

Blue Valley Global Academy
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Blue Valley Global Academy, located in Overland Park, KS, addresses many current-day issues regarding education, community, and sustainability. The basic problems that drove the school's design were study-abroad students being dispersed into low-performance learning environments, unsustainable and unsafe schools, and a lack of diversity in the community. From these issues, design requirements were formed that shaped the school:

- Accommodate a student body of at least 400 students, with half being international students or study-abroad students
- Attain LEED Certification, a green building and sustainability rating system
- Include a community-benefit element
- Include a mental health space, flexible classrooms, a performance space, athletic facilities, workspaces outside of the classroom, and a walkable campus

To find a site, multiple locations were researched in the Kansas City metro area and the Northeast region of the U.S. for an expansive search. Ultimately, a location in Overland Park, KS, was chosen since it scored the highest on a decision matrix and fit the project's needs. Even more, this area is primarily white, and an international school would increase diversity in this community.

The design process was officially started by creating a list of different spaces required to meet the design requirements: a school, library, dining hall, and dorms for international students.

The dining hall, also the cafeteria, serves as a bridge between the school and dorms, separating the public and private spaces for security and comfort. A green roof sits on top, connecting the second floors of the school and dorms, and a sky bridge connects the third floor of the school with the third floor of the dorms--this ensures proper traffic flow on each level while adding a sustainable and architectural feature. The dorm element would be inhabited by international students who were not staying with host families.

The school element is the most elaborate component. It offers language classes in Swahili, Portuguese, Russian, and Hindi, which are recognized as less commonly taught languages, and offers special science classes in geology, astronomy, and hydrology, mirroring the school's global concept from a learning perspective. These specialized classes academically differentiate Blue Valley Global Academy from peer schools.

The library element would be a new public library extension to the local Johnson County Library system. This is the community-benefit factor in this school, and it was strategically designed to benefit both the community and school. It includes a state-of-the-art maker space that can be utilized by the public and students.

These elements, all combined, make up the heart of Blue Valley Global Academy's design: a unique and immersive student experience. At BVGA, students are encouraged to interact and exchange ideas. They do not only learn in traditional classrooms but also from each other, an effect of having half of the student body come from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, incorporating flexibility was essential, since a diverse student body means even more diverse needs. No school days are the same at BVGA because students can choose how and where they learn, whether that be in the classroom, the many workspaces outside of the classrooms, or even on green roofs. Furthermore, the modular furniture allows students to work individually or within groups, also integrating technology into learning, because students can work anywhere comfortably.

The Mental Health Center in the school acknowledges the mental health needs of students and the growing mental health issue in teenagers. This private space, which includes a sensory room, provides a place for students to prioritize their mental health with social and emotional support, leading to better learning and improved active engagement.

However, the student experience is also affected by external or visual factors. The school element is outlined with curtain walls, which allow natural light into the learning spaces, maximizing productivity and sustainability. The innovative triangle layout of the classrooms placed on the exterior edge also maximizes the number of classrooms with windows. A roof overhang was precisely designed to protect the school from heavy solar heat. Blue, green, and orange were chosen as the school's main colors: blue and green, the colors of the Earth, symbolize the global outreach of the school, and orange, an accent color, symbolizes excitement and confidence.

Sustainability was also heavily considered in the overall design, and BVGA achieved LEED Silver Certification by garnering points in Location and Transport Credits, Sustainable Sites Credits, Water Efficiency Credits, Energy and Atmosphere Credits, and Indoor Environmental Quality Credits. This ensures that the building not only supports the well-being of the inhabitants but the environment as well. Other visible sustainable features include the four green roofs, solar panels, and shading roof.

To create a tailored design, we conducted research, such as district-wide surveys and analysis of unique schools around the world. Throughout the entire design process, we also met with professionals, including district administration, architects at Incite Design Studio (a local

architecture firm specializing in school design), and other designers. This feedback and input propelled Blue Valley Global Academy's vision forward, ensuring that the school's design was realistic and prioritized student experience above all.

All in all, Blue Valley Global Academy offers a unique education experience by highlighting flexibility and sustainability while providing numerous educational opportunities, benefiting students' future affairs, and positively impacting not only the local community but also the greater international community of its students. BVGA's design underscores the school's values: interaction, diversity, and a student- and community-focused educational environment. Students walk away with a greater understanding of the world around them, as well as how they interact with and celebrate differences, an indispensable skill to carry in life.