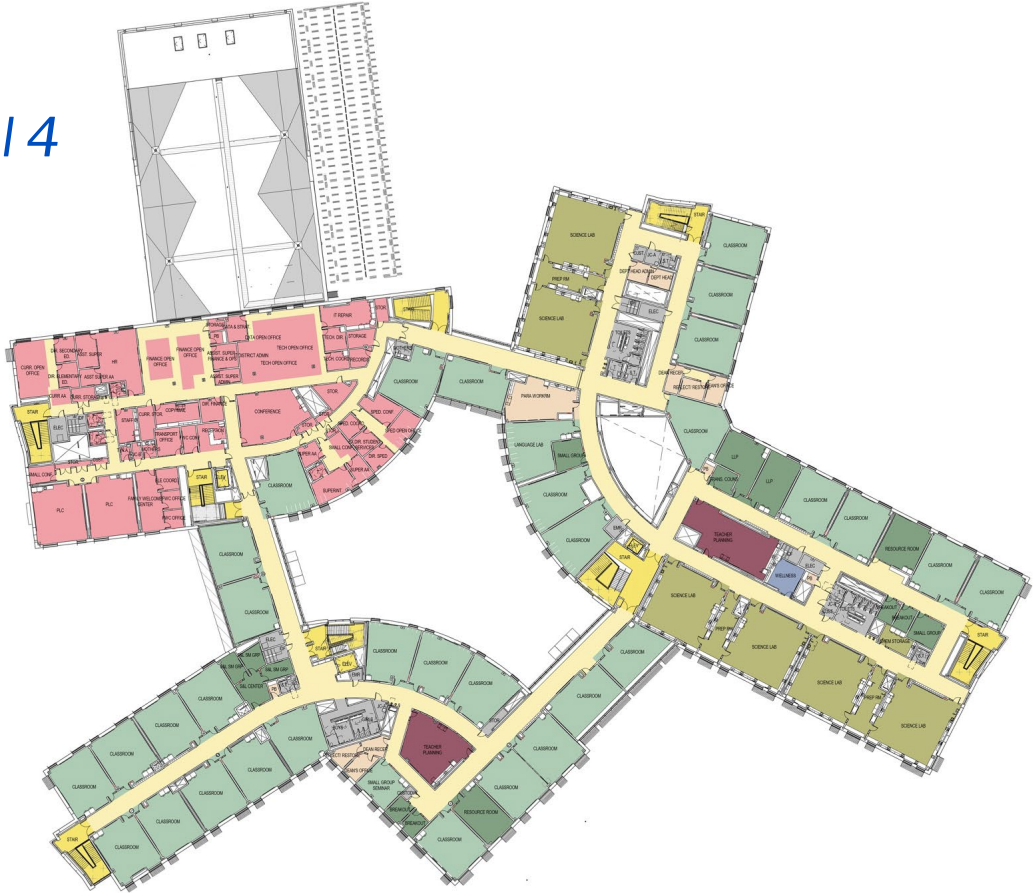


Lexington High School / Floor Plans

Level 3



Level 4



Lexington High School / Distribution of Alternative Learning Environments







Even in a high-performing district,
student wellness, inclusivity, personalization,
and flexibility remain critical design challenges.



Diversity,
Equity, and
Inclusion

Redefining
Success

Students
as Active
Agents

Authentic
Learning

Community
Partnerships

How can alternative learning environments support this?

Visioning and Community



Visioning and Community

Educational Priorities

Architectural Priorities

Interdisciplinary Connections

Hands-On / Inquiry-Based Learning ↔ Hands-on spaces, Outdoor Learning Spaces

Technology / STEAM

Varied Teaching / Learning Modalities ↔ Flexible Spaces

Voice and Choice ↔ Gallery Space, Universal Design and Access

Vocational Opportunities ↔ Career Exploration Spaces

Collaborative Opportunities ↔ Third Space for Social Interaction/ Relaxation

Performing Arts Programming

Display and Exhibition ↔ Gallery Space

Supportive Features



Calm/Quiet



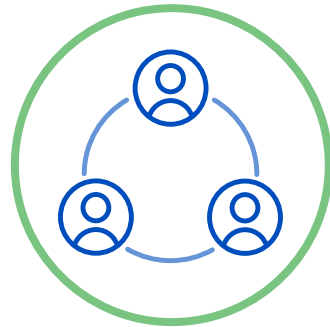
Movement



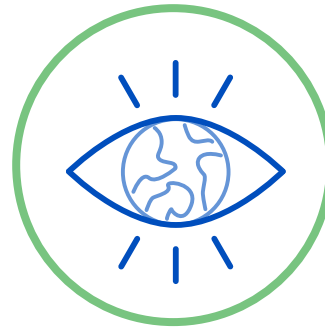
Focus



Social Emotional



Social
Connections



Authentic
Learning



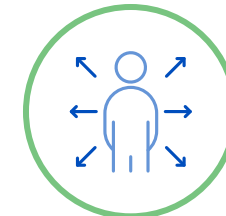
Sensory
Regulation

Space Types / Wellness Room

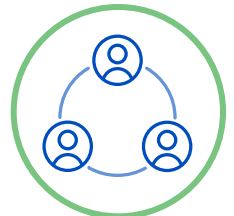
How can a room create spaces of respite, connection, and self-regulation?



Calm/Quiet



Movement



Social Connections

Space Features

- Tunable lighting
- Shades for privacy
- Calming visuals
- Diverse seating options
- Flexible furniture



Alternative Room Configuration

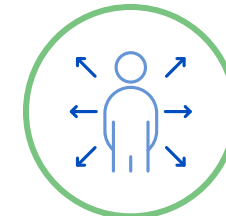


How can space affirm students' identities and cultures while strengthening their ties to the broader school community?

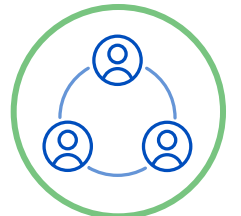
METCO ROOM / 300 NSF



Calm/Quiet



Movement



Social Connections

Space Features

- Comfortable lounge seating
- Flexible, agile furniture
- Carpet / soft surfaces
- A/V capability for playing music and sharing videos
- Tackboards or markerboards for student driven displays



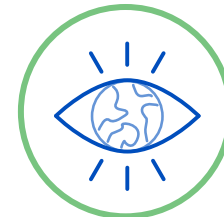
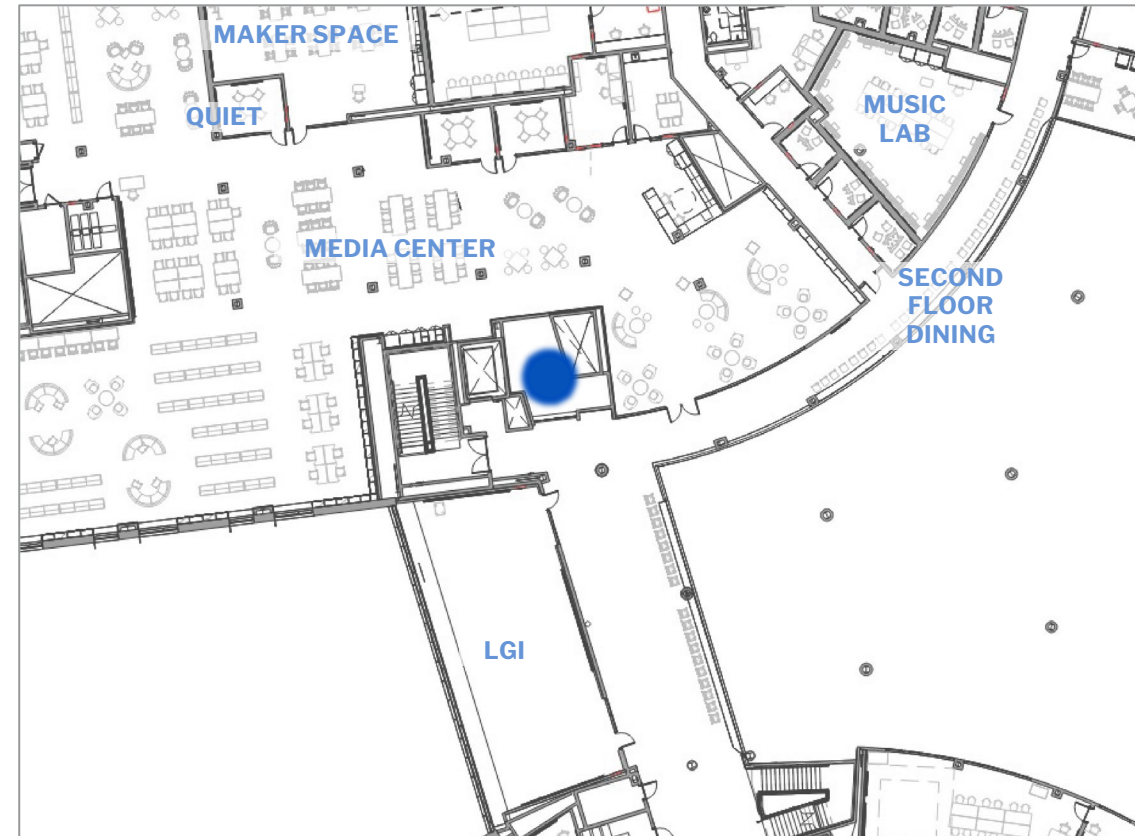
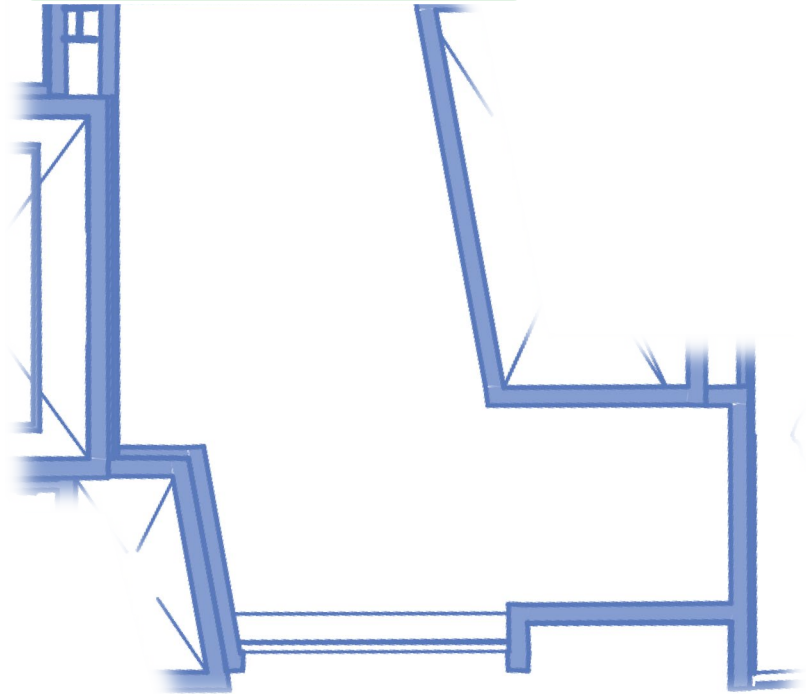
Alternative Room Configuration



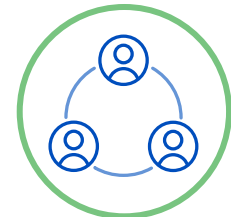
Space Types / Cafe/Snack Shop

How can a space nourish students and school culture?

CAFE/SNACK SHOP / 300 NSF



Authentic Learning



Social Connections

Space Features

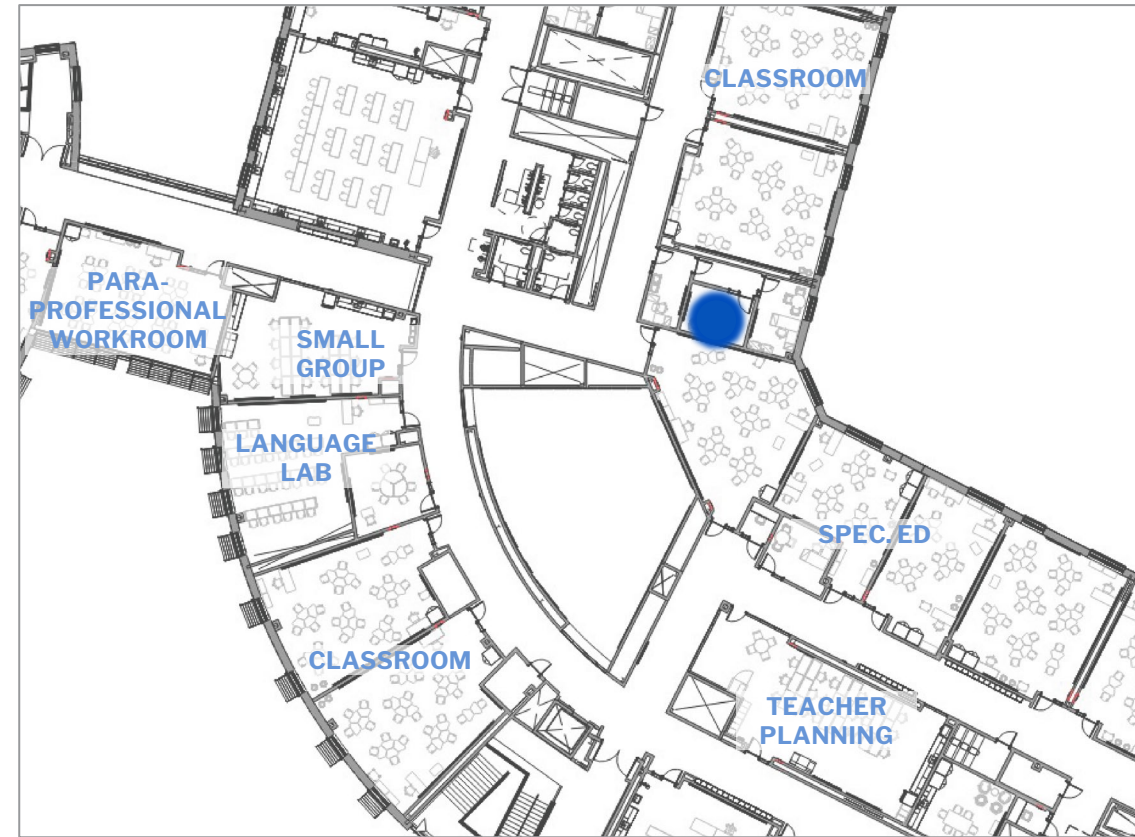
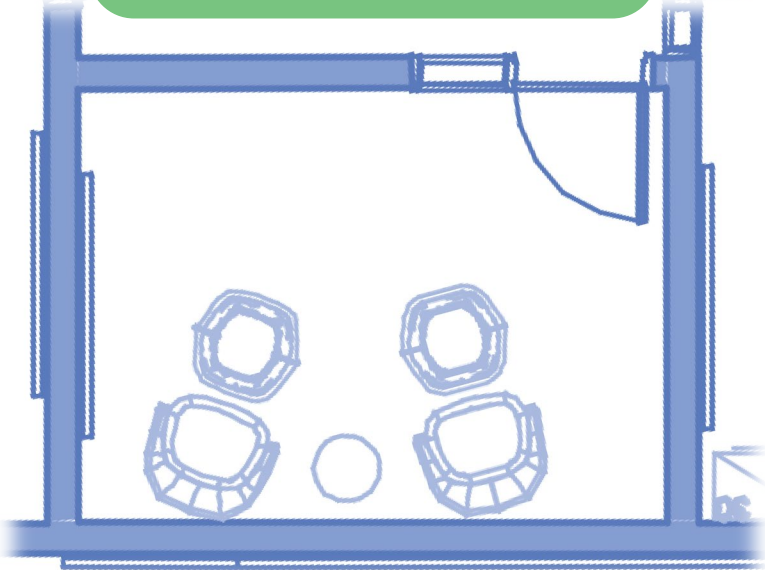
- Grab and go coolers
- Check-out counter
- Café tables and chairs
- Visible central location



Space Types / Restorative Room

How can a room heal and rebuild relationships?

RESTORATION ROOM / 135 NSF



Calm/Quiet



Social Emotional



Sensory Regulation

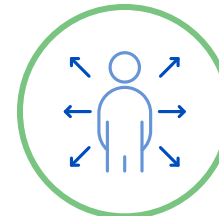
Space Features

- Dimmable color-tunable lighting
- Indirect light fixtures (table-top)
- Soft seating elements
- Carpet and muted color palettes
- Sensory elements
- Natural / biophilic materials

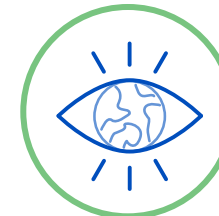


Space Types / Pop Up Shop/Gallery

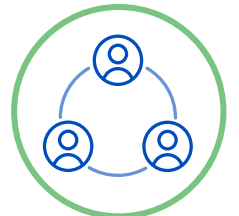
How can a space give students an authentic experience when showcasing their creativity and work?



Movement



Authentic Learning



Social Connections

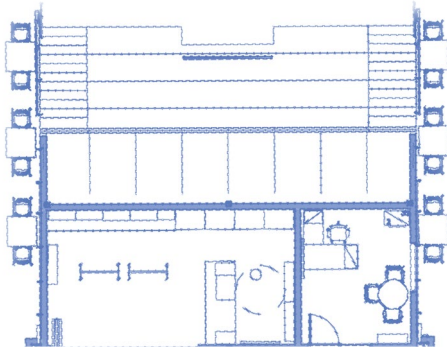
Space Features

- Flexible / agile layout
- Digital Displays
- Gallery lighting
- Slatwalls for apparel
- Visible/ central location

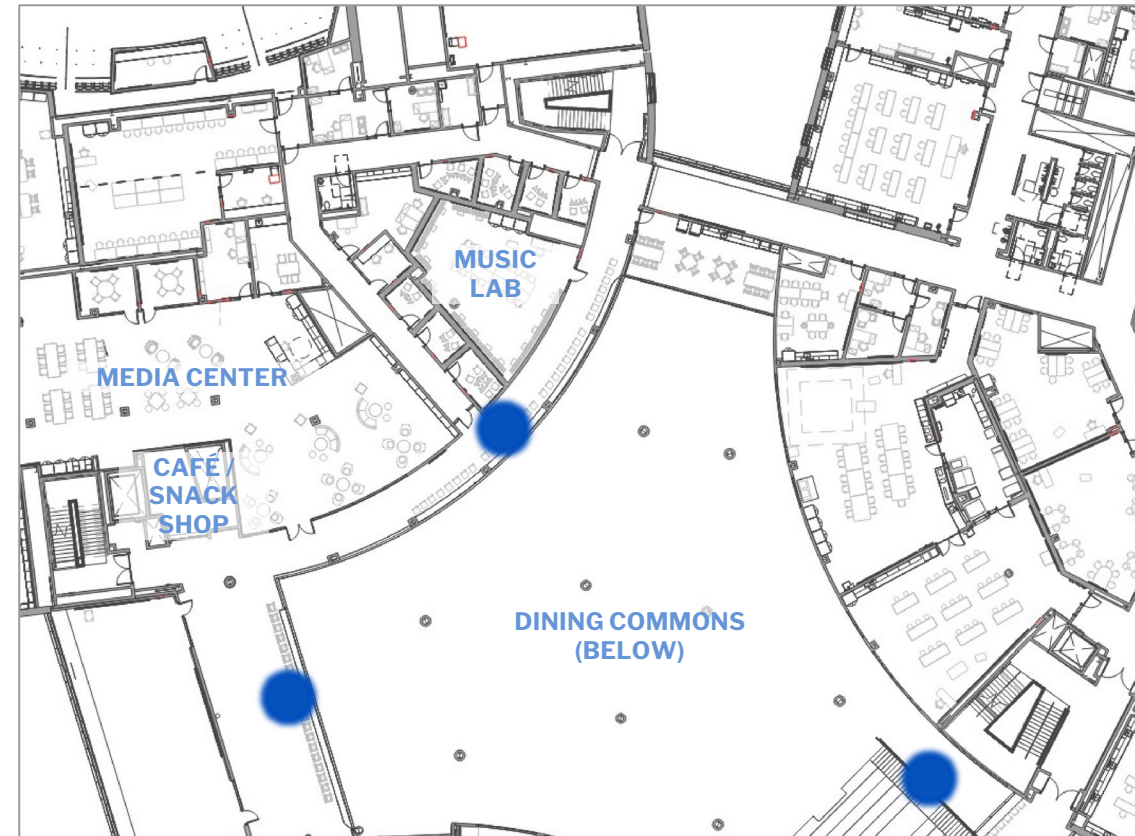


Space Types / Differentiated Dining

How can dining design support a calm and restful experience?



DIFFERENTIATED DINING / 500 NSF



Calm/Quiet



Focus



Social Connections

Space Features

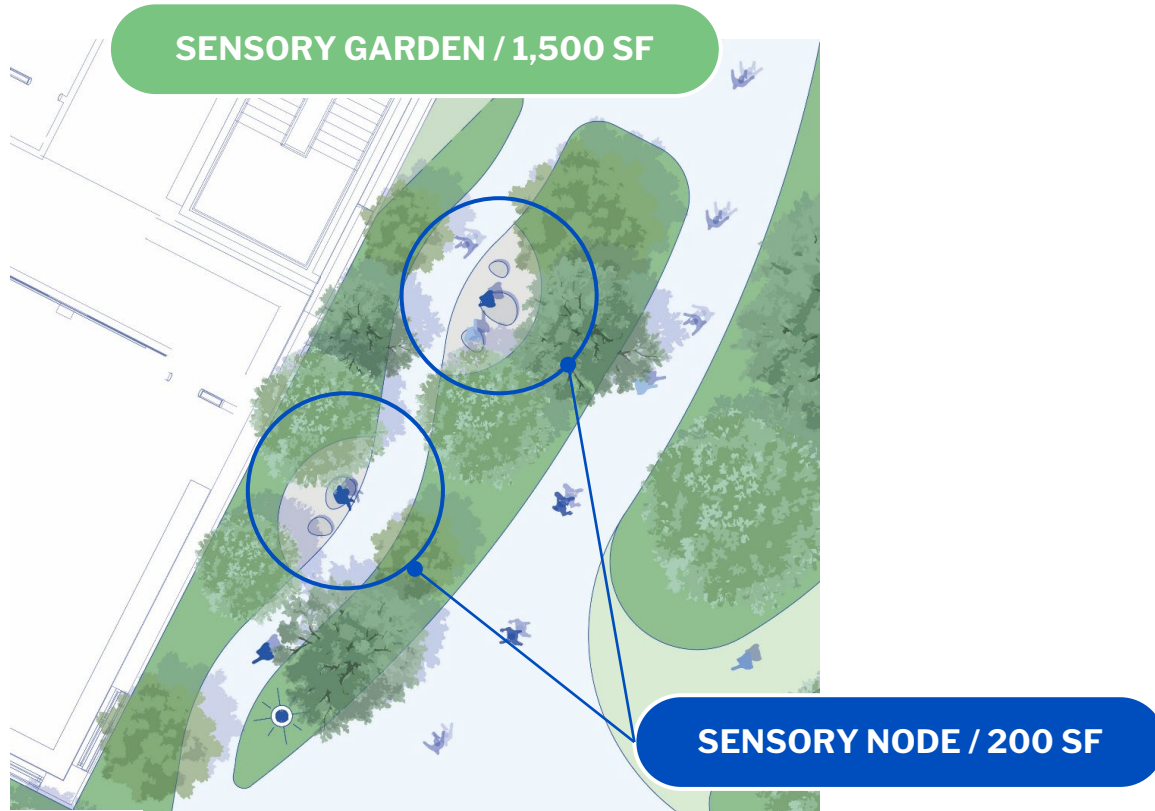
- Varied of seating types
- Smaller groupings of seating
- Visual cues and defined edges
- Acoustic elements



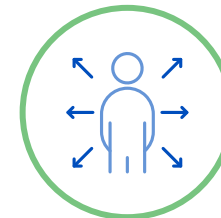
Additional Views



How can a school provide restorative environments beyond the walls of the building?



Calm/Quiet



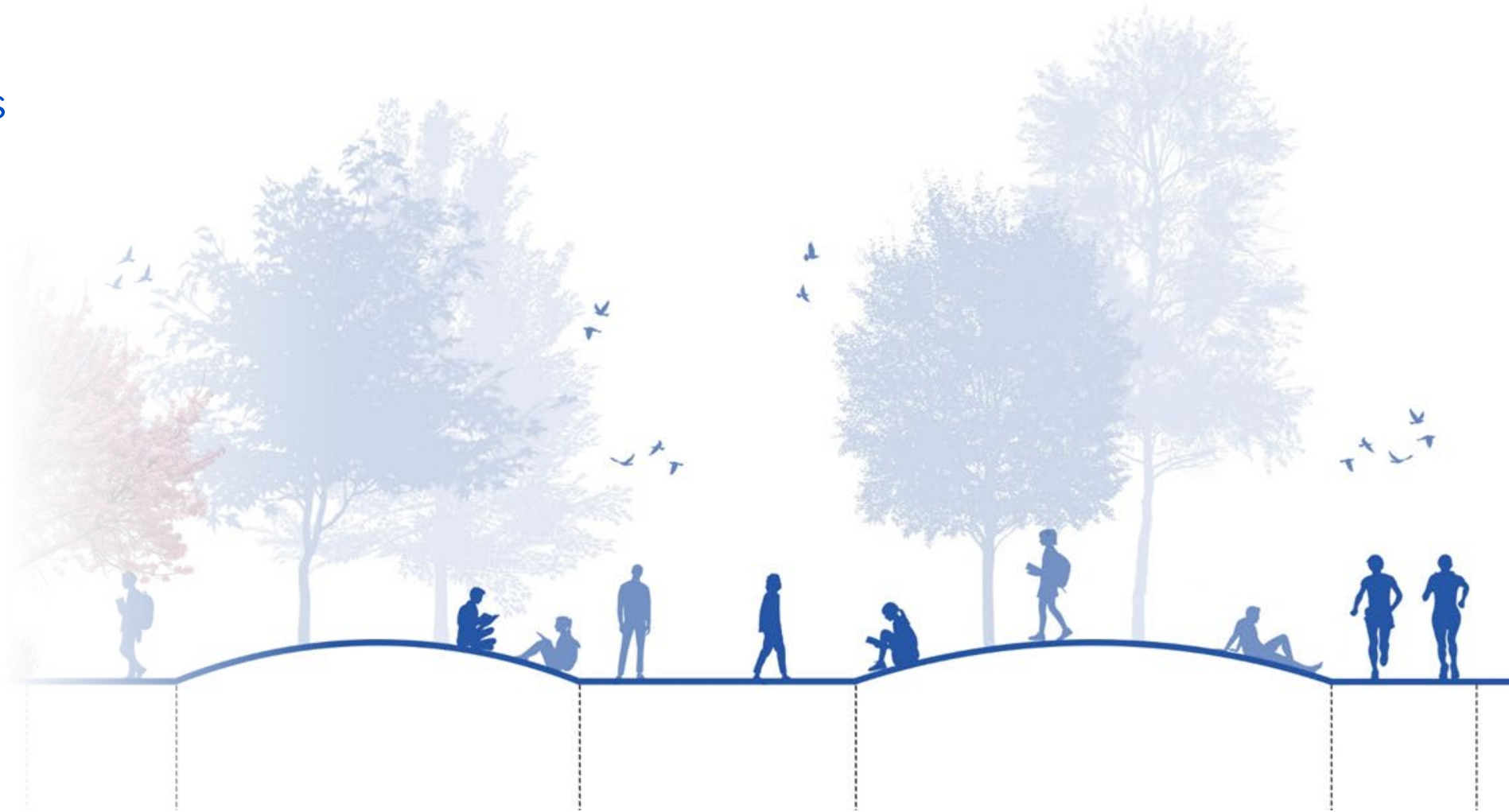
Movement



Sensory Regulation

Space Features

- Active sensory stimulating plantings and elements
- Quiet retreat areas
- Tactile elements
- Seating
- Accessible paths



Space Features

- Active sensory stimulating plantings and features
- Quiet retreat areas
- Tactile elements
- Seating



Activity

Questions



Matt Rice /
mrice@smma.com



Rosemary Park /
rpark@smma.com

Thank you

North Sensory Garden Enlargement



Program and Materials

KEY

- 01 TEXTURED SENSORY WALLS (TOUCH)
- 02 MUSIC CHIMES (SOUND)
- 03 WITCHHAZEL LOOP (SMELL/TASTE)
- 04 THYME (SMELL/TASTE)
- 05 PRECAST CONCRETE BENCH
- 06 STONE BENCHES
- 07 PLANTED BERMS
- 08 BIRD FEEDERS/BIRD SOUNDS (SOUND)
- 09 5' WIDE WALKING PATH



North Sensory Garden Plaza

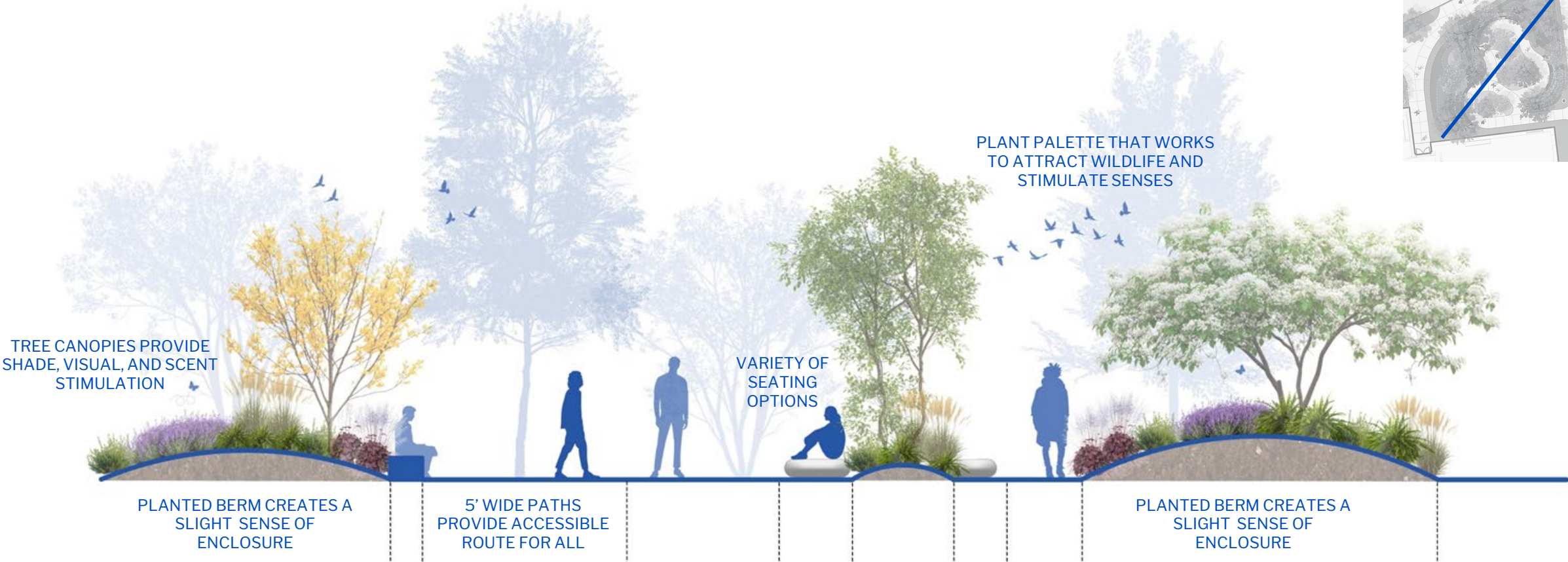


Program

KEY

- 01 SKATE PARK
- 02 OUTDOOR CARPENTRY PLAZA
- 03 CARPENTRY CLASSROOM
- 04 STAGE
- 05 DRESSING ROOMS
- 06 BAND ROOM
- 07 SKATE PARK PARKING LOT
- 08 BUILDING EGRESS
- 09 SENSORY GARDEN

North Sensory Garden/ Section



STIMULATES:

- Touch
- Scent
- Taste
- Visually
- Auditory



Common Witch Hazel
Hamamelis virginiana



Fringe Tree
Chionanthus virginicus



Goldie's Shield Fern
Dryopteris goldiana



Coral Bells 'Palace Purple'
Heuchera micrantha var.
diversifolia 'Palace Purple'



Red Twig Dogwood
Cornus sericea



Northern Sea Oats
Chasmanthium latifolium

Optional Quote

*"I've been here 11 years. Over that time, I've seen the school become more **openly reflective about identity, belonging**, and student experience. Conversations that once felt peripheral — around equity, representation, and well-being — are now more visible and more central, even when they're uncomfortable or unfinished."*

— Staff respondent