



SchoolsNEXT 2021

Team #24

Somerset Elementary School

Preeti Jain, Parker McCabe, Clarabelle Rode, and Camille Thai

Bullis Charter School

Somerset Elementary School

Overview

Somerset Elementary School strives to build a safe, friendly, and diverse environment where students engage in fun, creative, and innovative learning while connecting with their community and the outdoors. Located in Grass Valley, California, this K-6 school has a student body of around 420 students, 60 per grade. The teacher to student ratio 2:15, with 1 main teacher and 1 assistant teacher per class. The small class sizes at Somerset Elementary School provide learners with individualized support and helps to strengthen bonds between classmates, creating a closely-knit and safe learning environment.

Learning Environment

A typical day at Somerset Elementary School starts at 8:30 A.M. when students head over to their classrooms before attendance is taken at 8:35. Fourth through sixth graders have six forty-five minute classes, while kindergarten through third grade only has 5. Students have a morning break and lunch with ten to fifteen minute breaks in between classes. Somerset provides a variety of options for different assignments that helps to support all learning styles. Students are also given the choice to work in groups or individually and can choose how they convey their understanding and work. Somerset Elementary School promotes a healthy, safe, and comfortable learning environment through the education and discussion of difficult topics. Sixth graders will have health classes that feature grade level conversations about crime, drugs, mental health, and more. Students will learn about the science behind drugs, how to work through anxiety and stress, and more. We are including this in our curriculum as Grass Valley has high crime rates and drug usage and we want to make sure students feel supported and safe at school. Adding on, counselors are always available for students and families to talk to and monthly meetings with teachers and guardians are encouraged. Since our school ends in sixth grade, we will work with middle schools in our area to continue these conversations in later grades. The Grass Valley Meal Program (GVMP), created by Somerset, is another way the school will help to support the community. The GVMP helps to provide food for students and their families. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner are available at free or reduced prices, lunch being built in to the school day. A growth mindset is encouraged and supported throughout student's education. We view mistakes as an opportunity to grow and learn. Overall, the learning environment at Somerset is adaptive and helpful for all types of learning and learners.

Community Environment

A connection to the school pushes not only the community in the right direction, but also provides future generations with good education and safety. At Somerset, community is emphasized through bonding activities such as Autumn picnics, theater productions, concerts,

and even movies. SES has field trips where students connect with the community and nature around them. An example being a trip to Empire Mine State Historic Park, which connects to the history and community of Grass Valley. These activities give a chance for not only students, but also families to come together and build community.

Physical Environment

The physical campus of Somerset Elementary School is designed for optimal learning for students. While there is a bus system that will transport kids to and from school, there is a parking lot for drop off and faculty parking and bike racks inside the gates of the school. Although the campus is gated from the rest of the city with a few regulated entrances, visitors are required to get a temporary pass from the office before entering the school. The multiple types of seating around the room from beanbags to stools, will help for a creative learning environment that fosters the students' education. Whiteboard tables and desks will help with mathematics and design thinking. To emphasize collaboration, there will be areas better suited for groups as well as areas for individual work time. Outdoor seating will also be available to help students connect with the outdoors. Additionally, the campus of Somerset was designed and created to be the most eco friendly possible, by using recycled materials and LED lights. While solar technology is the main source of energy, students are taught about sustainability and conservation of natural resources. The cafeteria is waste conscious by rarely using non reusable or compostable materials. We compost all biodegradable matter to our school garden and recycle any glass, paper, or plastic. Along with being eco friendly, Somerset strives to incorporate biophilic, or green, design throughout the school. For example, classrooms have lots of windows to allow for natural light. The physical aspects of the campus contribute to the creativity and uniqueness of learning at Somerset.

Design Process

The first step of our design process was to research the community we were creating a school for. We learned about the needs of the community and children, and brainstormed ideas that could benefit them both. The physical environment was also an important factor in deciding what structures and designs we would incorporate. Additionally, we looked at pre-existing information about Grass Valley Charter School, which is currently in place, to gain an understanding of the school at large. After all of our research, we decided that our school would mainly focus on a connection to nature and the environment. Once we found this focus, we built classes and created new aspects of the school to connect to that mission.