

# ERRINGTON LEARNING CENTER

School District No. 38

*RICHMOND, BRITISH COLUMBIA, CANADA*

2014 Exhibition of School  
Planning and Architecture



## ERRINGTON LEARNING CENTER

Classroom space can expand



ERRINGTON LEARNING CENTER



**COMMUNITY  
ENVIRONMENT  
TRANSFORMATION**

The Richmond School District created a unique Learning Center for students with exceptional needs; a service that was previously not available in the District. In order to use vacant space and integrate the Center as much as possible with the regular educational facilities, a vacant wing of an existing elementary school was renovated to house the new Learning Center.

Through an extensive planning process with a large stakeholder group of teachers and occupational therapists, four classrooms were transformed into a new Center of 3450ft<sup>2</sup>. The Elementary School principal also functions as the Learning Center's principal.



Existing



New Entrance

## COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT *IDENTITY*

The Errington Learning Center fills a void in available services for the community, giving families a chance to give their children a tailored learning experience closer to home. It serves the entire school district and can house up to 8 students of elementary school age. As part of the renovations a new distinct entrance was created for the Learning Center, giving a strong sense of identity to this portion of the school for the staff and students to associate with, while remaining internally connected to Errington Elementary.

In addition to the building renovations, the access to the site was replanned and undertaken to highlight the main entrance of the school through landscaping and to provide practical bus access to the site. Further, dangerous congestion on neighbourhood streets was reduced by providing an organized drop off/pick up system for parents and employees.



## LEARNING ENVIRONMENT *HOME*

This Center is created for students with exceptional needs who have difficulty thriving in a regular classroom environment. Many of the spaces are related to teaching life skills. A fully functional residential kitchen in the core of the facility with living/dining room and laundry facilities was created to serve this purpose.

Specialty related project spaces include a Sensory Room with swings, padded floors, a slide and water play structures; a Calm Down room and individual and group learning spaces tailored to the unique needs of the children.



**LEARNING  
ENVIRONMENT**  
*SENSES*

The Sensory Room includes a custom designed play and climbing structures with hooks for swinging platforms, all of which were designed in collaboration with occupational therapists, the builders, and District staff. This room is meant to be a room of fun and play, while providing learning opportunities.

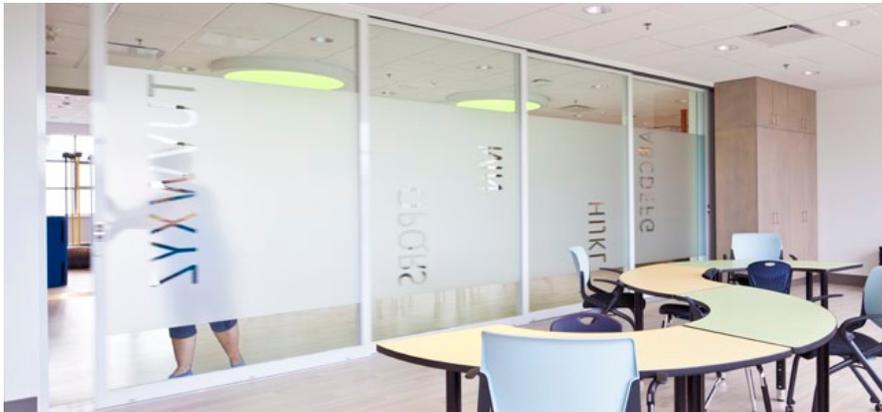
Obstacles and structures help build coordination and provide sensory experiences in a safe and controlled environment, such as the water feature to splash in, huge bean-bags to climb on, or the foam pit to dive in to.



**PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT**  
*PURPOSE*

For the physical environment, materials and colours were chosen that are durable, easy to clean and maintain, but do not overload the senses. Colours are used with consideration, and wood accents give the Center a more natural, calming effect.

Daylight is important, however there exists a risk of over stimulation from outside sources, so we chose to include new skylights and a translucent film for the windows. Exterior shutters were added so rooms can be blacked out if desired.



## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT *MODERATING*

A primary consideration was always how to give staff influence over the quantity and quality of sensory information the students receive. External weather, sound, or light can have a negative impact on many of these children, so means to reduce or eliminate these influences was essential for the learning environment to function. Acoustic insulation in the walls, mechanical divisions, specialized variable lighting, and motorized exterior shutters are all implemented to provide staff with the greatest degree of flexibility in moderating the physical environment.

Sliding glass dividers help in reducing noise or visual distraction and improve versatility of the space, while keeping both areas habitable and enjoyable for the students and faculty. All other rooms and areas are adjoined to this central space, making expansion possible for the children to move around and to provide clear viewing to help staff monitor multiple areas simultaneously. Individual spaces are small to provide one-on-one learning and can grow to accommodate larger groups of students. Because of the 1.2 to 1 Adult to Student ratio in the Center, there can be as many as 20 persons occupying the space on a regular basis.

**“It’s a place where children will have the chance to regulate their behavior while maintaining their dignity along the way.”**

—*Monica Pamer*  
Superintendent of Schools



## PLANNING PROCESS TEAM

This project was developed over an 18 month period with the help of a large project team, consisting of school district representatives, occupational and speech therapists, life skills teachers and the school principal. Once the budget and site had been determined, the team met on a very regular basis and explored several options. The team was involved throughout all design phases, having input in all details of the spaces, materials, millwork, play structures and lighting.

The team's input was critical in developing the highly specialized spaces required to meet the needs of these students. As well, having the teachers and therapists involved in the planning and design was critical to its success.



## PLANNING PROCESS *EFFICIENCY*

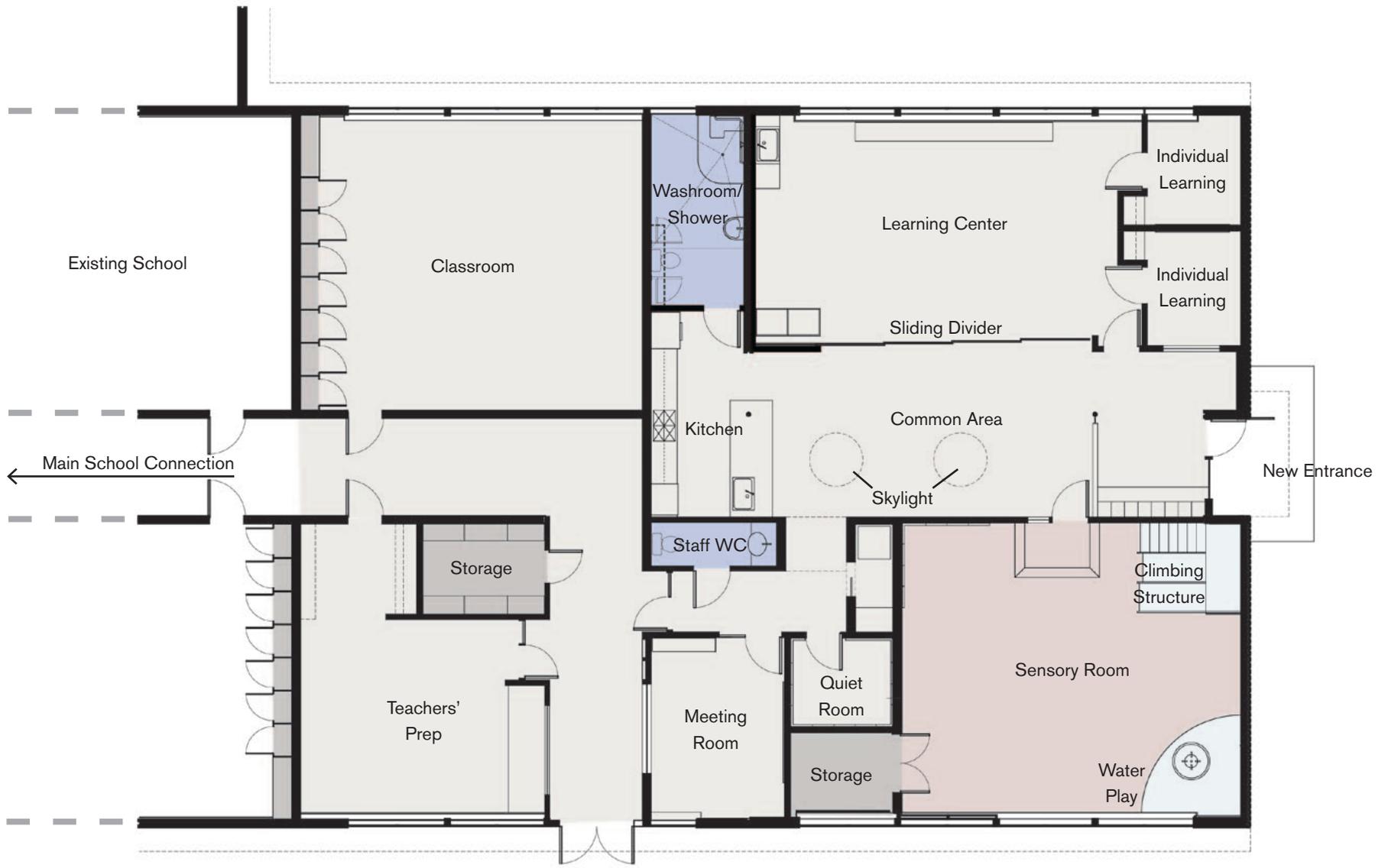
Site visits to other facilities, design charettes, and 3D modelling were used to help build understanding of the project, and to streamline project related decisions in order to meet the challenging construction schedule and occupancy date.

The construction of the project was on a very tight schedule and budget (7 months from first meeting to occupancy), we opted for Construction Management delivery method, with a CM prequalification process. The first project meeting took place in early 2013, with an issue for BP in April. Before demolition could commence, all asbestos containing construction materials from the original building were removed. Partial demolition started in May with construction in full force once school was out for summer.

The Center opened for the beginning of the new school year in September 2013.

**“The whole environment  
functions to support  
students so that they  
remain calm, focused and  
ready to learn.”**

—*Monica Pamer*  
Superintendent of Schools



 FLOORPLAN

# EXHIBITION OF SCHOOL PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE PROJECT DATA

<b>Submitting Firm:</b>		<b>HUGHES CONDON MARLER ARCHITECTS</b>
Project Role	Architect	
Project Contact	Karen Marler	
Title	Principal	
Address	Suite 300, 1508 W. 2 <sup>nd</sup> Ave. V6J 1H2	
City, Province, Country	Vancouver, BC, Canada	
Phone	(604) 732-6620	

<b>Other Firm:</b>		<b>PERKINS + WILL</b>
Project Role	Feasibility Study Architects	
Project Contact	Robert Drew	
Title	Partner	
Address	1220 Homer Street V6B 2Y5	
City, Province, Country	Vancouver, BC, Canada	
Phone	(604) 484-1555	

<b>Construction Firm:</b>		<b>UNITECH CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT LTD.</b>
Project Role	Construction Manager	
Project Contact	Wally Mansell	
Title	Senior Project Manager	
Address	Suite 400-1530, 56 <sup>th</sup> Street V4L 2A8	
City, Province, Country	Delta, BC, Canada	
Phone	(604) 943-8845	

# EXHIBITION OF SCHOOL PLANNING AND ARCHITECTURE PROJECT DETAILS

Project Name:	ERRINGTON LEARNING CENTER
City	Richmond
Province	British Columbia
District Name	School District No. 38
Supt/President	Clive Mason, Director of Facilities and Planning
Occupancy Date	Sept. 2013
Grades Housed	1-7
Student Capacity	8
Site Size (acres)	NA
Gross Area (ft <sup>2</sup> )	3450 ft <sup>2</sup>
Per Occupant (pupil)	431 ft <sup>2</sup> per pupil
Please Indicate Gross/Net	NA
If No	Construction Management
Site Development	\$67,000
Building Construction	\$662,000
Fixed Equipment	\$55,000
Other	\$230,000 (Demolition, Consultant, etc.)
Total	\$1,014,000

## EXCEPTIONAL FEATURE

### *“A PLACE OF THEIR OWN”*

<http://blogs.sd38.bc.ca/recessroadtrips/2014/01/21/a-place-of-their-own/>

The best testament to any project is how the users experience the space. The following blog post from the superintendent of schools, Monica Pamer, is a moving testament to the success of the centre for its students, school district, and the community.



*I ended my last post with this brash statement: “In the spirit of investigative blogging, the next few posts will be about the relationship between the concept of inclusion and different settings for different learning purposes. I’ll be visiting some of these settings and describing what’s going on there.”*

*I’m not quite sure what “investigative blogging” is, or if it even exists, but it sounded open-minded enough to allow for some road trips and questions about what inclusion means, and I’m off to a good start on this quest.*

*My first stop was Errington Learning Centre (ELC), arguably the most unique program we have in Richmond for children with exceptional needs. The Centre just opened in the fall of 2013. These wonderful photos were taken by Director of Facilities, Clive Mason.*

*There are only eight students enrolled, and at this point you may well be asking, “What’s the Errington Learning Centre?” Low profile it is, but it’s a remarkable space that’s been created to meet the needs of students who find the typical classroom completely overwhelming.*

*How do we know they’re overwhelmed? These students have ways of letting us know. In a traditional classroom setting, they may lash out physically, abruptly leave to find a place that is more calming, or dramatically withdraw emotionally. At the Errington Learning Centre, the whole environment functions to support these students so that they remain calm, focused and ready to learn.*



## EXCEPTIONAL FEATURE

### “A PLACE OF THEIR OWN”

<http://blogs.sd38.bc.ca/recessroadtrips/2014/01/21-a-place-of-their-own/>

*What's so different here? The ELC has a kitchen and spaces where students may come together to interact. There's also classroom-sized sensory room with a slide, swings, water play area and even a large pit of foam blocks to dive into. The floor is soft, the lights don't "buzz" and the background noise is eliminated.*

*The ELC also has a few "quiet" spaces to go to when things are too overwhelming. The whole atmosphere is calm, and the goal is to promote self-regulation.*

*For children in the ELC, their previous classrooms, with their buzzing florescent lights, ebb and flow of students, constant distractions, confusing expectations and social mysteries, caused an emotional and neurological overload. In these classrooms, their behavior was disruptive, to say the least. Despite our best efforts, they found it hard to blend in.*

*While I was at the ELC, a couple students were playing in the sensory room with supervision, and two more were hard at work in the group room with the support of their educational assistants. This is their community, and they seemed comfortable in it.*

*These quiet little scholars are a far cry from the disruptive and profoundly unhappy students they were last year. In the past, some of these children needed to work with two educational assistants at the same time just to remain in the classroom. Even with that kind of attention, things were often far from peaceful for them, their teachers or their classmates.*



*While every day is not perfect at the Errington Learning Centre, each day has its successes. They may be measured in centimetres, not kilometres, but they are very real. The children's parents also report that they notice profound positive changes in their children at school and at home.*

*The ELC is not an end-point for students. It's a place where children will have the chance to regulate their behavior while maintaining their dignity along the way – something that the typical school setting is challenged to provide.*

*—Monica Pamer*  
Superintendent of Schools