

The NDHS Story: For the Community, With the Community, By the Community

MAY 2018



A new classroom in North Dorchester High School. HCM gathered input from students and community when designing the school.

No matter what the details – be it a school, a senior living center, or a hospital – Hord Coplan Macht’s work affects those who learn, live, and work around it. That’s why we’re dedicated to involving those communities from the start. So, when we began talks with Dorchester County on their replacement of the North Dorchester High School, it was no different. As a 20th century building that teaches 21st century students and acts as a main hub for community activity long after school hours are over, it was especially important to include community members in the planning and design of the new school. The ultimate goal? To find a balance between an updated school that honors the original building’s legacy, while accounting for various community activities.

“NDHS doesn’t exist just to educate kids from 8am-3pm,” said HCM Education Principal Peter Winebrenner, AIA, LEED AP, REFP. “It acts as a community center for everyone in the area – so they really needed to be involved in the planning and design from the beginning.”

NDHS doesn’t exist just to educate kids...it acts as a community center for everyone in the area – so they needed to be involved in the planning and design from the beginning.

And that’s exactly what we did. In fact, the project’s mantra quickly became, “For the community, with the community, by the community.”

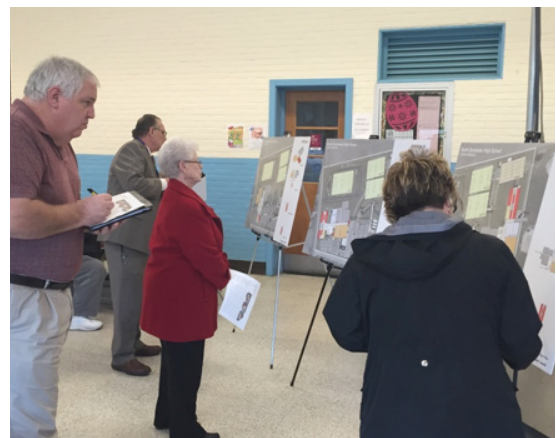
“We felt it was important to have their buy-in,” Winebrenner said. “For them to be a part of the solution, rather than us giving them what we think the solution should be and saying, ‘Take it or leave it.’”

In fact, the community was so involved from the beginning that we asked them to actually build their ideal high school...with Monopoly-like pieces, that is. “The community members who attended split up into about 8-9 groups,” said Chris Hauge, the School Facilities Engineer on the project. “So, while we got 8-9 answers as to what they thought we needed in a high school, each one of those models informed the conversation and shaped the school we’re building today.”

Key stakeholders took notice too. “The community feels a sense of ownership with the high school,” NDHS Principal Lynn Sorrells said. “They feel like they’re a part of it, not like it’s something that’s being done to them. Peter and his team did such a great job rolling the process out with the community.



Members of the local community build their ideal school with Monopoly pieces.



It was important to HCM that the community participate in the design process.

Because it's an occupied site, the community sees it every single day so it's a part of their lives and they know it intimately.



Renderings posted in the entryway help students visualize their input in the design.

They included engagement at all three levels – elementary, middle, and high school. They posted the renderings out front in the entry way so when kids go by during the school day, they say, 'Oh yeah, we talked about the gym in that location,' or 'We asked for windows there and look, we got it!'"

The fact that the new high school is being built alongside the old one, which will eventually be torn down and turned into additional parking, added another layer of complexity to this project. "Because it's an occupied site, the community sees it every single day so it's a part of their lives and they know it intimately," Winebrenner said. "Additionally, we're building the new school around the old one – but we don't want it to look like we built it around the old one."

To manage this complexity, construction is happening in phases. "We were able to zoom out to the larger campus and we're retroactively master planning the site," Winebrenner said. "This has driven how we construct the school in phases, how we work athletic fields and parking around the existing school. It's an intricate puzzle that's driven by the community's high use of the property. We just couldn't ignore that. The baseball and soccer fields couldn't be an afterthought."

Another complexity that arose in our many engagements with the community was the balance between upgrading a 20th century school to a 21st century one, while maintaining its tradition and legacy. "We have kids who are the great-grandchildren of NDHS graduates," Principal Sorrells said. "Families are very proud to say they graduated here. And while we all recognize that the functionality of the school has long outlived its time, it was still really important to honor that legacy and the architects have done an outstanding job of hearing those stories and being receptive and sensitive to that."

One way to honor the NDHS legacy was by including some of the existing wood in the new school. “While we’re building this new school under the premise of changing or upgrading what the community didn’t like about the old school, we also don’t want to get rid of the good stuff,” Winebrenner said.

Speaking of the good stuff: “When the last piece of steel was set, we gave all the kids and staff an opportunity to sign their names on it,” Hauge said. “With this and many other aspects of the project, I’d like to say that we deliberately tried to build as tight of a weave as we had but I can tell you it has exceeded all expectations in terms of community engagement.”

The new high school will be occupied in Fall 2019, with full use of the site in early 2020.

For the community, with the community, by the community – a mantra that may have come about from the North Dorchester High School project in particular, but one we believe in wholeheartedly for all the work that we do here at HCM.



HCM honored the NDHS legacy by repurposing wood from the old school to use in the new structure.

© 2018 Hord Coplan Macht
750 East Pratt Street, Suite 1100
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
410.837.7311 phone
410.837.6530 fax
info@hcm2.com