



Furniture Selection for K-12 Schools

G+P Creative Collaboration
Sustainable Solutions
GRIMM AND PARKER Engaging Environments

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Three Key Considerations for Furniture Selection

1 Sustainability | Life Cycle

Often when we ask our clients to think 50 years in the future, they think immediately of the things they can't predict, such as what technology will look like. They're not wrong - technology planned for our schools during construction can be outdated by the time the school opens. This time - when we put on our 50 years in the future hat - let us focus on what will never change about our students. Let's establish baseline criteria from which decisions can be made.

Size and Ability

We will always want to plan for students of varying abilities, from the tiniest child in the 10th percentile, to the largest. It is important to make design decisions based on the universality of environments. The uniqueness of each child must be celebrated and accounted for.

Curiosity and Exploration

There is an innate curiosity in children, an abundance of energy, and a desire to explore. Creating an environment in which children are contained and restrained sets a precedent that exploration is generally discouraged. By encouraging freedom of physical movement, we can also encourage freedom of the mind.

Consistency and Stability

We can provide students with more choice than they can imagine, but our learners will always crave consistency and stability. Consistency in the classroom is largely the responsibility of the teacher, who sets up the classroom and makes the rules. By providing an environment where each child understands the basic framework, it sets a standard from which students can deviate. We have to know the rules before we can break them.

Belonging

Establishing a sense of belonging may underline the importance of consistency in a child's development. When a student feels at home in the classroom, they can begin to explore. The goal is a home base where students experience a sense of ownership. Therefore cubbies - and desks and chairs with personal storage - still show up in new classrooms.



LINK to Discovery STEM and Moncure on G+P Website
<https://www.grimmandparker.com/project-category/elementary-schools/>

2 Movement

Every teacher has funny stories about the unique ways students “get comfortable” - leaning back too far, sitting backwards, swinging their feet, or sitting cross-legged.

For many years educators have been suspicious that movement is important. Over the last decade or so, we have finally gathered real data to qualify and quantify the benefits. Today we know that movement is important for brain development. It also helps support good posture development and sustained concentration.

Here are some furnishing types you may want to consider:

- Seating that moves vs. seating that allows for movement
- Adjustable height desks and tables
- Adaptable environments:

If a student isn't feeling supported by his/her environment, he/she should have the ability to adjust it quickly and easily, or be able to pick up and move to another location.

One of many case study examples is Discovery STEM Academy in Newport News, VA. Shortly after opening in 2017, teachers reported fewer absences, higher test scores, and improved behavior and attention. At Discovery STEM, flexibility means that learning can happen everywhere. Student choice provides a sense of ownership, makes students feel empowered, and grants them control over their own education. Every student can find his or her place.

At Discovery STEM we created Collaborative Learning Zones (“CLZs”) because we know 75% of students learn best by doing. Lightweight, easily reconfigurable furnishings maximize the efficiency of flexible learning spaces.



3 Function

As Architects and Designers we're always talking flexibility and adaptability. Seasoned teachers and administrators have undoubtedly weathered storms of past trends in teaching and learning. If you've ever had a few fitness balls show up over here, and a couple standing desks show up over there, you know what I'm talking about. When you're equipped with an entire classroom of flexible, adaptable furnishings, you can use your classroom like a “kit of parts” to play and experiment with different layouts and learning trends on a daily basis.

Teachers have spent the past few hundred years at the front of the classroom - with chalk in hand - lecturing to students in rows of inflexible, uncomfortable furniture. We live in an ever-changing world full of choices. In your classrooms, please encourage your students to take responsibility for their own learning. And in your decisions regarding furniture and the like, please consider our three simple points, and challenge what has been done before.



In closing, thoughtful furniture decisions promote emotional and psychological well-being; agile, restful environments support inclusion and fairness. Some students benefit from reflective, restorative activity before joining a group; soft surfaces can even help calm the central nervous system. Scatter a handful of lounge pieces here and there, with wood and other nature-inspired touches. Don't forget area rugs! Adjustable height lecterns + seating for teachers promote student-educator connections. Colorful, warm, and inspiring furniture has the power to lift spirits. Finally, easily reconfigurable furnishings contribute to a spirit of resiliency; they serve as a reminder that change is inevitable, and your community will adapt along with those changes.