



Focus Group Workshop  
November 16th 2:30 - 3:45pm | 2022

Tony Colonna: Director of SDC  
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## Supporting Student with Special Needs and Inclusion 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 are the current programs for students with special needs and special populations at ARUSD? Are they offered at all grade levels? Are some specific to certain campuses? Is there anything to note about these programs and the spaces they occupy?
- RSP Programming on all sites
- Therapeutic SDC for students with emotional issues
- Speech and other related services offered in house across campuses
- Part of SELPA but not currently active
- SDC: M/M and M/S spread out across district; not at every site; based on district need
- Each site has two to three SDC buses, but there is not a district-wide bus system
- SDC students often use the MPR or cafeteria for O.T. and lunch; however some opt to stay in the classroom for meal times

*Participants were asked questions to confirm their programs.*



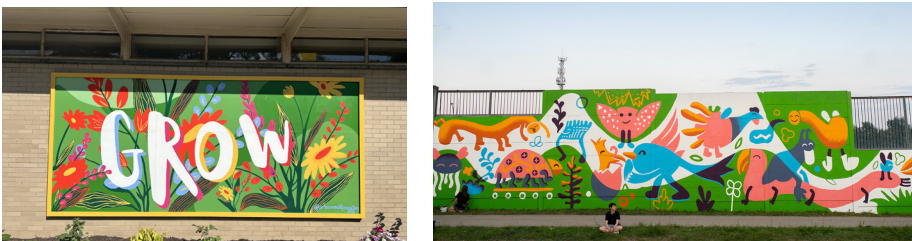
Before going into the Big Picture Questions, reference images below were shared. Participants were invited to leave comments on the photos.

MURAL LINK

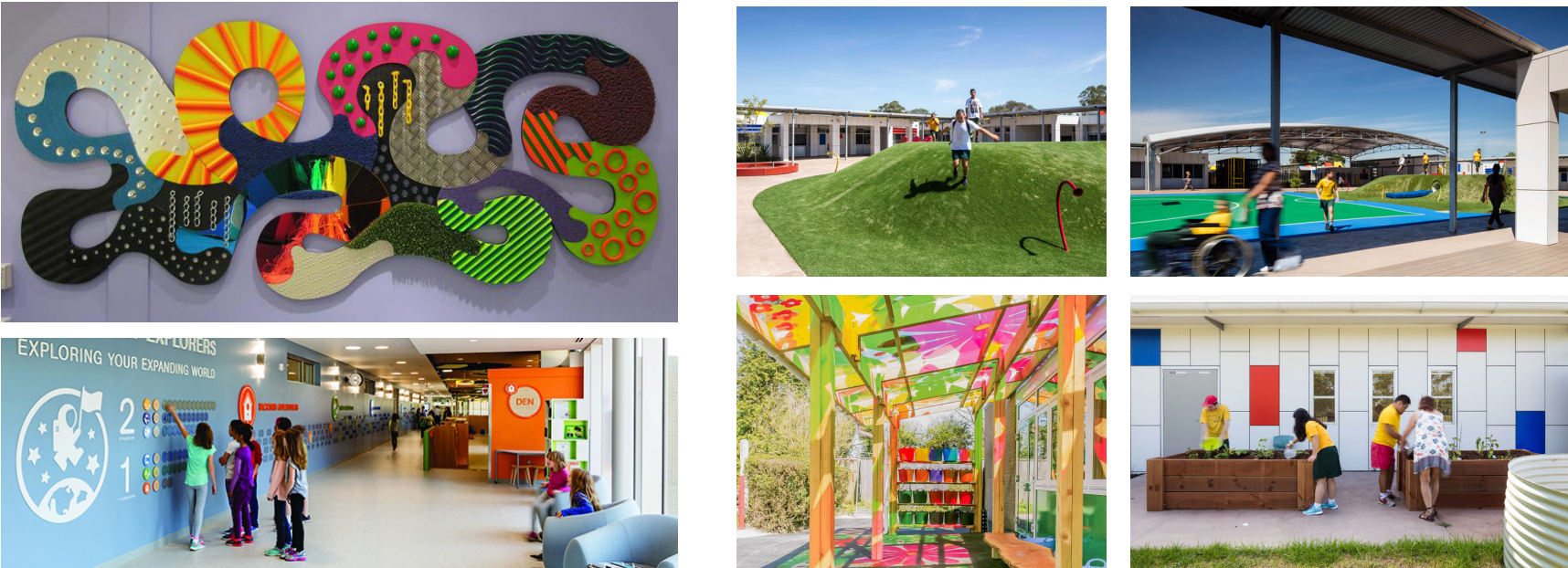
Interior Sensory Spaces and Inclusive Furniture



Engaging Graphics



Exterior Inclusivity



# Big Picture Questions:

- Are there peer institutions that do an exemplary job of supporting students with special needs you've seen that you've liked (or didn't)? What did you like (or dislike) about them?
- Are there programs to support students with special needs or special populations that have no proper location (i.e. we've seen other districts that lack space for counseling or have ad-hoc offices built into closets).
- What behaviors are you trying to encourage in each of the programs?
- What spaces would better support your inclusionary practices?
- Could you imagine a Resource Specialist Program (RSP) and Learning Resource Center/lab located in the library or adjacent to it for more integration with the mainstream?
- For the collaborative push-in approach, what does that look like at the ES level? ...the MS level? How could furniture or space types support that?

*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:

- For the individualized pull-out approach, what does that look like at the ES level? ... the MS level? How could furniture or space types support that?
- What behaviors are you trying to encourage around technology?
- How are current spaces supporting or preventing you from helping OT and APE students reach their potential?
- Research has pointed to the benefits to the developing brain to spend time outdoors. When students come back inside, they are better able to focus. What learning is currently taking place outdoors besides play-based learning? What learning activities could be supported by outdoor learning areas with the necessary infrastructure? If places were created on campuses for nature-based learning adjacent to indoor areas, would you envision learning being facilitated in those places?

*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:

- Rotary Play Garden

*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

- Physical fitness
- Outdoor reading
- Tinker space outdoors
- Sensory exploration
- Walking on paths
- Behavior classes for parents to help them learn how to support their child's education and well-being
- Gardening



# 2

## Current Challenges

- ADA accessibility is not uniform across ARUSD campuses. Some sites have issues with small stair areas within the buildings that require separate ramp structure for accessibility
- Lack of parking for visitors is an issue at every site; this limits family involvement in general but that limit has a larger effect on special needs populations
- Lack of Individualized Education Program conference rooms that could be used for faculty prep, training, and family meetings
- Lack of specified OT spaces on site, so the program often uses the MPR or cafeteria. However, when other disciplines need the MPR then OT is pushed
- Office space for counselors is currently limited, with services using spaces like the Library.
- O.T. or Counselors currently call to the room to pull a student out for individual meetings; if the offices and classrooms were centralized this process would be more efficient



# 3

## Design Objectives

Learning spaces should **promote collaboration between General Education and Special Day Classes** teachers and students. They should be flexible in their sizing and reconfigurability, especially when it comes to furniture organization to make sure all students are accommodated. Furniture and space that allows teachers or support staff to assist a student in one-on-one instruction or to host a small group of students.

**Flexible and individualized services and support programs** for students with special needs classrooms centrally located near shared resources with a variety of zones to support a variety of needs. Technology responsibility should be encouraged in these spaces, but not relied upon as the main educational tool in the classroom especially given different sensory needs in SDC.

# 3

## Design Objectives

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

- Enclosed play area geared towards all ages for SDC students to use
- Quiet corners for breaks from the larger group for students that need individual time
- Storage located within the classrooms for the larger amount of sensory equipment and personal belongings for each student
- Acoustic tiles, light filters, and dimmable or colored lighting to allow for sensory adjustments to the physical environment
- Accessible sinks within SDC classrooms
- Cushioned flooring that can be wiped cleaned with a preferred mix of carpeting is also needed to enhance acoustics, make the space feel inviting and allow students to do things like lie down to read.

# 3

## Design Objectives

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

- Tall, aesthetically pleasing and non-institutional fencing around the perimeter of the campus to help ensure students with special needs are safe even if they happen to wander from supervision
- Dedicated sensory areas that allow for students to engage their motor skills and body freely when necessary
- Walls that are all various write -on surfaces since students want to interact with every surface in a SDC classroom
- Avoid too much open space or high ceilings because students lose focus

# 4

## Affordances

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

#### **Furniture and Equipment**

- Flexible and sensory furniture of various sizes for different ages, with a range of soft to hard texture for different mental stimulation needs
  - Standardized and effective temperature controls
  - Floor seating elements like carpet squares, bean bags, and pads
  - Desks that could be grouped together to promote faster group set up
  - Large swing within the autism room
- 

#### **Technology**

- 1:1 computers students can take home and take care of
- Charging stations in each room instead of shared mobile labs
- Mobile smart boards or LCD screens
- Google suites and read and write apps for assistive tech support



# 5

## Sizing and Adjacencies

- Occupational Therapy and Adaptive Physical Education need full-sized classrooms, and should be separate, specialized spaces from SDC classrooms
- Counselor office adjacent to Individualized Education Program (IEP) spaces
- General Education and SDC teacher collaboration space and office space
- Combined RSP and Learning Center that focuses on the wellness and inclusion of all students would help to promote a larger understanding of SDC student needs and abilities
- Connected teacher hubs and classrooms
- If not a sensory room then at least a sensory area within or adjacent to the classroom
- Enclosed outdoor play area geared towards all ages

# 5

## Sizing and Adjacencies

- Rooms large enough to be split or reconfigured by fold-able walls
- Adjacent and enclosed outdoor area for safe and supervised play, and easily accessible outdoor eating areas for lunch time
- It is preferred if a location could be provided that is further into the campus but still able to provide privacy for SDC students that might need time to ground themselves with a trusted adult. This way a balance is reached between promoting student inclusion and providing the space necessary to address student needs.

# 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](#)