

Four schools open with innovative designs

Rebuilt Douglass, Creekside, Emerald opened in fall

By Amy Bounds
Staff Writer

Principals at Boulder Valley's rebuilt schools describe opening buildings designed for innovation as a career highlight.

Boulder's Douglass and Creekside elementary schools and Broomfield's Emerald Elementary School — plus Erie's new Meadowlark PK-8 — are designed to meet the learning needs of students in the 21st century.

All four opened last fall and were paid for with money from 2014's \$576.5 million bond issue.

Common design elements include learning communities, a "heart" gathering area in the center of the school, a curiosity center (the 21st-century version of a library), natural light and flexible spaces and furniture.

"The building doesn't get in the way of learning," said

Kiffany Lychock, Boulder Valley's director of innovation.

Douglass Principal Jon Wolfer said teachers put a lot of thought into how they use the common spaces and "jumped in on day one" to collaborate.

His favorite space is the new cafe-style lunchroom.

"The old lunchroom was just chaos," he said. "The new place promotes kids talking to each other."

Creekside Principal Francine Eufemia said teachers and students are so enthusiastic about designing prototypes in the school's new makerspace that it has spilled out into the common areas.

"The kids are so excited," she said. "They love when we bring people to see the space because they're so proud of it."

At Emerald, Principal Samara Williams' favorite spot in the new building may be the preschool and kindergarten commons.

The area is modeled after a children's museum, with sensory tables, a giant ball ramp with pipes students can move to create different configurations, a big table for crafts, a puppet show



Lewis Geyer / Staff Photographer

From left, first-graders Angel Soto, Quincy Sadler and Nkemjika Udokwu use dry-erase boards to work on a spelling assignment in a commons area outside their classrooms at Emerald Elementary in Broomfield in February.

stage and a pretend laundry area.

The first-grade commons area also gets daily use by students and serves as a space for students to present what they've learned to parents.

The teachers said it's challenging — and loud — to bring all their wiggly first-graders together in the commons area for hands-on lessons. But, they said, it's worth it to increase student engagement.

The first-graders recently divided into groups of four in the commons to play a game using quiet "rattle-

snake" voices.

They passed around individual whiteboards, taking turns writing down words that included letter combinations, such as "ir." With each new letter combination, they tried to beat their previous number of words.

"Some days, we spend too much time in the commons area," teacher Jessie Jones said. "We have to find a balance. It takes practice."

More opportunities for team teaching has been a benefit of the learning community model, she said. In math, for example, students may rotate to different class-

rooms for different hands-on activities that teach a math concept.

"If I skip something, I know the other teachers will have it," she said.

Plus, the teachers said, the new building offers a better environment overall.

"Now, when we go to other schools, it feels dark and depressing," said first-grade teacher Kim Moore. "There's not as much light and they don't have our high ceilings. I would never want to go back."

Students talked about how much they like all the windows, the bigger library and the new furniture.

Fifth-grader Shankari Ajan likes that the new school looks more modern, offers more space and is more colorful. The learning community model is another plus.

"Before, it was just one teacher for you," Shankari said. "We wouldn't see other classes at all. Now, all the 55 kids work together."

Along with Meadowlark PK-8 and the three new elementary schools, Lafayette's Centaurus High School also is starting to try a more collaborative approach. Meadowlark stu-

dents will feed into Centaurus.

Centaurus, which is getting a \$30 million remodel through the bond issue, added the high school version of a learning community with a new humanities wing. The wing includes six classrooms and a common area.

In the fall, the school also will have a redesigned library envisioned as a global learning center.

Centaurus Principal Dan Ryan said humanities teachers this school year are focused on collaborating and sharing spaces.

"Teachers are using common language," he said. "It's a better work and learning environment. A lot of it is setting the foundation for our future work."

Once the redesign is complete, Ryan said, he expects to see more student-led learning throughout the school.

"Everything revolves around making the instruction more meaningful and engaging for the kids," he said.

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members must plant and harvest "seeds of justice" in order to find new solutions to current social issues.

On top of the Chavez event, community members also hosted Reading to End Racism, a program that allows teens to teach kids about tolerance.

"We really try to create programs to help people identify their strengths and using them to help the community," Verveer said.

The impact of the event has reached older members of the community, as well.

Julie Piller, an attendee at the Chavez celebration for 13 out of the 14 years it's been organized, said Chavez's promotion for peaceful change inspired her to participate.

"I care a lot about social justice. Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta were good examples on how to have a peaceful movement," Piller said. "I felt this affinity with him."

Piller has encouraged her kids to participate in the youth committee, as well. All three of her children

have grown up attending the event.

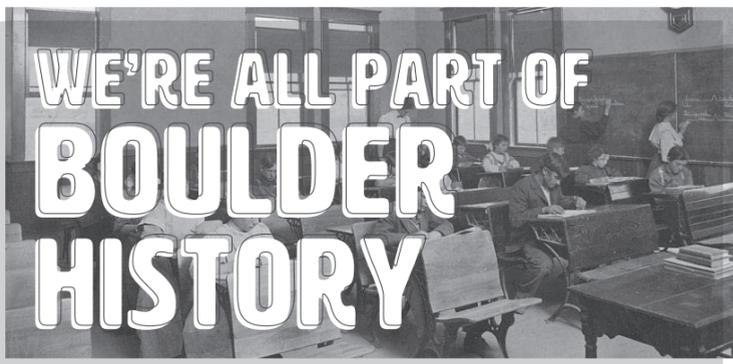
The strong sense of community isn't lost on its members. When Caparechini travels outside of Lafayette, she notices a lack of closeness she feels when at home. She said, "Whenever I go to different schools, I notice our community is closer together and more diverse."

"I love being able to help people and help this community as much as I can. This has been a great way to do that," Caparechini said.



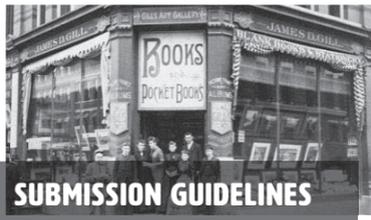
Adrianna Iturbe, left, joins in on the zumba dance during Lafayette's 14th annual Cesar Chavez celebration Saturday.

Cliff Grassmick / Staff Photographer



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- Tuesday, June 5** 4 p.m. – 6 p.m.
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