



A4LE ALASKA CHAPTER 2015 ARCHITECTURAL AWARDS

GEORGE H. GILSON MIDDLE SCHOOL PROJECT NARRATIVE

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GEORGE H. GILSON MIDDLE SCHOOL



The new school uses about 48,000 BTU/sq.ft. less energy than the old school.

To reduce construction, long-term operations, and maintenance costs, smart materials choices and building systems include:

- + Thermal building envelope
- + Simple building massing
- + Durable, simple finishes
- + 3 bypass boilers
- + High-efficiency LED lights
- + Windows that maximize daylight and retain crucial heat, important to a positive learning environment in Valdez's long, dark winters

In 2010, the original 1965 George H. Gilson Junior High School reached the end of its serviceable life. Through five *community-* and *student-driven planning labs*, the team helped the City of Valdez, teachers, staff, students, community members and parents achieve the educational vision of a *21st Century School*.

The community and team pushed the boundaries of the traditional educational model, using the *Core Academic Neighborhood*. The new 56,759 SF, 160-student school doubles the size of the former school and replaces traditional double-loaded hallways and classrooms with shared, flexible, *multi-use* spaces. The team removed walls, extended spaces for *collaborative learning*, and created *flexible shared spaces*.

The teachers can now organize learning environments to work for each student's learning style. The Career and Technical Workshop allows *project-based learning*, close to the high school to *share resources*. This design approach also maximized funds to serve more students, doing *more with less*.

The new student commons provides collaborative learning space. The main commons offers student dining, a presentation theatre, and a gathering hall that *welcomes community uses* (a community priority) and accommodates student population and technology evolutions.

The *physical environment*, finishes, artwork, and displays reflect the *students' vision* and energy. The result is a comfortable, welcoming, safe environment, with its own strong *identity* and a *connection* to the community.

This open concept is also *secure*, with administration offices at the main entrance, good sight lines for supervision, and a separate entrance away from the academic area for community use.

Valdez sees an average 27-foot snowfall annually, and this new design allows the school to be an emergency shelter during *winter storm* events. The landscape architects designed the *compact site* for *easy maintenance* and snow removal, storage, and equipment, with special attention to the campus master plan and *shared space* with the high school. The site design emphasizes:

- + efficient access and circulation
- + shared educational and community spaces
- + planned expansion space
- + new turf fields
- + daylight and views

Construction required a collaborative contractor relationship, as school and public spaces were *operational during phased construction*.