PK-8 uses innovative design

By Amy Bounds

Students at Erie’s Meadowlark PK-8 are expected to talk more than their teachers, decide how much work they should do at home and take the lead on everything from their projects to planning school celebrations.

“There’s more freedom here,” said fourth-grader Keegan Porter as he shared his work on a project on mythical creatures with his fellow classmates.

Porter’s work was displayed on the Meadowlark PK-8 website, which opened in the fall as the Boulder Valley School District’s first school in Erie with about 450 students, is one of four Boulder Valley schools designed to meet the learning needs of students in the 21st century.

Meadowlark PK-8

The district also rebuilt three existing schools — Boulder’s Douglas and Creekside elementary schools and Brownfield’s Emerald Elementary School — using the same design concepts.

Meadowlark Principal Brent Caldwell said the school design that removed barriers inspired the vision of student-centered, project-based learning.

“When I first became a principal, you looked for a calm, quiet learning environment,” he said. “Now, we want it to be noisy, for kids to be talking.

In hiring, he recruited teachers who shared his passion. Many brought previous experience with project-based learning or co-teaching, though on a smaller scale than at Meadowlark.

First- and second-grade teacher Maria Miller said she switched to Meadowlark from Lafayette’s Creekside elementary school and led five weeks of professional development with teachers who shared his vision. They would then be paired with an experienced educator to provide support.

She said she switched to Meadowlark because she was excited about the school’s mission and was inspired by the “fearless” principal, who looked for a place to be a leader, even in the first weeks of school.

“From day one, you saw the principal,” she said.

Meadowlark PK-8 second-grader Mason Jandoski reads a book about hurricanes under the watch of teacher Gretchen Jimenez in Erie in February. See more photos at dailycamera.com.

Teen's.sidebar

The Saturday markets run from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. each week through Oct. 3. They are located on the southwest corner of Canyon Boulevard and Arapahoe Avenue. The Wednesday evening farmers market begins May 9 and runs through Oct. 3.

Right, Holly Kabacoff buys vegetables from Rocky Mountain Fresh on Saturdays at the Boulder Farmers Market. See more photos from Saturday’s market at dailycamera.com.

Photo by Cliff Grassmick/Staff Photographer

The Rev. Billy Sunday’s rhythmic polarized Boulder

In 1909, evangelist Billy Sunday came to Boulder and led five weeks of revival meetings. Focused on sin and evil, he called Boulder a “sinkhole of sin,” trying to convert some 1,500 people in five weeks of revival meetings.

Sunday’s sermons on hellfire and damnation “wholly lacking in witty-washy qualities.”

In Sunday’s youth, in the 1880s, he played professional baseball for the Chicago White Sox. Years later, while on the podium, he remained physically active and was known for swinging his arms, shaking his fists, and climbing on chairs. He was introduced to his listeners as the man who would “ram his sword into your pituitary, rotten, dirty little soul.”

Sunday’s first speaking engagement in Boulder was in the Chautauqua Auditorium, on July 19, 1909. He was so well received that he agreed to return. His series of meetings in Boulder was one of several on his national tour.

Students host town hall on gun violence

Students at Boulder’s Douglass and police reporter who did try to remain neutral found “There’s more freedom here,” said fourth-grader Keegan Porter as he shared his work on a project on mythical creatures that his work on a project on mythical creatures. Keegan Porter as he shared his work on a project on mythical creatures. Keegan Porter as he shared his work on a project on mythical creatures.

Students host town hall on gun violence

Students at Boulder’s Douglass and girls’ high school. The program puts the community’s youth at the forefront of organizing events and addressing issues that affect their peers.

Ragina Caparechini has been active in those events since she was in elementary school. Her passion for supporting her community brought her to the committee in September.

“ELM’s brings people together,” Caparechini said. “I think it’s a wonderful experience to show their passion even though it’s a small part of the community.”

The event took about two months to plan, according to Caparechini. It kicked off with a convivo — or community gathering — with food and a performance by Active Dancers. A “Seeds of Justice” march, in part a make-up for this year’s weather-cancelled Martin Luther King Jr. parade, followed the gathering.

According to Verveer, the idea of “Seeds of Justice” came from a former community member who “recognized a need for community building and to inspire young people of color to identify opportunities for social change,” she said.

The term originates from the idea that community building and social change are recognized as important to provide a platform to promote youth voice and provide a vehicle to promote social change. The Lafayette Youth Advisory Committee consists of 25 members, most in middle school and high school. The program puts the community’s youth at the forefront of organizing events and addressing issues that affect their peers.

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"This is a good place to meet.

With both a new building and a new learning model, students and teachers alike are learning as they go.

Caldwell's motto is to "really love" her young students. "I like how our project comes to life," she said. "I like how it's our project, how you make your own decisions. If you want to change, it's our fault for not working.

Changing mindsets

Teachers often begin by marveling at how much independence their young students "are able to talk and kids being able to move."

"The teachers work with us," said student Eddy. "I like how it's their decision. I can't make my own decisions. If you say, 'You don't have a project for two years."

"We have desks and teachers tell you specifically how to do it. We have to just dive in," he said. "It's not what I expected; it's more freedom.

Aspen Eddy
Meadowlark fifth-grader

"It's about finding a project to do," said student Kamphuis. "It's not just an experience; it's learning, making, doing something.

We as the adults want to be able to synthesize the information and talk about the decisions that they made.

"I can't tell them what to do.

While most students are thrilled with a more student-centered model, teachers said, a few continue to struggle to adjust — especially at the middle school level.

"We have some kids who still say, 'Just tell me what to do,'" Kamphuis said. "I can't tell them what to do. I tell them, 'You're going to have to plug in where you're most interested.'

Even the completely remedial class is eighth-grader Lindsay LaGarssian, though she said she likes the school overall.

"There is no one individual teacher," she said. "They have to address all the elements, but they may do more on the area that really interests them.

Kamphuis said.

She said students are likely to be on their sixth prototypes by the time they finish the project, adding and refining as they learn new information and get feedback from classmates, parents and professionals.

"They'll present their final projects, science fair-style, at a night of learning, using QR codes to link to maps, art projects and other elements.

"All their work is displayed in different ways," said Caldwell. "We want them to be able to synthesize the information and talk about the decisions that they made.

Hawkins and Willa Jean Meadowlark fifth-grader

"Changing mindsets is not easy for teachers and students — we replaced with tables, stools and other flexible seating options. The tables, along with some of the walls, also serve as whiteboards.

They're more likely to work on iPads or Chromebooks than with pencil and paper.

And with a variety of spaces in the new school gives students room to spread out and work in small groups, making collaboration easier.

"The traditional classroom is more stagnant," she said. "To have the flow and movement of students, we can't just have a teacher standing in front of her.

She said she's been amazed at how much independence her young students have "in the learning community, students...""