

BLRB architects

38,000 SF | Site & Demolition Cost: \$1,250,000 • Construction Cost: \$8,942,000 | Completed September 2009

PROGRAM AND GOALS

Simpson Intermediate School is located in the rural town of Montesano, situated about 25 miles east of Aberdeen. Because of its integrated role in the life of the community, Simpson was designed with significant input and support from local residents. School district leaders, students, teachers, parents and community members worked in tandem with the design team to develop a school that embodies a rich community heritage and emphasizes a contemporary approach to individualized instruction and a technology-rich curriculum. Creation of a personalized, student-centered environment that facilitates interaction and participation was the project's overarching vision. Accordingly, the educational program is centered on small learning communities, adaptability, flexibility of space, development of a collaborative environment, and the integration of contemporary educational technology.

DESIGN

One of the planning committee's design goals was that the school embody community identity and the richness of Montesano's past. The town's history and fortunes have been significantly shaped by its siting at the convergence of three rivers – a location that solidified its role in the development of the regional timber industry. Simpson's floor plan is influenced by this unique local geography and draws from the town's past as a central logging hub. The main corridor, featuring whimsical flooring insets evocative of water, represents the Chehalis River, with two secondary entry points and exterior walkways echoing the Satsop and Wynoochee Rivers. Historic logging images, local to the region, and accompanying interpretives line the hallway, educating students and visitors about the stages of the logging process from initial cutting to mill finishing. Raw timber is integrated throughout the building, used architecturally to be symbolic of trees and the surrounding forests.

Within this context, students begin their education at Simpson "upriver" and move "downriver" as they matriculate from grade to grade. Each grade level is broken into clusters around shared learning spaces called "Star Centers" and each Star Center owns a breakaway space on the main corridor that students can personalize, creating ownership, identity and a sense of place. Display areas along the main corridor serve to recognize student work and projects, and provide space for teachers to augment lessons. Flexibility and adaptability of space to multiple needs and programs were achieved through the integration of both wired and wireless technology. Moveable furniture and tackable walls further contribute to the easy reconfiguration of spaces to accommodate changing educational and instructional models.

Because of Simpson's prominence in community life, inclusion and facility access were also significant design considerations. The school's multipurpose room and adjacent restrooms are accessible for after-hours events and can be locked off from instructional areas to permit public access without compromising security. Playfields are also accessible for community use during non-school hours and public use is encouraged. Building security is enhanced by a single point of entry that is controlled and monitored by the administration staff.

SUSTAINABILITY

A thoughtful siting of the building ensures that natural light is infused throughout the school all day, especially in all learning spaces. The use of skylights, large perimeter windows and clerestory windows further carry daylight to the school's interior areas. Extensive use of glass throughout the building's interior permits daylight to permeate throughout and provides clarity of multiple sightlines, enhancing student safety and security. Additionally, transparency to the library and classrooms from the central corridor showcases educational activities and contributes to the collaborative feeling of the school's environment.

A high-performance mechanical system with sensor and zone controls reduces energy consumption and lowers operational costs. Sustainable materials choices employed throughout the school include wheatboard, high-recycle content VCTT floor covering in lieu of traditional carpeting, FSC certified lumber and low VOC furniture and finishes. Linoleum was selected for high traffic areas for its durability and ease of maintenance. Low flow, sensor-controlled plumbing fixtures significantly reduce water consumption. Water conservation is further supported through the use of native and drought tolerant plants in landscaping, eliminating the need for a permanent irrigation system and aiding in storm water management.