

MOUNT TAHOMA HIGH SCHOOL

Form ♦ Function ♦ Beauty

Grades 9-12
1,800 Students

277,912 SF
\$58,250,000

When voters approved a \$450 million bond measure that included \$77.7 million for a new Mount Tahoma High School, they launched a monumental investment in one of Tacoma's poorest neighborhoods. Chosen as one of 16 high schools to participate in the Gates Foundation's State Achievers Program, Mt. Tahoma was also transforming itself educationally by exploring ways to restructure and deliver curriculum.

BLRB Architects collaborated with district staff, students and community members to develop several key goals that guided the school's design. Among these: provide a personalized learning environment; create a healthy and sustainable learning community; establish the school as a community center that fosters community pride; and preserve and celebrate the school's heritage and namesake.

The most compelling goal, however, was to empower students with a sense of community, spanning the gamut from their roles as individuals to their global connections. Four learning academies create smaller communities within the context of this large comprehensive high school. Students stay within these learning communities until graduation, creating strong relationships between themselves and their teachers. It is believed that teachers can better meet individual needs by instructing the same students throughout their high school years.

Expanding their sense of community one step further, a footbridge connects the two main instructional buildings. It acts as a physical connection to the adjacent learning communities. More importantly, it serves as a visual reminder to students of their relationship to the Mount Tahoma High School community as a whole. Together these building elements embrace the landscaped outdoor courtyard which serves as a shared gathering area for all students.

Used as a linking element between the north wing and the learning academies is the student commons or "social heart" of the school. This multifunctional space is centrally located at the school's internal crossroads, and supports social activities of both students and the community alike. The commons' rotunda offers sweeping views of the school's iconic namesake, Mount Rainier, as well as offering students a view of an even larger community that awaits them beyond high school. And finally, a world map inlaid in the commons' floor reminds students of their global connections.

While creating a healthy and sustainable learning environment was a design goal unto itself, it also provided yet another opportunity to expand each student's sense of community. Sustainable features of the building; such as daylighting, use of "green" building materials, occupancy controlled lighting and HVAC, as well as water conservation and storm water management, further the educational mission of the school. They allow the entire campus to become a teaching tool and set an example of environmental sustainability for future district projects. More importantly, they illustrate to each student the part they play as global citizens and stewards of the environment they share.

Though it's comprehensive in size and amenities, the two-story school feels friendly and inviting, "a learning village," rather than a single, massive structure. The school is designed to be flexible for curriculum changes, accommodate a variety of teaching and learning styles, adapt to changing educational needs, and expand for growth. It's a building that joins the highest regard for our quality of life with the least effect on our environment. The new Mount Tahoma High School is a marvel for the eyes and a state-of-the-art center for learning.

CONSTRUCTION COST BREAKDOWN

Phase I: Site Preparation Construction	\$ 1,300,000
Phase II: Building and Site Construction	
Main Building.....	44,450,000
Stadium.....	6,100,000
Site Development.....	5,950,000
Off-Site Development.....	450,000
TOTAL CONSTRUCTION COSTS	\$58,250,000