

INSPIRE

K12 Education Update | Volume III



Built for Change

Architecture that embraces the evolution of education

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There is no shortage in the number of changes that are impacting educators today. Educators have always been adaptable, creative, and resourceful in meeting the needs of their students. However, over the last few years, the rate at which our educators have been forced to adapt to changing needs and ideas has rapidly increased, and there is no sign of slowing down. While we can't halt time and technology, we can give educators smarter architectural solutions that are built to flex for the future.

Driving Change in Education

The next generation of learners were born into a world ruled by intuitive devices, interconnectivity, and platforms ripe with instant information and discovery – all at their fingertips. You could say, today's K12 students are not even "programmed" for the same approaches that worked with past generations of learners. They are looking for more realistic workforce training, collaborative learning, cutting-edge technology, sustainably responsible buildings, and energized environments that can keep up with their evolving interests. All of this is challenging educators to anticipate their quickly changing needs and adapt their plans on the fly.

Discussion on the changes in education and the impact on the built environment have been building momentum over the last decade with conversations about pedagogy, building design, security, and technology

at the forefront. Today, conversations around mental health, human interaction, and social emotional well-being are rising to the top and driving change around how we talk about and embrace these student and staff needs. In short, formalized education is embarking on a future-ready overhaul that responds to the ambitions of the next generation.

“Our students are entering a world that we can't envision and will be in occupations that do not even exist yet, so focusing on skills that will provide them success, goes beyond just delivering academic content.”

– Kay Nelson, Former Assistant Superintendent
Sartell-St. Stephen Schools

Navigating Change

If you're wondering when these changes are coming, the simple answer is, yesterday. Change is already here and knocking on your door. Schools are being charged with giving teachers, students, and administration the tools to embrace life and learning beyond the walls of the traditional classroom. Planning for the future requires robust, flexible, infrastructure that is prepared to meet the changing needs for decades to come – even if we don't know exactly what that looks like. Your building can help you navigate some of the changes you may be encountering and help you prepare for an unpredictable future.



1. Be in alignment with the community.

The beliefs, values, and expectations of the community can impact the success or failure of an implemented change. The space within your building is a great opportunity to support local needs and reflect the diverse cultures of the people who use it. A thriving local business could be a great partner for a coffee shop or career and technical education program. Additional athletic space can supplement community recreation space and be a place for gathering. In Mahnomon, MN, a discussion on the mental health needs for staff and students is the driving force. They're considering providing space for wrap-around services that increase access to mental and physical health resources within the building. In this scenario, students wouldn't have to leave campus to benefit from those services, resulting in less instructional time loss.

When asked what one piece of advice he would give to other education leaders who are managing changes in their school, Superintendent of McKenzie County School District, Steve Holen, noted that it's important to “...maintain levels of communication and transparency by ensuring the changes are aligned with community beliefs and expectations. Collaboration with other political subdivisions and businesses is essential to ensure the school district has a similar expectation as stakeholders and citizens in the community.”



2. Make change part of school culture.

Educators and employers are asking students to be collaborative, creative, critical thinkers, and good communicators – skill sets often referred to as the “Four C's.” A fifth “C” to add to that list is students who can navigate Change. Change is part of the unlearning and relearning process that is now a coveted character asset. Modern facilities demand spaces that can flex with pedagogical, enrollment, and drastic world changes. Over the last two years, those who had integrated technology and modernized spaces were able to pivot with the unexpected changes more quickly. Those who still leaned on traditional learning environments found making the changes more challenging, and often were less able to support the technology and spatial needs of students in schools that were not designed to adapt. When adaptability is part of the everyday, navigating change is less intimidating and creates more resilient educators and learners.



“Just like instruction needs to change, our learning environments also need to change,” said Kay Nelson, Former Assistant Superintendent for Sartell-St. Stephen Schools. “Students no longer learn in desks and rows. They need open spaces and flexibility to embrace collaboration and problem-solving situations. Spaces that foster creativity and allow for a variety of learning styles are essential to meaningful learning. This is what we see in business and industry, and our schools should model the workplace if we are truly preparing our students for life beyond our school walls. Facilities should inspire, make learning visible, and celebrate the opportunities the school provides.”



3. Be purposeful and model expectations.

As with anything unknown, a building that challenges the status quo can be emotional and create apprehension, mistrust, anxiety, and fear. It's common for people to be hesitant to embrace change, preferring to stick with what they know and what has always been done, regardless of its effectiveness. Your building should not get in the way but rather reinforce your school's mission and driving pedagogy. As you develop your pedagogy, be purposeful in setting expectations for staff and help them understand how the building can support their goals. Show them how it can flex to respond to changes as yet unknown. Open and engaging conversations with both your designers and your staff ensure the building, teaching, and learning work together to maximize potential now, and in the future.



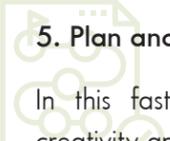
4. Maintain clear, consistent communication and transparency.

A new building, or the transformation that an existing building goes through during renovation, can be an opportunity to adjust procedure and provide spaces that present new opportunities for teaching and learning. Use the time during design and construction, which can be anywhere from a year to several years, to communicate the why behind the changes going into effect and how the building supports that. Effectively managing institutional change is a matter of balancing perspective and expectation. It's critical to make sure that stakeholders feel informed about what is happening, and most importantly, why something is happening. Clear, consistent communication helps keep everyone informed. Nelson recognizes the importance of communicating change to staff, saying, *"Change is the only constant, and this is challenging for educators. Educational changes take time to be fully implemented and effective, so being deliberate and focused when tackling new initiatives is critical. When staff understand 'the why', they are more open to change."*



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5. Plan and pilot professional development.

In this fast-paced digital age, spaces that foster creativity and allow for a variety of learning styles are now essential to meaningful learning and teaching. Part of communicating with staff to ensure they know what to expect, is incorporating time to experiment and learn through professional development programs. Provide time and space for staff to ask questions, try things out, and understand how a new idea can be incorporated into their lesson plans. Sometimes creating an actual “pilot learning space” that mimics the space to be provided, allows staff to work in a prototype of the proposed spaces that includes the technology that will be provided. This is a great way to not only make everyone comfortable with the change but allow them to relay meaningful feedback to the design team. Putting the extra effort into planning can help ensure a high probability of success when and if changes get implemented. Nelson had this advice for other education leaders who are managing changes

in their school, *“Be purposeful. Know the why behind the change, and make sure it is student-centered. Be impeccable with your word and make sure you are willing to roll up your sleeves and model what you are asking others to do.”*

Future Readiness

Navigating these conversations can be difficult, emotional, and ultimately exciting if districts are willing to embrace new ways of thinking and doing. When you need to quickly adapt to changes, the building shouldn't be a barrier to your goals. Your building can support your goals and be part of the solution to navigating the changes your district may be facing. When building and pedagogy are in sync, change can be uplifting and a catalyst to a new outlook and new opportunities that demonstrate your school is listening, adapting, and ready to take on the future of education.

“We have tried to be transparent and consistent in our management of change; we believe strongly in having a well-researched, flexible plan to allow for levels of adjustment as needed to maintain the overall, long-range goals established in conjunction with stakeholders.”

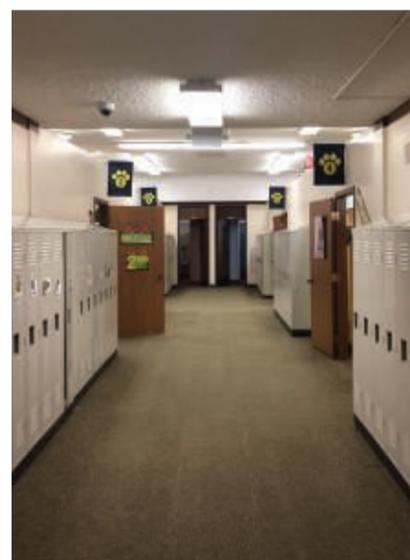
– Steve Holen, Superintendent
McKenzie County School District





Uncovering Potential

Modernizing traditional learning and exploring hidden potential



Groton Area Elementary School Expansion & Renovation | Groton, SD

The existing configuration of the 1968 building presented challenges that obstructed collaborative student learning but offered plenty of hidden potential awaiting exploration. Traditional classroom wings lacked space for students to break out into smaller groups, didn't offer adequate storage, and were not acoustically sealed from neighboring classrooms or the hallway, creating challenges within the classroom. To address these needs, the building underwent a transformation for the benefit of future learners. The classroom wings of the building were renovated to create a Learning Commons with space for students and staff to openly collaborate.

Champions of Change

Behind the scenes of a classroom teacher, culture builder, and technology integrationist



Travis Lape

Innovative Programs Director
Harrisburg School District

What if? It's a question that opens our minds to a lot of potential; potential for change, inspiration, and anxiety. It's also a question that Travis Lape, Innovative Programs Director at Harrisburg School District of Harrisburg, SD, poses to get districts to think differently. He challenges tradition and explores what might be possible inside the classroom to shape the learning environments of the future.

JLG's K12 studio is committed to learning from educators to better understand what is happening in education and learning today. As part of our ongoing professional development, we invited Travis to present at one of our internal studio meetings to talk about his work. Travis' experience as both a classroom teacher and technology integrationist has paved the way for impactful change as the districts' Innovative Programs Director. His goal is to create learning experiences that empower and equip students with necessary skills to effectively produce and consume content across multiple media platforms. He also works hard to help educators feel confident when using technology, hoping that all teachers will take risks and try new ways of engaging students.

Travis shared with us tips on how to engage staff in conversations around change. He has discovered that the process involves taking people from the "Unconscious Incompetence" – where they don't know what they don't know - and educating them so they become comfortable enough to move into "Conscious Competence" - where they are aware of opportunities and are willing to try something new. This shift in understanding opens the door to new ways teachers can empower their students to take ownership of their own learning experiences.

This transition can happen in many ways. One approach that Travis shared with us is to ask groups how they feel about images that show different learning environments – from a traditional schoolhouse to a modern, agile space. Are they drawn to the furniture? Do the posters on the wall feel inspiring or cluttered? Is the space too stark or too dark? This exercise helps staff recognize opportunities they can implement in their own spaces and make change less intimidating.

Champions of change like Travis are a huge asset to districts looking to make a shift in how education is delivered. Who in your district can be a champion for change?

If you're interested in following Travis, check out the Movers & Makers Podcast which he co-hosts, or reach out via email at travis.lape@k12.sd.us.

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