Our Children Are The Stars

The Stars Of Steck
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Amos Steck came to Colorado in 1859 to find gold. What he found was a community that was eager to learn and grow and develop its own type of exploration skills. That influence can be seen in the use of prospecting equipment as site explorations. Just as he looked for gold in years past, the children of Steck are taught they are the gold of today and tomorrow.

Steck Elementary School was designed and built by Arthur Axtens in the Art Deco style popular in the 1930’s. The original main entrance was on Ash Street, which is now the athletic field. The current entrance is on Albion Street. The kindergarten room is decorated with murals by the Denver artist Leona Bradbury. The Art Deco styling of pillars of the various site structures are reference to the original design.

The Hilltop neighborhood is within a two mile radius of museums, parks, gardens, and golf courses. The community uses the open space between the two schools for unprogrammed sports. The Denver Urban Garden program encourages the use of the garden for curriculum in the school. It was important for us to consider the community uses and connectivity to neighborhoods when deciding where elements of design would be incorporated on the site.
Parents, faculty, and neighbors all support the growth and prosperity of Steck Elementary school in numerous ways. In the fall there is an annual fund raising auction. Last year the auction raised over $11,000 that was used to pay for extra staff and enrichment programs. There is a dollar a day program where each family is asked to donate a dollar a day for each child they have that attends Steck. There are some families that donate more so that all can benefit. There is also the Steck Stomp that is a get together for the friends and neighbors to have fun, run, and get to know each other better. The families of Steck will support and encourage the improvements planned for their school.
Create safe vehicular and pedestrian access
One goal is to keep staff and visitor parking in areas that are not in conflict with children arriving and departing school.

Create an ECE area that is fenced and close in the school building
Children can learn to gain independence going out and returning from the play area which is located safely near the school building.

Create signage with changeable letters highlighting school functions
Signage will allow for community and parent notification of events.

Keep the perimeter safe for children biking and walking to school
Bike parking spaces near the entry to the school allow for safer travel for bikers.

Allow for the ease of snow removal and lawn maintenance
Paving areas that are attractive and still functional make prompt snow removal and lawn maintenance possible.

Promote proper drainage from the site into appropriate storm water sewers or use on site
Play yards will have more days of play if they drain readily with minimal plowing.
Create entry into the school that introduces the school focus on science
Steck stars can be shown in paving, overhead structures and icons throughout the landscape.

Increase the Steck garden area for school and community use
The Denver Urban Garden space at Steck is one of the smallest of their participating gardens. There is room to enlarge it.

Endeavor to have all outdoor play on the same side of the school for safer community use
When neighbors from the community use the play areas on weekends they would prefer all the areas to be on the same side for all age children to be visible.

Create public gathering space for presentation and learning experience for up to 50 students
With the wonderful Colorado weather there are many days when children call be outside and an outdoor learning center is needed.

Add programs that increase physical participation and build teamwork
Teamwork can be built through sports and play activities.

Create fun playgrounds that stimulate learning and are an asset to the community
This fun relic can also serve as a climbing wall.
Through games, activities, and school yard adventure children will have the opportunity to find and discover learning experiences. From the simple digging in the sandbox for prospecting relics to the elaborate Discovery Trail in the DUG to the Stardust Walk in the main play area students will learn to use their skills of discovery and exploration.

ECE Playground will have relics from prospecting days buried in sandbox.

Intermediate Playground

Boulders and walls can replicate the stars and their distance from the earth.

Primary Playground

There can be symbols place around the playground that reflect the children to the past and remind them of the future.
Granite pavers are embedded in the concrete walk. They state the name of a star and the distance from earth. They are placed at relative distance to each other and the earth. A glass embedded swirl connects all the granite pavers and a poem follows the flow of the glass swirl. This incorporates the names of colors, counting, stars names, and distances.

Sun
93 million miles
yellow

Ross 154
9.6 light years
red

Alpha Centauri c
4.2 million years
red

Barnard’s star
5.9 light years
red

STARDUST TRAIL

Photo 27

Photo 25

Photo 26

Photo 28

Photo 29

Photo 30

PATH TO THE STARS-

SCIENCE
The entrance on Albion Street is highlighted with an entrance pavilion and curved seating areas. An entrance walk inserted with donor pavers separates an accessible Early Childhood Education area and the primary play area. The main core play area has a gathering pavilion and intermediate play areas that wrap around the building. A Kinder “Garden” was created for passive activities. The Steck garden area is also a part of the Denver Urban Garden.
The entry area is a archway that follows the line of the shade structure from the ECE area and rear of the curved seating area. There is additional seating around the existing tree in the front area. Inset pavers will carry the sandblasted message that the Steck Children are the stars of the future. Banners on the left of the entrance walk welcome all to Steck Elementary.
The Early Childhood Education area is accessed with a ramp from the main entry way. The surfaces include a wood chip play area, a sod area and a sand box. There is also an area that has decomposed granite with boulders and grasses. The sand box has a shade structure and a picnic area is located at the end of the entrance walkway.
The gathering space is an area that creates a division between the intermediate and primary play areas as well as serving as a place for outdoor classroom activities and respite. The face of a clock and distances of measure are embedded in the concrete paving area.
The Intermediate play area creates opportunities for levels of play for the child in 4th or 5th grade. It has basketball courts, hard surface play areas, boulders, and some lawn areas.
The Kinder Garden area is primarily for use by passive reading activities. It is located outside the ECE room and is accessed through an arched willow gate. There is an area for story telling, hiding and exploring a Gnome home.
The Steck Garden participates in the Denver Urban Garden program. It has plots for both community and school use. There is an outdoor learning area and an discovery trail that goes through a rock garden. There are opportunities for animal and insect observations.
The transition area is located between Steck Elementary School and Hill Middle School. The two schools share the running track and ball fields that are also well used by the community. The columns that are a part of the transition area reflect the Art Deco style.
Acknowledgements

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