THIS IS OUR SCHOOL

Community drives design of new preK-8 school with 98% low-income students

“The entire community felt like they were part of the process.”

– Saul Brass, Laraway School Board Vice President
EDUCATIONAL VISION

Laraway School had changed little since the 1950s. Additionally, nearly 98% of its students are low-income.

The district wanted a new preK-8 school for half the budget of similar-sized schools nearby.

Goals included:

- Incorporate school community input
- Reduce bullying and promote camaraderie
- Encourage learning beyond the classroom
- Celebrate Joliet region

The old school had overcrowded spaces, sparse natural light, aging infrastructure, and skyrocketing maintenance costs.

During one student visioning session, a kindergartner created this drawing of an older and a younger student getting along.

Community and student visioning sessions
PLANNING PROCESS

Key Stakeholders

- **Focus Groups** determined goals and needs.
- A 12-person **Design Committee** developed layout concepts.
- A **Core Team** reviewed/tweaked conceptual designs.
- **Community Engagement Forums** solicited community feedback.

![Building concept development](image1)

- **User Educational Patterns**
- **Site Physical Patterns**
- **Mission Cultural Patterns**

![Design Committee concepts](image2)

- **Student workshops**

![Student workshops](image3)
**DESIGN SOLUTION**

Educational Patterns

- Grade level neighborhoods surround central courtyard
- Each neighborhood offers active/flexible core space
- Team centers encourage teacher collaboration

▲ Each neighborhood has a front porch.

▲ Central lockers expose wall space for windows, writing surfaces, and tackboards.
Physical Patterns

Joliet’s Wauponsee Glacial Trail inspired the curving corridor.

Green metal returns at window jambs suggest windbreaks or crops.
DESIGN SOLUTION

Cultural Patterns

The linear layout, east/west orientation, and floor/lighting patterns reference Joliet’s farming history.

See board members discuss shortcomings of the old school, the planning process, and the impact the new school has made: [http://bit.ly/LarawayVideo](http://bit.ly/LarawayVideo)

A curving “quarry wall” acknowledges Joliet’s limestone quarrying heritage.
## CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHALLENGE</th>
<th>SOLUTION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Required disadvantaged community to pass referendum</td>
<td>Planning effort led to 80% “yes” vote</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concerns about older students bullying younger ones</td>
<td>Neighborhoods and circulation separate younger and older students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Create advanced educational environment despite restrictive budget</td>
<td>Linear design, neighborhoods, active/flexible zones, daylight/views</td>
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<td>Some students not learning proper hygiene at home</td>
<td>Nursing office showers and laundry room</td>
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- Coaching rooms connect each pair of classrooms.
- The modular tech lab ties into Joliet Township High School’s Career Academies.
When marketplace demand for precast concrete peaked, the team converted the precast design to masonry to complete construction on time and avoid delivery premiums.

The design pulls apart a simple box to open to surroundings and save costs.

Metal in window jambs saves money and creates visual interest.
GREEN FEATURES

- Roof and wall insulation exceed minimum R values
- All mechanical units have heat recovery
- Daylight harvesting system
- Rain gardens and bioswales

Designers used sun studies to maximize natural light, while minimizing glare and shadows.
The Laraway School story proves that districts serving disadvantaged families can unite communities to create cost-effective learning settings that emphasize student performance and regional nuances.

“In the old school, students weren’t too excited to wear shirts or jackets with the Laraway logo, but now they’re proud.”

— Michelle Matenaer, Laraway School Board secretary