



Focus Group Workshop  
November 16th 11:00- 12:15 pm | 2022

Dr. Ballesteros: Director of Early Learning  
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## Early Childhood Alum Rock Union School District





Ed Specifications  
& Standards

## Next Steps:

Incorporate content from this interview into the Ed Specs design guidelines—then schedule round two video conference meetings with the same group to review the draft chapter for input in, March 2023.

*Participants were oriented to understand what a Master Plan is and what Ed Specs are. Then highlights from the Ed Specs Visioning Workshop were shown, concluding with a list of learning shifts produced by Ed Specs Workshop participants as a vision for the future on the following page. After that, participants were asked a series of questions to confirm the program and vision for the future.*



# Learning Shifts Focus on Student Empowerment- DRAFT

ARUSD's learning environments will support students' development of ***mind, body and spirit***. They will be empowered with the opportunity to try different ways of learning to discover how they learn best, ***find their spark*** and to ***keep the curiosity*** they were born with to become ***expert lifelong learners***. ARUSD will work to give students and families who need additional support to have an ***equal chance to thrive***, meeting all their needs.

## EMPOWERING STUDENTS TO BECOME EXPERT LEARNERS

- Multi-sensory and multi-intelligences learning
- More control at the hands of the students
- Independent choice and/or collaborative elective periods
- Less teacher-directed time
- Students setting individual goals
- Student-driven activities
- Student-chosen schedules
- More independent work time
- Relaxation rooms
- No school uniforms

## HIGHER COLLABORATION

- Team collaboration across studies, play, and extra-curricular activities
- Flexible and collaborative opportunities

## EQUITY FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES

- Spaces to support personal and basic needs (i.e. laundry services)
- Full day kindergarten

## MIND, BODY AND SPIRIT

- More outside and exploration time
- Play and naturalistic movement
- Bring community into the class
- Indoor and outdoor use spaces

# Program Background:

- What is the approach to pedagogy? (i.e. Reggio Emilia, Child-Centered Constructivist, personalized learning)?
- Please confirm the programs for early childhood? (PreSchool, Transitional Kindergarten, Kindergarten Outside Providers)
- Please confirm the programs with community partners.

*Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.*

# Program Background:

*Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.*

## **Programs:**

- Cinderella Head Start: full and half-day sessions
- Kidango Child Center: full and half-day programs
- YMCA (also place under Student Services Board)
- Think Together Preschool
- Little Heroes (also place under Outdoor, Athletics, and Student Services boards)
- Think Together
- Painter Co-op Preschool
- Escuelita through Mayfair (SOMOS)

## **Outside Partners:**

- FIRST 5 Santa Clara County
- Grail Family Services
- Healthier Kids Foundation
- Kidango
- San Juan Bautista (like Kidango -SJB)
- Santa Clara County Office of Education/ Head Start
- SOMOS Mayfair - always parallel child+family



# Program Background:

Grants from the state require that early childhood learners have the option for a nine hour day split between education and after school programs. Most TK/K curriculum in ARUSD are half day programs, but first through third graders have a full day schedule. *There is a strong desire to extend the full day schedule to TK/K grades.*

For full day learners, two hours of physical activity outside—one in the morning and one in the afternoon—are required by license and regulations, and further physical activities are offered via after school programs that run latest until 6pm. However, increasing this time outside is believed to be beneficial by most early childhood educators in the district. Students have an hour break for recess, during which twenty minutes are spent for lunch and in the cafeteria at most sites.

*Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.*

# Program Background:

Technology is used less at this age since the children engage more with play-based and kinesthetic learning, but they receive one-to-one iPads starting in first grade mostly to access digital libraries and software like Imagine Learning. While early childhood learners don't receive formal music lessons, music is incorporated in their classrooms.

*Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.*

Before going into the Big Picture Questions, reference images below were shared. Participants were invited to leave comments on the photos.

MURAL LINK

Gathering and Split Spaces



Indoor Facilities



Outdoor Exploration





# Big Picture Questions:

- Are there peer early childhood learning centers you've seen that you've liked (or didn't)? What did you like (or dislike) about them?
- Are there any physical activities geared more towards student groups to be accounted for spatially? Geared towards individual activity?
- What resources would best support motor skill development of children across different grade levels?
- Are there additional learning activities that would want to be considered in these areas?
- What resources/ infrastructure is required to support safe and engaging play across each grade level?

*Participants were asked questions to draw out their ideas to improve the learning environments to support the mission and vision of Alum Rock USD.*

# Big Picture Questions:

- How can physical fitness and play spaces should be improved for ARUSD?
- Is better outdoor lighting needed for Pre-K or after school programs since they finish when it is dark?
- Is there anything else we should know about how learning environments for early childhood could be improved at ARUSD?

*Participants were asked questions to draw out their ideas to improve the learning environments to support the mission and vision of Alum Rock USD.*

# Reference Projects Shared by Participants:

- Cisco Systems in Milpitas
- Bright Horizons
- Rotary PlayGarden in Guadalupe River Park on Coleman Avenue San Jose
- Genentech: employee sponsored corporate centers that have nature outdoor centers

*The first question was intended to see if participants had reference projects to share with or felt that they were exemplary, whether it is in ARUSD or outside of the district. The following pages show the reference projects discussed.*





Rotary Play Garden | San Jose, CA





*The following pages show the participants answers placed in the sections in which they will appear in the educational specifications sections for this topic.*

- Sections:
1. Activities
  2. Current Challenges
  3. Design Objectives
  4. Affordances
  5. Sizing and Adjacencies

# 1

## Activities

- Water or sand table
- Tricycles and storage for them
- Imaginative play kitchen, BBQ set, etc
- Building block center
- Reading corner
- Music
- Access to digital libraries via their iPad
- STEAM table/mobile tinker space

# 2

## Current Challenges

- Lack of safe and separate parking and drop-off zones for TK/K
- Outdated, poorly maintained, and inadequately sized play equipment for early learners
- Lack of well lit and well surveilled exterior space to support student supervision
- Lack of TK/K restrooms in classrooms at a handful of ARUSD sites
- Lack of storage for all kinesthetic and play based learning equipment
- Lack of furniture sized for both small children and adults that allows for flexible engagement
- Lack of hand washing facilities in some classrooms
- The need for storage is greater the younger the students are. This is especially true since their learning is less based in technology and more in physical activity.

# 3

## Design Objectives

Early childhood education spaces should be **soft, comfortable, and welcoming, a home away from home** especially since so many children in this district don't have a home of their own. **Calming colors and natural materials should fill the space** and be used in the furniture. Provide small and cozy zones in both the classrooms and shared learning spaces to **help with energetic regulation and interpersonal connections**. There is an interest in classrooms designed with the ability to connect to one another, potentially through a partitioned wall that folds to open the space. This would empower higher collaboration team teaching to support multiple learning activities simultaneously. Learning in these spaces should not be technologically based but rather play and kinesthetic based. **Play should be inclusive of all students and abilities**, and development of executive function skills is extremely important. Outdoor play areas should be adequately equipped and sized for small children and allow for easy supervision.



# 3

## Design Objectives

### **Ideas for the physical environment to support the vision for learning**

- Universal play equipment for all ages, sizes, and ability and park like play yards
- Strong need for a separate, safe and well lit drop off and pick up zones for TK/Kinder children only. And better lighting in parking lots to accommodate after school program pick-ups is needed.
- Safer vehicle entrance and exit routes to address bottlenecking and traffic flow. Additionally, a close look at the amount and quality of speed bumps and crossing guards on surrounding streets.
- Minimize or eliminate carpeting in early childhood classrooms to support faster and easier cleaning
- Lower ceilings to create a cozy space and help redirect student focus to their teacher or the activity at hand

# 3

## Design Objectives

### **Ideas for the physical environment to support the vision for learning**

- Calming colors used in the walls and overall environment to create space that feels comforting
- Direct connection to outdoors to allow for play-based learning on a regular basis with patio coverage
- Interest in some classrooms having a movable partition wall to allow two rooms to be combined for dual teaching activities
- Tactile surfaces to engage balance and motor skills
- Provided living room corner and tinker space within the classroom

# 4

## Affordances

### **Furniture, Equipment, and Technology**

#### **Furniture and Equipment**

- High quality, flexible, and soft furniture pieces like bean bags
- Desks and chairs of various sizes for kids who grow at different rates
- Desks that are easily configurable into various group sizes and use
- Chairs for both adults and children within the classroom
- Active motor skill and life skill toys such as play kitchen sets and sensory tables that allow students to experience different materials from water to sand, etc.
- Large amounts of storage for students' personal items, student activities, books, teacher organization, etc., potentially even storage sheds to prevent classroom clutter
- Hand washing facilities needed in classrooms, not hand sanitizer stations
- Clothes washer and dryer

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#### **Technology**

- iPads are used for digital libraries
- Most students in elementary school currently receive an iPad that they are responsible for

# 5

## Sizing and Adjacencies

- Outdoor play areas directly accessible from classrooms
- Laundry services are needed through age five
- Restrooms within every TK/K classroom
- Separate parking and drop off/pick up lane for TK/K since parents and guardians often need to walk them inside themselves.



# Appendix

*Please follow the links to the Mural board to see artifacts from the focus group interview and the Ed Specs Visioning Workshop link to see the Artifacts from the workshop.*

Mural Link: [HERE](#)

Ed Specs Visioning Workshop Link: [HERE](#)