

Henry David Thoreau Elementary School; Kirkland, WA

Transcendentalist author Henry David Thoreau would be proud of this school bearing his name for the ways in which the land is incorporated in its design and for the quality of its education, which allows students and staff “to go confidently in the direction of (their) dreams.”

Describe the client's goals and program, and how the design solution meets the goals

Originally, a 40,663-square-foot, single-story elementary school built in 1963, Thoreau was updated in 1989, adding a 10,000-square-foot building to the school. A new millennium rang in a new era at Thoreau; and the solution called for the 1963 structure to be demolished to make room for a new 52,000-square-foot split-level school, built into the side of a hill and designed to look like a lodge to blend with the residential neighborhood flanked by St. Edward State Park to the north and Ben Fin Hill Park to the south. The Lake Washington School District also desired a more contemporary learning experience, which paved the way for a more collaborative team approach, shared work areas with adjacent support spaces and updated technology.

Situated on a steep site, DLR Group designed a new building climbing up the slope, allowing school to stay in session in the existing building below. Community and administrative facilities occupy the lower level, while classrooms and other academic spaces reside on the upper level. Because the upper level is situated on the hillside, a stronger presence for the new school in the neighborhood is created. Shared spaces for students and staff are centrally located between classrooms. The gymnasium/commons on the lower level and the library on the upper level form the community-zoned core of the school.

Due to this non-traditional two-level structure, the architect was inspired to design an interior atrium, a connecting gallery, and cross-axial circulation patterns -- elements that integrate practical structure and economy with a high environmental aesthetic. The redesign of the site circulation improves safety by separating cars, buses, and service vehicles.

Housed in the new building are 17 classrooms, a library, a gymnasium/commons, restrooms, kitchen, and mechanical/storage space. The gymnasium and commons are linked by an operable partition that opens to provide a large, uninterrupted space and are located to allow for community use. The 1989 building was renovated to house five classrooms, restrooms and administrative offices.

How does the project contribute and respond to the unique nature of its surroundings community?

The design intent was to integrate the school into its surroundings, unify the building into a cohesive whole and provide a building that has a comfortable "Northwest" look and feel. The result is a building with a comforting and nurturing feel while the image takes on the character of a lodge. To achieve this image, the gallery features exposed glu-lam timbers. A colorful wainscoting further embraces the lodge-type look while providing durability and easy maintenance.

The building steps up the hill along the east edge of the site, enhancing the presence of the school from the street. A "gallery," which was created in the space between the 1989 building and the new classroom wing to the east, is now one of two primary interior circulation spaces. The "Gallery" features a high vaulted ceiling and receives natural light thorough clerestory glazing provided on the upper portions of the east and west walls. To the north of the 1989 building, a two-level circulation space was created that bisects the building as it steps down the hillside. A "Promontory" was created that overlooks the lower level from above.

In what ways can the facility easily adapt to changing education delivery?

Thoreau was designed with flex spaces to provide future options for various education programs and delivery methods.

Provide the area and construction costs?

New construction: 42,000 SF

Renovation construction: 10,000 SF

Total cost: \$7,550,000.00; \$145 per SF