



MCDANIEL HIGH SCHOOL GENDER  
NEUTRAL RESTROOM

## GENDER-INCLUSIVE & ALL-INCLUSIVE DESIGN

# Design Strategies for Restroom & Locker Room Facilities

First envisioned as an inclusive design strategy to support transgender and gender diverse people who may otherwise find gender-specific facilities intimidating or unsafe, the benefits of gender-inclusive design turn out to provide safety, comfort and privacy to a wide array of people.

From those who may require the assistance of a caregiver of a different gender, to parents with children of a different gender, to those who experience body image issues and are seeking more individual privacy – thoughtfully designed gender-inclusive facilities have emerged as supportive of the entire community.

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**Designers and clients looking for a roadmap to well-designed, functional and code-compliant gender inclusive restroom and locker room facilities will find that a wide range of planning and design solutions have emerged over the last several years.**

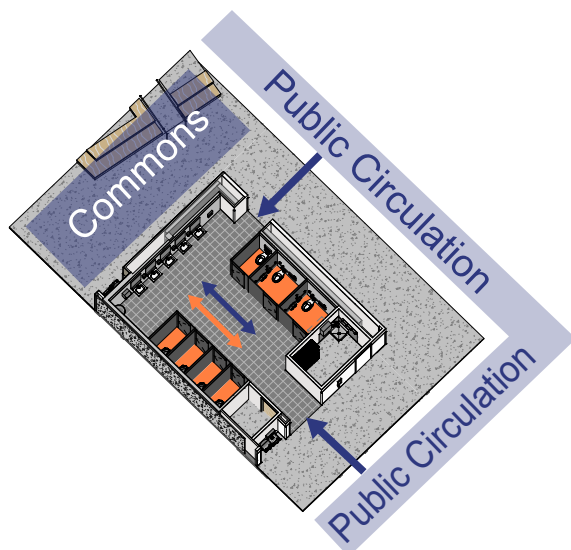
How these issues are resolved for different sports and athletic function, including team meetings, changing and locker rooms, and the interplay with coaching offices has added an additional level of design exploration.

Opsis’s case study reviews both high school and higher education facilities to explore and summarize:

- an outline of key design issues
- key planning considerations and concepts, and
- space requirements and technical details of each strategy

## Gender Inclusive Restrooms at Portland Public School’s Grant & McDaniel High Schools

Portland Public Schools (PPS) has been at the national forefront of all-gender restroom facility design over the last six years, when a series of voter-approved bond measures funded district-wide high school modernizations.



1. Gender Neutral Restroom Stalls



MINSHENG JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, TAIPEI



JOHNSON HIGH SCHOOL, ST. PAUL



CARDIFF HIGH SCHOOL, WALES

PRECEDENT OF EXISTING GENDER-NEUTRAL RESTROOM FACILITIES

PPS’s renovated Grant High School opened in fall of 2019. At that time, the high school was one of the first in the country to have only gender-inclusive restrooms throughout the facility. These individual compartment toilet rooms and open sink areas have been well received by the students and administration during the pandemic-truncated school year. [\[resource\]](#).

PPS’s school design process, while based on district-wide standards, is heavily influenced by the community through the Design Advisory Group (DAG) consisting of student, parent, teacher, and community stakeholders. For the **new McDaniel High School**, Opsis Architecture worked with the DAG to conduct an extensive review of the Grant High School gender-inclusive design strategies and others being developed across the country. The committee opted for a solution that combines both gender-specific and gender-neutral restroom banks, a strategy they believed best reflected their community values.

## Inclusive Facility Planning Concepts for McDaniel High School:

- For this high school, the two large gender-inclusive restrooms are located at the central Commons Crossroads adjacent to the cafeteria and performing arts center to provide maximum accessibility. All other gender-specific restroom banks also include two individual gender-inclusive single use restrooms.
- The sense of welcome and personal security in an all-user facility is greatly improved by increased visual overviews of the space and by creating multiple entrances and exits with no deadends.
- The inclusive character of an all-user facility was enhanced through materials, colors and details that avoid stereotype “locker/restroom” typologies.
- Bright lighting and simple modern finishes were used to create a clean and welcoming space.
- Utilizing zero-sightline, full-height panelized partition systems for toilet and changing stalls reduced first costs, maintenance costs and provided long-term layout flexibility that might be required with changing needs over time.

- Consideration for special needs students resulted in large individual restrooms with changing tables and lifts distributed throughout the school.
- By avoiding access points opening into main open spaces, acoustic concerns were mitigated.

## Technical Design Considerations

- Zero-sightline floor-to-ceiling toilet partition systems in lieu of fully built out walls, reduced construction costs, reduced floor area and simplified maintenance.
- With more distributed “wet” enclosed spaces, the design team worked closely with facilities operations staff to understand the durability of surfaces and cleaning requirements.
- The increase of fully enclosed toilet spaces required early upfront code and MEP system reviews to ensure compliance and appropriate budgeting for fire protection, ventilation and meeting occupancy/ fixture counts.
- Ceiling-mounted security cameras in the corridor at restroom entry points provided increased security





## Gender-Inclusive Locker Rooms & Athletic Team Rooms

While many design strategies for gender-neutral restroom facilities have been developed across the country in the last five years, there has been only recent attention to sports and athletic program locker and team room facilities. Prior to the enactment of Title IX in 1972, these facilities had provided disproportionately larger locker rooms and team room space for men than women. While Title IX provided for gender equity (equal access for men and women), providing safe and welcoming gender-inclusive spaces has only recently been explored in the context of these facilities.

### Locker Rooms

The renovation of the **University of Washington Intramural Activities Building (IMA) Student Recreation Center** is a student-initiated and student fee-funded project to rebuild all the facility locker rooms to be fully gender-inclusive and designed around the principles of Universal Design. While all of the inclusive restroom design considerations apply to locker rooms, they also bring an additional set of design considerations including:

- **Cabana Configurations** – In researching recent gender-inclusive facilities at student recreation centers across the country, the project team identified a wide range of room types. These room types included Cabanas with a) showers, sinks and toilets; b) sinks and showers; c) changing only. Based on the desire for maximum flexibility of use, the IMA team chose Cabanas with showers, toilets and sinks. A separate set of changing-only cabanas was created to allow for quick use functionality.



UW IMA GENDER-INCLUSIVE LOCKER ROOMS

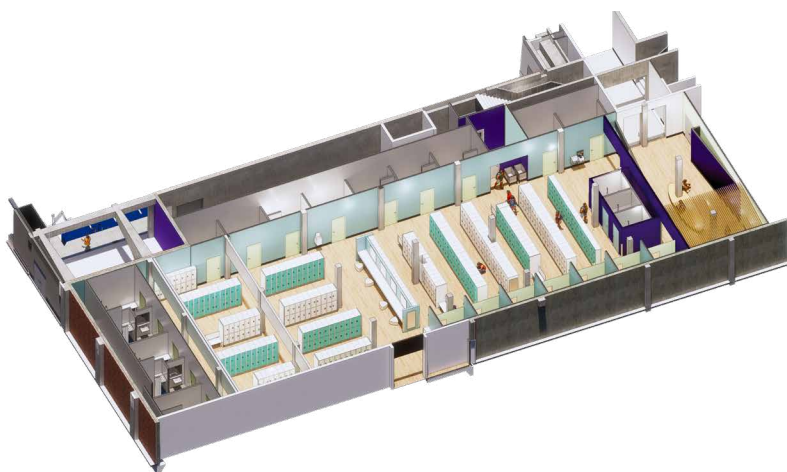
- **Cabana Quantities** – The team’s research, encompassing conversations with recreation center directors with gender-inclusive facilities, revealed no clear methodology for determining the appropriate number of Cabanas per typical / maximum facility user count. Further complicating this topic are a) the long-term trend toward less frequent student showering and changing in locker rooms and b) the impact of extended locker room closures during the pandemic that will likely accelerate trend A.
- **Wayfinding** – A clear organization of where cabanas and changing rooms are located is key to users being able to orient themselves. This is especially important given that locker rows can block visual orientation. The IMA project used color mapping help users locate entries and exits, and locate full cabanas and changing rooms.

### Athletic Team Rooms

Team rooms use is currently oriented to gender-specific sports teams and the widely varying number of participants in a particular sport. This consideration requires a nuanced addition to the design consideration of gender-inclusive restrooms and locker room.

For the new **North Eugene High School (NEHS)** the Opsis design team worked with the District’s planning committee to test a wide range of plan configurations that create inclusive spaces while maintaining flexibility.

In high school facilities, the space need for locker rooms has been steadily declining as students change and shower less frequently. This reduction in space need has allowed for the inclusion of more diverse gender-neutral facilities within the same traditionally allotted program square footage.

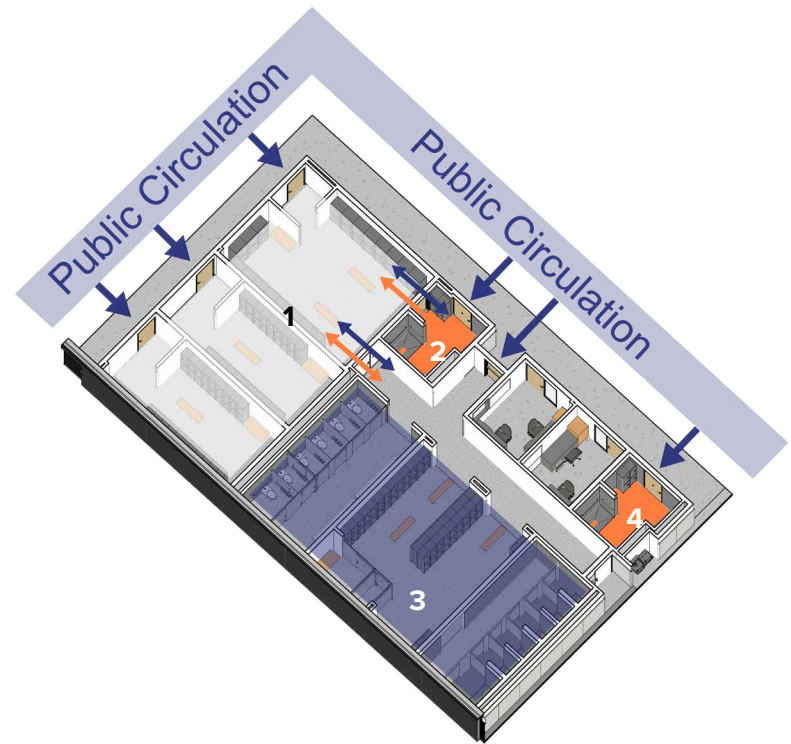


UW IMA CABANA CONFIGURATIONS & LOCKERS

The NEHS design solution seeks to solve the issues unique to Athletic Team Rooms:

- **Common Circulation Zone** – A key to the flexibility of gender-neutral facilities is to create a common circulation system that connects the majority of the spaces without students having to enter from a gender-specific space.
- **Equal Locker Room Space** – The District opted to continue with male and female gender-specific locker / shower rooms facilities of exactly equal size. To address some students' comfort issues around changing within the locker rooms, three changing stalls were added to each the locker room.
- **Gender-Inclusive Locker Rooms** – Two gender-neutral locker rooms were created, each with two toilet stalls and a single accessible shower. Our unique solution provides a second door connecting from these gender-neutral rooms to an adjacent team room, thus allowing all team members to share a team meeting space while providing separate changing/shower facilities.
- **Athletic Team Rooms** – Team rooms play host to the widest variety of uses. Designs need to consider the widely varying size of sports teams, the gender identity dynamics within those teams and the sports culture established by the school and coaching staff. Given these variables, team rooms are one of the more challenging to program and design.

The NEHS design took a middle ground approach that creates flexible creates team rooms of varying sizes (one large enough for the football team) that are accessed from the common circulation zone – thus allowing the rooms to flex by sports seasons to either gender specific or gender inclusive. The common corridor access also allows different gender coaching staff to access the team rooms without passing through a gender-specific locker room. Two of the larger team rooms are also connected directly into the adjacent gender-specific locker room and adjacent gender-inclusive locker room. This arrangement allows for mixed gender teams to utilize the team room space for team meetings.



#### North Eugene High School Design

1. Gender Neutral Sports Team Rooms
2. Gender Neutral Shower/Lockers
3. Gendered Lockers Toilets & Showers
4. Gender Neutral Coaches Shower

- **Coaches Offices / Locker Room Supervision** – Traditionally, coaches' offices have been gender-specific and included windows into the locker/ changing area for supervision. These offices have also had direct connections to a gender-specific shower and changing room. With mixed-gender coaching for teams now increasing, the NEHS design creates separate all-gender coach's shower facilities and limits window visibility to only to the locker room entry.

**While gender-inclusive facility design is still in its infancy, the need for these inclusive environments will continue to evolve and mature through exploration of design concepts and lessons learned.** The planned post-occupancy study for McDaniel High School will include a special in-depth focus on these facilities to determine preferences and any issues resulting from the designs.