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**The backstory on the initial plan and funding:**

Berkshire Local Schools is opening up a brand new $51 million Pre-K through 12th grade state-of-the-art campus through a very unique partnership with the community and Kent State University. The school is located in rural Ohio, about 40 miles outside of Cleveland. Berkshire Local Schools covers an area of 118 square miles.

The 204,000 square-foot school is located on the grounds of Kent State University – Geauga, on 33 acres, though a long-term, 100-year lease with Kent State at $1.

The new school campus actually combines three schools, Burton Elementary, Ledgemont Elementary and Berkshire Junior High/High School.

The school will serve up to 1,600 students and opens for classes on August 16th.

Initial talks were started with three other school districts in the surrounding areas, and eventually ended with the merger of Ledgemont School District into Berkshire Local Schools.

The Superintendent is John Stoddard, who took over in 2017. But plans were over ten years in the making. According to Stoddard, the schools in the area were having enrollment declines, not atypical to smaller, rural districts across Ohio.

Stoddard worked to revive the PRIME committee (Partnership for Rural Innovative Models of Education), that was started by the prior superintendent, and consists of school board members, administrators, teachers, and volunteers from the community.

Funding came from multiple sources, including two Ohio House bills that combined for 55% of total funding. This included an additional 10% (to bring the total to 55%) through a bill that essentially said if you build a new school on the site of a college campus, the state will give you an additional 10%. The project also became the first school in the state to be funded locally by the USDA.

**Aligning the campus design with district values and goals:**

One of the primary goals of Berkshire Local Schools is to provide students with the skills they need to succeed in life, and that was crucial in the design of the new school. Local businesses were having trouble bringing in workers that had the skills including soft skills such as communications, collaboration and teamwork.

Berkshire Local Schools want their students to achieve the American Dream, defined as leading to a career which allows their students to earn a living wage, have access to quality health care benefits, along with the opportunity for advancement in their chosen field.

The path to success is different for every student, but generally it means going to college, learning a trade, joining the military, starting a new business, or any combination of those paths, to pursue the American dream.

As part of the new school build, additional tracks were added, including the ability for students to enroll in more College Credit Plus courses, both in their new facility and outside the new facility. This provides a faster route to earning college credits while still in high school. As a result, high school students have the opportunity to earn the equivalent of an Associate’s Degree while still in high school, reducing the financial burden of college of families in a rural environment, where many families endure financial hardship.

They also introduced a new healthcare path (in partnership with Kent State University and University Hospitals), so students can also enroll in classes to prepare for medical jobs including, but not limited to, nursing.

They also added new diesel mechanics offering (medium to heavy truck technician), in partnership with Auburn Career Center, to provide a direct path to high-wage trade jobs.

Berkshire Local Schools also embraces project based learning, so the design of the school spaces would need to incorporate that approach.

**School Configuration:**

The new campus replaced three schools, and now has three different wings, for Pre-K/elementary, middle school, and high school, as well as a large central cafeteria common area, a new state-of-the-art auditorium, and multiple gyms.

The new campus also includes a new athletic facility, made possible in part by a $2 million donation from Great Lakes Cheese, as well as donations from other generous donors.

Another unique aspect of the campus is their immersive themed areas. One of the key design partners, Inventionland Education, provided the design and construction for the new, age-appropriate spaces.

Inventionland is one of the most significant invention factories in America, and their Education division developed areas including a kindergarten cabin, a 1st and 2nd-grade castle, a treehouse space for our 3rd and 4th graders, a pirate ship for 5th and 6th-grade students, and a robot space for 7th and 8th-grade students, as well as unique maker spaces for our high school students.

The concept behind the maker spaces and Innovation Labs® ties in with Berkshire’s project-based learning approach. They want learners to understand how the ideas they teach work, instead of just memorizing and repeating facts. It’s a much more integrated, comprehensive approach to bringing multiple disciplines into play, much like the real-world works. It also helps to develop the soft skills that today’s employers want.

District offices are also housed in the new school campus.

**Team members:**

Inventionland Education designed the immersive maker spaces.

BSHM Architects of Youngstown, were the architecture team for the new school.

ICON Ohio were the construction managers at risk for the new school.

The Ohio Facilities and Construction Commission was a partner on the project.

Kent State University was a partner on the project.