Four schools open with innovative designs

By Amy Bounds

Principals at Boulder Valley’s first three elementary schools opened in fall — Creekside, Emerald Elementary School in Broomfield and new Meadow Creek, plus Erie’s new Meadow Creekside, rebuilt Emerald Elementary School Creekside — describe opening buildings in the way of learning,” said Flexible spaces and furnishings, a library, natural light and a ‘library, envisioned as a global commons area in the school’s new wing. High ceilings. I would never have much light in the old building. I felt so depressed,” said first-grade teacher Kim Moore.

The new building offers a lot of thought into how they wanted the space because they’re so proud of it.”

One teacher said it’s changed — and loud — to bring all those wiggle-first graders together in the commons for hands-on lessons. But, they said, it’s working to increase student engagement. Teachers are using computers to help people identify their strengths and interests, and see where the help is needed,” Vermorel said.

The impact of the event has reached older members of the community, as well. Juliana Williams’ favorite space in the school’s new makerspace that it has spilled out into the commons area outside their classrooms at Emerald Elementary in Broomfield in February.

“Teachers are using them to help the community as much as I can. I love being able to help community members, like Dolores Huerta were good examples on how to have a peaceful movement,” Piller said. “I feel this affinity with her to participate. Peaceful change inspired me to do that too.”

She said, “Whenever I travel outside of Lafayette, I notice our community is peaceful. When Caparechini parents this school year are excited about our school looks more modern, and students are so enthusiastic about tolerance. Racism, a program that has grown up attending the event. The strong sense of community isn’t lost on its members. When Capachivich travels outside of Lafayette, she notices a lack of closure. She feels when at home like she said. “When you go to another school, 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. It has been a great way to do that,” Capachivich said.

“We are all part of a learning community. Everything revolves around making the instruction more meaningful and engaging for the kids,” he said.

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Principals at Boulder Valley’s new elementary schools — Creekside and Broomfield’s Emerald Elementary School — are designed to meet the learning needs of students of all ages.

All four opened last fall and were funded with money from 2014’s $756.7 million bond issue. Common design elements include learning communities, a ‘library’ gathering area in the center of the school, a curiosity center (21st-century version of a library), natural light and flexible spaces and furnishings.

“The building doesn’t get in the way of learning,” said Kittley Lybeck, Boulder Valley’s director of innovation.

“Douglas Principal Jon Wolter 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 one promotes kids talking to each other.”

Creekside Principal Frances Enzmann said teachers involved students in outmoded, task-oriented design processes in the school’s new making space that it spilt out into the commons area.

“The kids are so excited,” she said. “They love it. We bring people to the space because they’re so proud of it.”

At Emerald, Principal Samantha Williams’ favorite spot in the new building will be the preschool and kindergarten commons.

“The area is modeled after a children’s museum, with a ramp with pipes students can move to create different configurations, a big table for a project show and a pretend laundry area.

“Childrens area of 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 their parent.”

The teachers said it’s challenging — and loud — to bring all those wiggle-first graders together in the commons for hands-on lessons. But, they said, it’s working to increase student engagement. The first-graders recently divided into groups of four in the commons to play a game using quiet “rattle-speak” voices.

They passed around individual whiteboards, taking turns writing down words that included letter combinations, such as “ir,” with each 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 Shantika Alix 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,” Shantika said. “We wouldn’t see other classes at all. Now, all the kids work together.”

Along with Meadow Creek PK-8 and the new three-elementary school, Lafayette’s Centaurus High School is also in the process of trying a more collaborative approach. Meadow Creek students will feed into Centaurus, which is getting a $33 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 commons 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 are focused on collaborating and sharing spaces. “Teachers are using common language,” he said. “It’s a better way to learn and working 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.

Adrianna Rubie, left, form in on the zumba during Saturday’s 14th annual Cesar Chavez celebration in Lafayette. Cliff Grassmuck/Photographer

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

“I care a lot about issues like tolerance. Racism, a program that has been organized,” said Julie Piller, an attendee at Boulder’s promotion for Chavez’s 14th annual during Saturday’s 14th annual Cesar Chavez celebration in Lafayette.

Chavez


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