



# Post Occupancy Evaluation: **Understanding Learning Commons**

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Abbot-Downing Elementary School  
Concord, New Hampshire

- Classroom
- Learning Commons
- Shared Spaces
- Circulation
- Administrative
- Support
- Toilet



First Floor



Second Floor

Abbot-Downing Elementary School  
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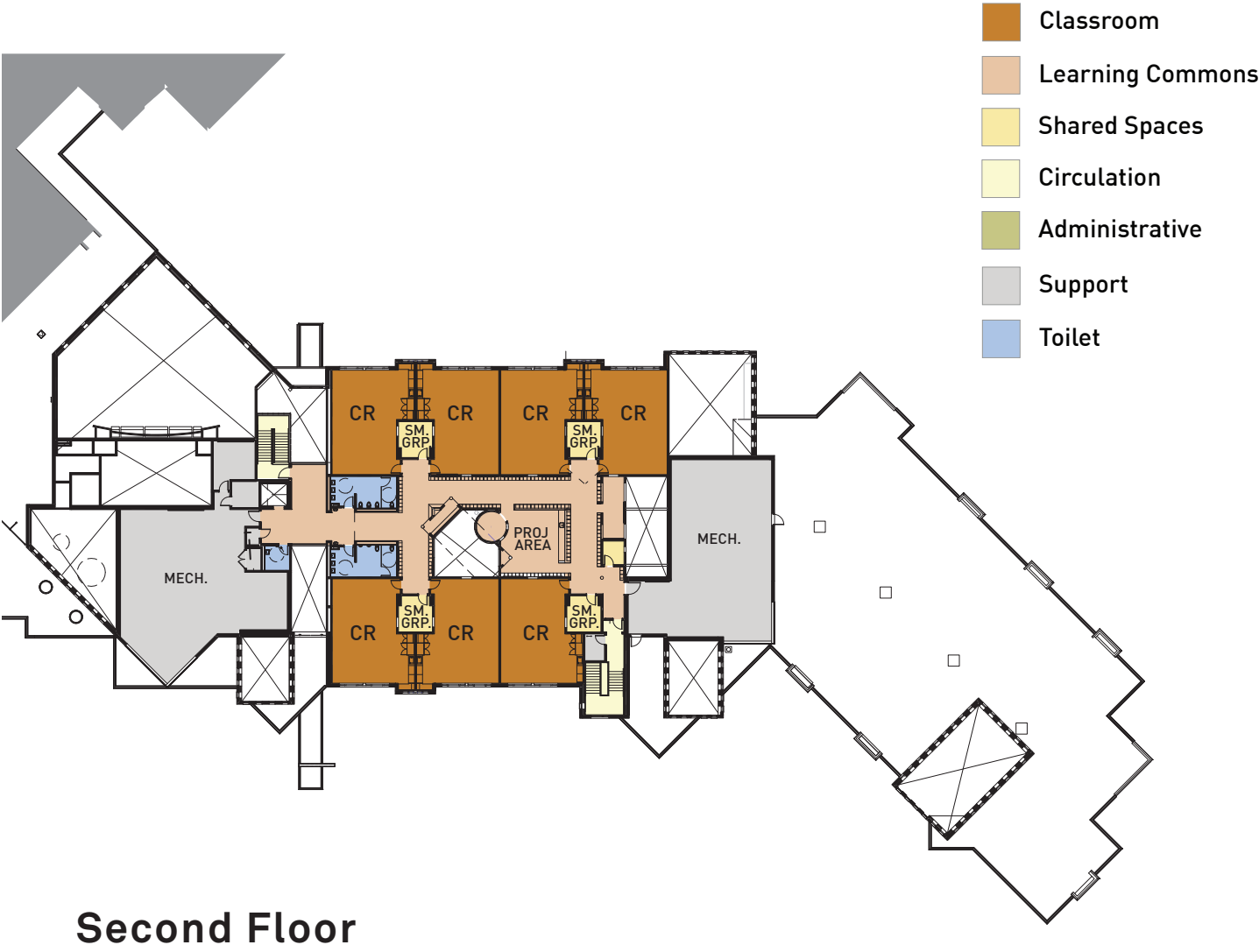
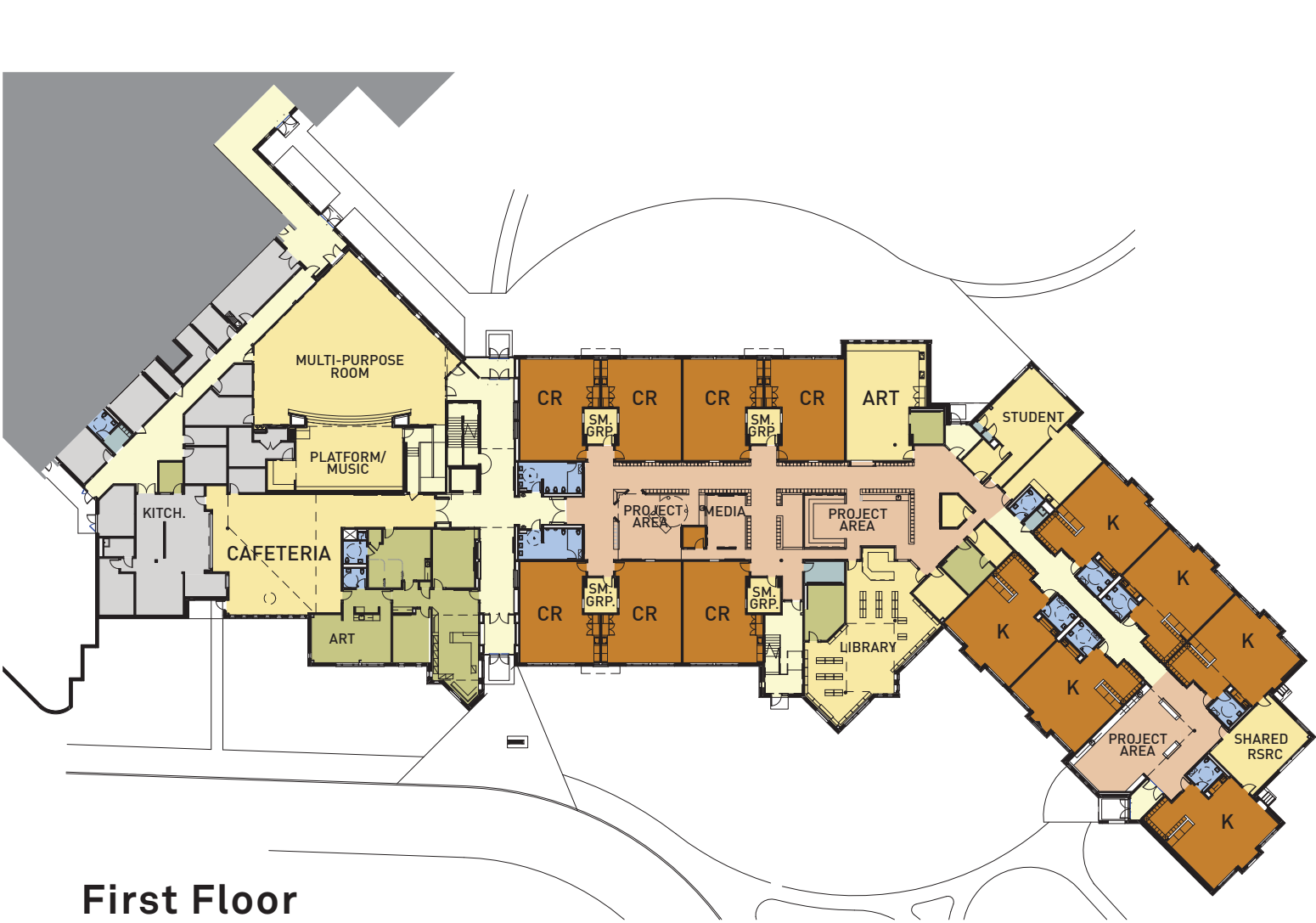


First Floor



Second Floor

Mill Brook Primary School  
Concord, New Hampshire



# Methodology

- On-line questionnaires asking about how the space is used and what is liked and disliked about the space
- Follow-up interviews with teachers and Principals
- Observations of the space

# Challenges: each school is different

- Plan layouts vary
- Grade levels vary
- Student demographics difference at each school; higher level of special needs students at Millbrook, McAuliffe has the fewest English Language Learners
- Leadership different at each of the schools. McAuliffe has the only Principal who was there when the school opened.

# Challenges: lack of consistency

- No teacher training, teachers learn how to use the spaces by watching each other
- New Superintendent
- Two new principals
- Teachers' interest/experience in project based learning varies
- Intensity of Special Needs students at Mill Brook puts stress on use of the space
- Teachers trust older students to use the space wisely more than the younger students

# **Big Picture Results:** teachers use LC for a wide variety of activities

- Project based and stem learning activities
- Small group activities.
- Science unit for a grade level
- Performances
- One on one tutoring
- Older students tutoring younger students
- Grade level activities



*“There is more space to spread out and work in small groups”*

*“My students can go out and read, research and record”*

*“A place where more than one class can go out and work together”*

*“It allows for collaborative learning and it is an area in which all students are able to observe their peer. I think it does a wonderful job of piquing interest.”*





# Big Picture Results:

Teachers and students  
love the variety of spaces  
and the ability to move to  
new and different spaces.





# Big Picture Results:

Teachers enjoy allowing students to work independently and in small groups and working with the entire class on projects outside of the classroom.





However, the Learning Commons has its drawbacks...



# Challenge:

## Visual connections are critical

- Teachers with project areas immediately outside of their classrooms tended to use project areas more than teachers with classrooms without direct connects to project area
- Teachers with project areas immediately outside of their classrooms were also more likely to send out a small groups of children, particularly in younger grades



# Challenge:

## Bringing the entire grade level together is important

- Create larger project areas to hold more than 1 class at a time.





# Challenge:

## Open amphitheater is problematic for some teachers

Younger students can be tempted to climb and get out of control when not directly supervised in the amphitheater. Should be large enough for entire grade





# Challenge: more story rooms

These are extremely popular.  
Although having to go up a  
flight seems to be a barrier for  
some teachers.





# **Challenge:** places for students with special needs

The special needs population has grown. The breakout rooms and the project areas are, at times, used for special needs. This was not part of the original program but can conflict with other academic use of these areas.





# Challenge: general

- Needs change quickly. Dramatic increase in special needs was not anticipated
- Don't underestimate the importance of teacher development
- The culture can change quickly as teachers retire or when a principal leaves.

