

# 2015 Exhibition of School Planning and Architecture

## Valley Pathways School

Category: New Construction

Mat Su Borough School District

Palmer, Alaska



VALLEY PATHWAYS | PALMER, ALASKA | SIGNATURE PHOTO

### Design Basis:

*Using prototype school designs often result in bland, ordinary buildings that do not respond the character of a particular school or community. Not so at Valley Pathways where an enlightened owner and robust planning process created a unique expression of a special learning program and community setting. All school districts run on tight budgets with a strong focus on teaching and learning. Using prototype school designs is one way to reduce facility costs and propagate successful solutions. Valley Pathways demonstrates that when done right these schools can be every bit as vital and engaging as schools designed from scratch.*



*Prototype Floor Plan: Su Valley Junior/Senior High School*





VALLEY PATHWAYS | SITE AND FLOOR PLAN





*Situated on a south-facing hill, the school connects to lush forested areas that provide learning opportunities for life sciences and resource management curriculum.*

### Community Engagement

The school is organized around a dynamic gathering space that connects entry, athletics and academics. Administrative areas are open and engaged with this space providing critical interaction between staff, students and community users. Despite its open feel the school can be easily partitioned providing security during after-hours use. After more than a decade of living in a portable village on the shaded part of the site, the new school is perched on a sunny hill, a proud expression of the community's support for quality education for all learners, regardless of their life circumstances and challenges.



*The visual connection between the Commons Area and Media Center activates the new building with daily student life.*



VALLEY PATHWAYS | MULTI-PURPOSE COMMONS AREA

### Learning Environment:

The Valley Pathways promise is achievement for all learners. Creating an environment that easily adapts to the necessarily varied teaching strategies was paramount to meeting that promise. The academic wing organizes classrooms around shared lab spaces, making specialized spaces accessible to all grade levels. 'L' shaped classrooms provide opportunities for varied teaching/learning settings with shared break out spaces. Informal learning happens in circulation spaces, nooks and the main gathering spaces. Because of their reliance on technology for delivering course content the traditional media center was transformed into a multi-media presentation room, a showpiece for of academic achievement connected to the commons



*Original portable classroom environment*



*The typical classroom in portable units were replaced by a variety of bright, open lab spaces in the new building, supporting flexible layouts and activities.*

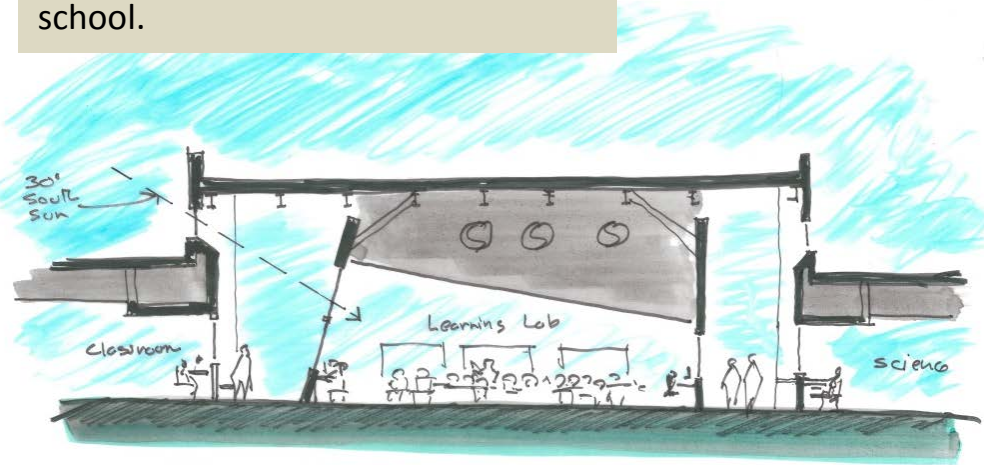


*L-shaped classrooms provide for a variety of traditional and technology-driven learning settings. A shared study room provides a quiet breakout space between pairs of classrooms.*

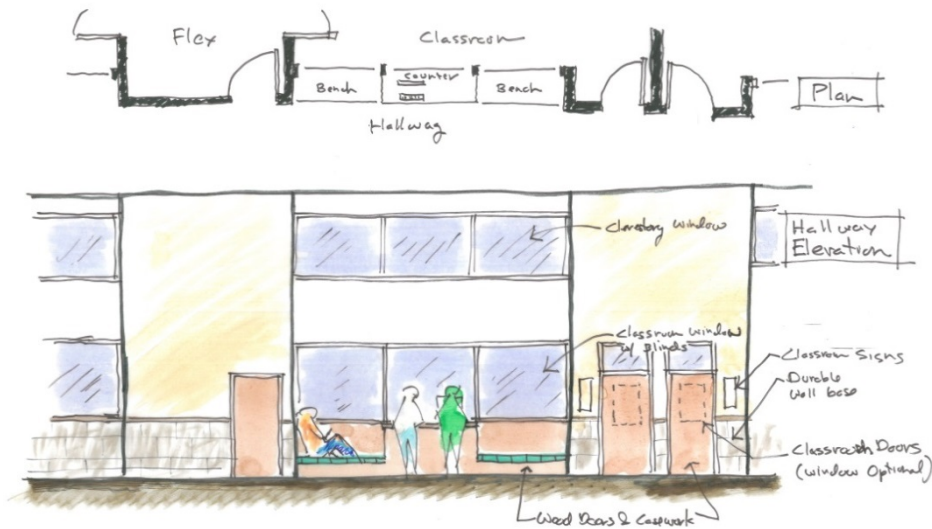


### Physical Environment:

Although built on the 'bones' of the Su Valley School, Valley Pathways underwent an amazing transformation. Clerestory windows bring sun into core lab spaces, the Learning Signature features prominently inside and out and learning is on display everywhere. A sense of community and connectedness is supported by strategic use of interior windows allowing views to and from all learning spaces. Bright materials and finishes make the most of Alaska's precious winter sun reflecting into every corner of the school.



*Daylighting strategies flood interior labs with natural light and important connection in a land where students often arrive and leave school in the darkness of long winter nights.*



*The entire school community is united by visual connections to learning spaces that put learning on display.*





*Portable units housed administrative and academic spaces for 13 years. The new building now reflects the personal connections between students and staff that make the Valley Pathways experience unique.*





*Visual connection between interior and exterior provide a sense of openness and light.*

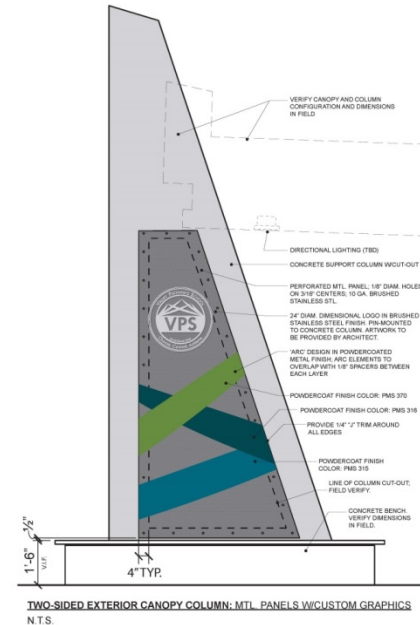
## Planning Process

As a school of choice Valley Pathways is a 7-12 institution, more akin to a community college than a traditional high school. Students there are seeking learning that offers flexibility in scheduling, course selection, and program pace. Each student works closely with teachers and advisors to develop a customized course program to achieve specific educational goals. This highly individualized program delivery employs a teaching strategy that relies heavily on online coursework, mentoring and off site learning.

Intense school workshops freely adapted the award winning Su Valley School to this unique program while exploring the school's character through a process of developing a Learning Signature. 'Choose, Commit, Achieve' reflects the core values of the teachers and students and became the touchstone for the design process.



The school's Learning Signature, **Choose. Commit. Achieve.** grew out of workshop discussions with staff and reflects the extraordinary efforts they make to assure each student's success. The new school logo reflects that commitment and is used on everything from t-shirts to school stationary.





*The new building is an inviting new home in the heart of the Mat-Su Valley, supporting the success of every student.*

VALLEY PATHWAYS | EMBRACING NATURE AND ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF STUDENT LIFE

# Exhibition of School Planning and Architecture

## Project Data

Submitting Firm :	McCool Carlson Green Architects
Project Role	Educational Planner & Architect
Project Contact	Michael Carlson
Title	Principal Architect
Address	421 W 1 <sup>st</sup> Ave Suite 300
City, State or Province, Country	Anchorage, Alaska
Phone	907-563-8474

Joint Partner Firm:	
Project Role	
Project Contact	
Title	
Address	
City, State or Province, Country	
Phone	

Other Firm:	
Project Role	
Project Contact	
Title	
Address	
City, State or Province, Country	
Phone	

Construction Firm:	Collins Construction
Project Role	General Contractor
Project Contact	Greg Waisanen
Title	Owner
Address	PO Box 87-1827
City, State or Province, Country	Wasilla, Alaska
Phone	907-376-8299

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## Project Details

<b>Project Name</b>	Valley Pathways School
<b>City</b>	Palmer
<b>State</b>	Alaska
<b>District Name</b>	Mat Su Borough School District
<b>Supt/President</b>	Dr. Deena M Paramo
<b>Occupancy Date</b>	August 2014
<b>Grades Housed</b>	7-12
<b>Capacity(Students)</b>	250
<b>Site Size (acres)</b>	20
<b>Gross Area (sq. ft.)</b>	50,000
<b>Per Occupant(pupil)</b>	200
<b>gross/net please indicate</b>	1.4
<b>Design and Build?</b>	no
<b>If yes, Total Cost:</b>	
<b>Includes:</b>	
<b>If no,</b>	
<b>Site Development:</b>	\$1.5M
<b>Building Construction:</b>	\$15M
<b>Fixed Equipment:</b>	\$500,000
<b>Other:</b>	
<b>Total:</b>	\$17M