

Robert Frost Elementary School

59,746 SF

Total Construction Cost (incl. site work): \$19,269,695

Site Work and Development Costs: \$3,422,000

Opening its doors in Fall 2009, Robert Frost Elementary School offers its community a new educational facility featuring art, poetry, and light-filled, shared learning spaces. In the process of its development, the Lake Washington School District and design team deliberately created a planning environment to cultivate enthusiasm and encourage creative expression. By rethinking conventional configurations and infusing poetry and art into every design stroke, their work has resulted in a truly unique and inspiring place to learn.

Driven by both the unique nature of the site and the outcomes of Consensus Planning Workshops held during the early stages of the project, the school design provides exceptional flexibility and strong, clear connections in and out-of-doors.

Flexible Shared Learning Spaces

There are four learning groupings in the building, each functioning as its own small learning community. The shared learning environments are designed in clusters of four independent classrooms surrounding a communal instruction area, all with large windows offering unimpeded views to the exterior courtyards and woods beyond. Underscoring the connection to the outdoors, each shared space has direct access to the courtyards and paths leading to an additional outdoor classroom "in-the-round" defined by large boulders among the trees.

The design team incorporated sound resistant, double-glazed folding wall systems to empower teachers to open up their classrooms easily to the shared space and to the adjacent classroom, allowing various spatial configurations to suit learning objectives. These movable walls are situated to permit visibility throughout the cluster, supporting group learning while also providing safe and secure sight lines for monitoring students in various areas. A teacher workroom/prep/storage space and a small group/planning room have direct visual connection and access to the shared instructional area. Restroom entries are also oriented towards the shared space, enabling the teachers to monitor entry in and out of the restrooms without losing sight of students.

Principal Sue Anne Sullivan explains how the flexible design of these clusters has created new learning opportunities at the school:

"Our Shared Learning Spaces offer students and teachers the freedom to create effective learning environments and the flexibility to change them easily, based on the activity and the user group. A Shared Learning Space might hold two or three classes of students working together on a science experiment in the morning, provide space for several small mixed-age collaborative groups to work together on a writing assignment a few hours later, and comfortably host an after-school staff meeting later that day."

Sustainable Features

Underpinning the school's focus on nature and outdoor learning are the principles of good environmental stewardship. In addition to protection of the many mature, stately trees on site, there are various sustainable features: Pervious grasscrete fire lane, storm water drainage utilizing rain gardens, heating units provided for and controlled by each room, daylight harvesting and automatic fixture dimming, occupancy sensors, highly energy efficient glazing, no mechanical air conditioning, operable windows, landscaping using native plants and no irrigation.