

# Mat-Su Day School Project Narrative

The Mat-Su Day School provides focused education and support for students with emotional and behavioral challenges who were not successful in their home schools. These are students who have traditionally been devalued, labeled, and targeted for placement at institutions. At the Day School, students have the opportunity to practice academic, social, behavioral, and employability skills necessary for success. Because the ultimate goal is to return students to their home school to enter a program that will allow for maximum inclusion, the Day School emulates the academic environments of local schools as much as possible while recognizing unique support, learning, and safety requirements.

The school's core committee of stakeholders identified the following guiding design principles for the Mat-Su Day School experience: Safety, Sense of Hope, Openness, Non-Institutional, Calm, and Simple. Taken together, they represent an educational environment that communicates that these students' efforts have value and are worthy of respect.

To ensure safety the academic spaces are divided into two wings based on age. Lower grades have general classrooms where all subjects are taught, while upper grades have specialized classrooms for subject specific instruction. The academic volumes are small in scale and clad in simple materials. Modest glazing allows these forms to read as more opaque and sheltered. Students access these wings through a common entry hall. As soon as students enter the Mat-Su Day School, they have a view through the building to the forested perimeter of the site. This transparency promises students that there is a goal beyond their time at the Day School, and the skills learned within aid them to achieve this goal. Other common spaces include media classrooms, a multipurpose space for kinetic learning, and an achievement classroom. The achievement classroom is a reward space for students excelling in their studies and self-control. Administration and counselling are also centrally located to provide oversight. Architecturally, these common spaces are cradled by two folded planes that open outward toward the main approach to the building. By contrast to the academic volumes, the common space volumes are larger in scale, and have inviting visual texture with warm colors. A band of multicolored glazing wraps it, projecting openness and welcome to students and visitors. Internally, academic and common spaces are divided by threshold walls. These walls define the classrooms as calm, focused zones while enriching common spaces with curving geometry, subtle tactility, and a sense of exploration.