April 2024 Newsletter Spotlight
Contributed and Designed by Stantec
École Įtł'ǫ̀ (Sissons School Replacement), Yellowknife, Northwest Territories, Canada

This two-storey, 4,350-square-metre learning facility replaces a prominent neighbourhood landmark with a state-of-the-art kindergarten to grade 5 school for the 21st century. The former building had a two-storey library at the heart of its open concept. This anchoring, central space is repeated here, allowing natural light to penetrate deep into the floor plate while connecting both floors visually and spatially. École Įtł'ǫ̀ houses approximately 500 children in a variety of learning spaces. These spaces flexibly accommodate different learning modalities while comfortable window seats allow intimate learning nooks within each classroom. Hallways are flowing, widening to afford small group breakout spaces, narrowing to define learning neighbourhoods.

The use of natural materials and vibrant colours evoke water, grass, and air, together with a circulation pattern emulating trails in the boreal forest, recalls the land in which the new school is set. An informal dining room near the front door is also a cultural space with soft seating for gathering, providing a welcoming environment for elders teaching traditional Dene knowledge in a Francophone setting.

The spacious gymnasium is paneled in perforated wood for acoustic absorption; the large high-level insulated windows facilitate glare-free play under natural light. Washrooms are open-plan, safe, and gender-neutral throughout. A south-facing clerestory hovering over the sinuous circulation spine captures low winter sun and provides an outlet for passive ventilation louvres using thermostatically controlled dampers. The primary heat source is biomass, complemented by high-performance heat recovery ventilation that conserves energy and supplies fresh air to complement the passive system.