

## Environment

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### Medina school works green into its building and its curriculum

- *St. Thomas includes the latest version of a natural ventilation system Bassetti has been refining in its projects.*

By [KATIE ZEMTSEFF](#)  
Journal Staff Reporter

The St. Thomas School in Medina recently completed a \$25 million, 55,000-square-foot building that is expected to be one of the first in Washington, if not the first, to be certified under the LEED for schools program. It has targeted LEED gold.

Kristian Kicinski, project architect for Bassetti Architects, said the school needed space to grow. The existing building, he said, was an agglomeration of additions and remodels that had taken place since the 1950s. St. Thomas wanted to support more students so it needed new space.

Bassetti was architect. Sellen Construction was general contractor.

The new building was completed in August. It has two wings on two levels that branch out from a core area. The core has a multipurpose common space, a gymnasium, mechanical rooms, kitchen space and administrative offices. The building has 23 classrooms.

Kicinski said St. Thomas strives to educate students to be global citizens by instilling ethics and a desire for learning. Because of that focus the school choose to target LEED gold. "They felt like environmental responsibility was a key component of that and they wanted to model that component in their building."

Public schools in Washington are required to reach LEED silver or to meet the Washington Sustainable Schools Protocol. Private schools are not required to meet any green standards. LEED for schools is a new program, launched in 2007.



Photos by John Edwards [\[enlarge\]](#)

**The architects said it was important that the St. Thomas School building welcome people to the area and be a good neighbor.**

St. Thomas is also designed to meet Energy Star certification.

The building is designed to be 21 percent more efficient than ASHRAE 90.1. Porous concrete was used for all sidewalks, the playground and for the fire lane. All classroom space is daylight and 95 percent of other spaces are daylight.

Kicinski said St. Thomas includes the latest version of a natural ventilation system Bassetti has been using and refining in its projects. Hot air is exhausted from classrooms through a shaft that runs to the roof. Fresh

outdoor air is then drawn into classrooms, through a damper underneath the classroom windows, and into a large cabinet, where it is warmed by heat from a hot water pipe, and sent into the classroom. It cuts out the need for an HVAC system and eliminates fan and duct noise, making it easier for students to concentrate. Air quality is also monitored by CO2 sensors.

The building uses low-emitting finishes. The finishes were also chosen to stimulate learning. Kicinski said there is research showing the best classroom environment is uncluttered and not distracting, so the team focused on natural elements like wood and neutral colors inside classrooms, and used more color in common areas of the building.

“We tried to find the right balance between providing a bright colorful environment but not overdoing it.”

St. Thomas's symbol is an oak tree, and the building is split into four geographic zones that are dedicated to different age groups and designed to support different phases of education. Each zone is identified with a theme, related to the oak tree. The four zones are: prekindergarten or acorn, elementary school or seedlings, upper grades or oak leaves and specialty classes or tree rings.

Lorne McConachie, design principal at Bassetti, said children layer skills on top of other skills as they learn and grow, and the team tried to create those layers of space in the classroom. “That was pretty fun we haven't done a lot of early childhood space so we did a lot of ... thinking about how to make that work well.”

The four stages of learning are also reflected in different play equipment on the playground.

McConachie said the neighborhood also influenced the project. This school, he said, sits at the entry to Medina in a “rather proper neighborhood,” so it was important to create a building that would welcome people to the area and be a good neighbor.

The site is next to a park and a golf course in an “idyllic pastoral landscape.” The building, he said, balances those two influences so the front is about being a good neighbor, but the back, he said, is about “the delight that comes from being a five-year-old.”

Project members include Site Workshop, landscape architect; SvR Design, civil engineer; Coughlin Porter Lundeen, structural engineer; Stantec Engineering, mechanical engineer; Travis Fitzmaurice & Associates, electrical engineer; and Sparling, acoustical engineer.

For more information on the project, visit [www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=new\\_bldg\\_design.project\\_st\\_thomas](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=new_bldg_design.project_st_thomas).



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**The school's symbol is an oak tree. Playgrounds shown here are designed for different age groups.**