

# INSPIRE

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# Taking Care of Staff, Takes Care of Students

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In the desire to make education spaces student-centered, the needs of teachers, coaches, paraprofessionals, custodians, administrators, and many other adults are often overlooked.

A school building is not only a place for student learning, but also a workplace for adults with their own needs, concerns, and daily challenges. As K12 architects and designers, we balance the focus to equitably take care of staff as well because **taking care of staff, ultimately takes care of students.**

## Evolved Perspectives of the Profession

Teaching is a long-standing profession that provides meaningful opportunities to build community and make a lasting impact on future generations; reasons why many people get into teaching in the first place.

Despite the positive outlook many have of teaching early on, we've seen an increase in the number of teachers leaving the profession and fewer students enrolling in teacher prep courses. The reason, according to a June 2022<sup>1</sup> report by Rand on teacher well-being, "is the context in which they are teaching that is stressful rather than teaching itself." One teacher put it this way:

“It has nothing to do with the teaching. I love being in the classroom. I love being with my students, but it has been an exhausting experience.”

The current environment teachers are experiencing is drastically impacting their view of the profession, how long they stay, and how excited they are to continue doing the work. When they reach the stage of burnout where they consider leaving the profession, the reasons for leaving seem to fall into four categories: 1) **High levels of burnout and stress**, 2) **Economic factors**, 3) **Increased demands on teachers**, and 4) **Poor working conditions.**

## Feeling the Burn

When staff needs are overlooked, stress increases, leading to a sharp decline in mental health and an increase in burnout and teacher turnover; none of which helps students to grow or thrive. In fact, research has found that "teacher burnout is predictive of student academic outcomes, including being correlated with lower levels of student-effective learning and motivation."<sup>2</sup> **When a teacher isn't motivated to teach, students aren't motivated to learn.**

The role of the building is more important than ever, and teachers are speaking up about the impact of their surroundings. A 2022 report by Corgan,<sup>3</sup> found that surveyed teachers increasingly found "the design of the classroom to be important for their ability to be a good teacher, rising from 38% in 2019 to 71% in 2022 – a marked 33% difference."

**71%** of educators find the design of the classroom to be important for their ability to be a good teacher

## How Can Better Buildings Build Better Teachers?

While a building cannot solve every challenge teachers face today, a better-built environment can help remove many of the day-to-day obstacles standing in the way of happy, productive, and meaningful careers. As architects and designers, we are dedicated to improving the environments that uphold teaching and learning. Our goal is to ensure teachers feel heard, valued, safe, and well-supported within their schools – having the tools they need to be the inspired leaders their students need.

The benefits of spaces designed with both staff and students in mind can not only help teachers be good teachers, but can also lead to increased job satisfaction, improved health and well-being, increased morale, reduced absenteeism, and higher levels of overall well-being.<sup>4</sup> There are also documented economic impacts for the district and community. **When staff feel their needs are being met, there is less teacher turnover and more incentive to stay as part of an engaged and thriving community.** All of this leads to better student outcomes and happier teachers.



## What does a CARE-ing space look like?

A school facility focused on teacher needs and addresses the concerns mentioned earlier that impact teacher retention and recruitment, starts with space that focuses on **CARE**:

**CONDITIONS that are clean, whole (not broken), and safe** | In order to thrive we must first meet our basic needs. In a school building this means making sure buildings are in good physical condition, address safety and security concerns, and have necessary supports, such as whiteboards and plenty of outlets to teach and learn in the 21st century. Are there existing building conditions that are impacting the ability of your staff to do their job?

**AUDIENCE-CENTERED environments** | Everyone who walks into a space has different needs. Some needs are universal between staff and students, some are student-specific, and others are staff-specific. Consider how the needs of staff change based on their age, gender, or tenure in the profession. Staff who speak all day may suffer from vocal strain, or if they are standing, foot fatigue. What “symptoms” become apparent when time is regularly spent in a poorly designed space?

**RELIEF from stressors** | Teaching is a highly empathetic profession, and because of the amount of physical, emotional, and mental stress, there is a higher likelihood of burnout. According to a 2023 report on teacher well-being by Rand,<sup>5</sup> teachers’ top-ranked source of job-related stress was managing student behavior. How can the building provide relief from the day-to-day worries and stressors so that the impacts aren’t felt by educators or those they interact with?

**EXCITEMENT for occupants** | Staff and students should be excited to come to school. With rising teacher turnover and pipeline challenges, it’s more important than ever that the space in which they do their work excites them as much as the work they are doing. As it turns out, when you lean into what keeps them coming back, and addressing the items above, you also serve their need for excitement. What sort of space would make staff excited to do their job?

The chart on the adjacent page outlines some of the most common staff concerns we’ve heard and opportunities for how the built environment can make an impact through the principles of **CARE**.



### Valuing Self-CARE

Centering the building around the principles of **CARE** is what allows teachers to put on their own oxygen mask first; self-care that prepares them to take care of others. When designed to be supportive and uplifting spaces, without disconnection and dysfunction, **your district gains a stronger foundation to support a proud and productive workplace, an inspired learning environment, and ultimately leading to future-ready students.**

## CARE Design Interventions

	Issue	Design Interventions
Conditions that are clean, whole, and safe	Classroom Conditions	Conduct a <b>Facility Condition Assessment</b> to identify classroom deficiencies. Engage staff to understand their existing stressors and concerns. Establish a plan to address concerns.
	Indoor Environmental Quality	As part of the Facility Condition Assessment identify thermal comfort, lighting and air quality issues/concerns. Addressing these items can improve health by <b>reducing cases of asthma, allergies, or migraines, and reduced absenteeism.</b>
	Disease Control	Choose furniture and finishes that have <b>easy-to-clean surfaces</b> . Regularly replace air filters and system settings related to fresh air intake.
	Safety & Security Concerns	Implement best practice safety and security practices, like those based on building code and <b>CPTED principles</b> . Introduce a secure entry point to the building and designate lock-down points within the building to create a layered approach to security.
Audience-Centered Environments	Desire for Connection with Other Staff	Create spaces throughout the building that <b>provide staff an opportunity to connect in both social and professional ways</b> . Think about how collaboration and support can be fostered.
	Need for Mental Health Supports	Tap into creative ways to make <b>spaces that support mental health</b> from integrating biophilic design elements, such as natural light, addressing neurodivergent needs by providing a variety of working spaces, or creating a more human-scale experience that makes you feel welcomed and more comfortable.
	Lack of Ownership and Identity	<b>Engaging staff in design decisions</b> empowers them to take ownership of their space and creates confidence to use it to the highest potential. Adaptable spaces that can easily adjust to student/staff needs give staff more control over their environment.
	Physical Health Symptoms	Addressing acoustics and flooring can <b>provide physical relief for staff during the day</b> . Proper building orientation and/or integrating window shades can reduce harmful glare. Active furnishings, such as sit/stand desks, allows staff to adjust furniture for appropriate age and gender needs. Wellness rooms for mental health breaks, administering medication, or meeting the needs of nursing mothers should be easily accessible to all staff.
Relief from Stressors	Spaces Take Too Much Time to Clean and Rearrange	Reduce time spent on maintenance by providing furniture and finishes that are <b>durable and easy-to-clean</b> . Furniture with wheels makes it easy to reconfigure learning spaces and for custodians to move and clean around or to rearrange based on lesson plans during the day.
	Managing Constant Change	Change is inevitable. <b>Limit stress around change by making spaces as adaptable as possible</b> . Introduce bigger changes slowly, allowing staff to become comfortable with the change and provide feedback for a sense of control.
	Decompress and Recharge	Provide sensory decompression spaces outside of the classrooms like small group rooms, wellness rooms or similar where staff can go to take a break to recharge. For some, that might be their classroom; for others, it might be a quiet office-like setting away from the classroom; for others, it might be both.
	Managing Student Behavior	Visually connecting spaces allows for more <b>passive supervision</b> , more support from other staff, and less bullying. Students can be triggered by enclosed spaces, feeling an uncomfortable sense of physical isolation or can become distracted by outside noises. Visually connected spaces can help reduce student behavior incidents.
Excitement for Occupants	Recruitment & Retention	Your building(s) can <b>build excitement</b> for your district, generate school pride, highlight available resources and amenities, and the work you’ve done to address the needs above to create a supportive culture.
	Sterile & Monotonous Environments	Engage teachers’ creativity and sense of wonder to create <b>inspired environments</b> by engaging their senses and desire for discovery through color, branding, and even storage that gets them excited to come to work.



# CPTED: How Built Environments are Redefining School Safety & Security

JLG’s Whitney Lougheed, AIA, LEED AP, recently completed the Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) certification, adding a third esteemed acronym to her title, CPD. The term CPTED originated in 1971 with criminologist C. Ray Jeffrey, who hypothesized that **the way to prevent crime is to focus on the total environment**. His theory went mainstream in 1991 with Timothy D. Crowe’s book Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, which remains valuable today, not only to cities and neighborhoods but also to schools.

## What is CPTED?

CPTED, pronounced as “sep-ted,” seeks to improve quality of life through the reduction of fear and incidences of wrongdoing, using proper design and effective use of the built environment to enhance the physical school, social management, and support of directives guided by the district and administrators. basic reactions to be almost universal.

## The 3 D’s of CPTED

Our dominant focus of CPTED is the built environment of your school. Through the three D’s—**Designation, Definition, and Design**—schools can increase safety and security through everyday design principles. The following is a breakdown, including questions that help define solutions:

### DESIGNATED PURPOSE

In designating the purpose of the space, **we help determine its intended use by asking if the intent will change in the future, and how its purpose will be defined by different users.**

### DEFINED BEHAVIORS

To define behaviors, **we consider desired behaviors and outcomes of people using the space.** Here, we look to student to student, individual student, student to staff, staff to student, individual staff, and community culture. We ask if the space is defined physically, and does it need to be? Another question concerns the naming of the space. Priya Parker shares the concept of “naming as priming” in her book The Art of Gathering. “Simply because of the name, I’ve noticed that people seem to show up differently. They’re more open...”

### DESIGN

In design, we look to natural surveillance, increasing the perception that people can be seen and caught. Here, **natural access control with strategic design encourages specific pathways while avoiding others.** To engage territorial reinforcement, we ask how we can foster a sense of ownership, using flooring changes, signage, exterior fences, and even landscaping.

CPTED principles also target maintenance, ensuring spaces are well-maintained for the intended purpose, decreasing incidents of negative behaviors. **We ask how we can share that ownership in care and maintenance. If people feel they belong in a space, they will inherently want to keep it in good condition.**

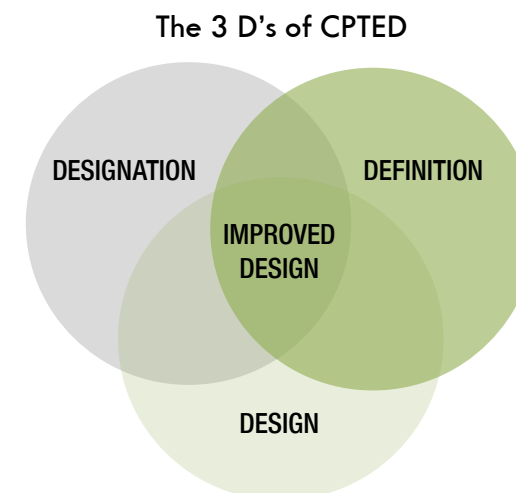
“Safety is not the absence of threat; it is the presence of connection.”

– Dr. Gabor Maté (interviewed by Stephen Porges (2021) and referenced in Reimagining School Safety: A Guide for Schools and Communities, 2022)

## Why Should My School Care About CPTED?

While most administrators look to immediate solutions to stop negative behaviors and violent actions, school designers look to environmental CPTED solutions to set the stage for positive behaviors.

“Schools want to know how to protect themselves in place and how to stop an intruder. While these should be addressed in the design, the reduction in wrongdoing is more about understanding the desired quality of life, with a building that supports those outcomes,” explained Lougheed. **“The goal should be more focused on preventing the wrongdoings versus stopping them.”**



One of our successful implementations of CPTED converted a ‘60s high school into a ‘main street’ design that put active learning on display, so staff can passively observe. This approach supports positive behaviors so students and staff can feel safer walking the halls. For administration, it was an opportunity to increase positive interaction and decrease negative behaviors that lead to larger issues.

## Reimagining School Safety

Our own philosophy on CPTED comes from Reimagining School Safety: A Guide for Schools and Communities. Shifting safety, as noted by the authors, Lauren Trout, Christina Pate, Krystal Wu, and Joe McKenna, “is defined so that it is not the absence of violence but the existence of systems and structures that support mutual care, belonging, and interconnection, schools’ policies, practices, and values shift toward creating strong communities and places of collaborative learning.”

The authors refer to a “renewed focus on prevention that is rooted in supporting all students’ psychological safety, mental health, and identities. Finally, the movement toward a more comprehensive approach [to school safety] provides an opportunity to break out of silos and work across disciplines...”

“CPTED is less about stopping negative behaviors, and more about creating an environment where **even if they could do something mischievous, they don’t want to – due to ownership, ability to be seen, or increased quality of life,**” said Lougheed.

“As a CPD, I look at the CPTED model as circular,” said Lougheed. “It starts with understanding how your school seeks to improve the quality of life for students and staff. If we follow the three Ds, we can increase positive behaviors—a critical first step towards designing a better built environment. It’s about collaboratively designing a positive K12 learning environment that outweighs negative behaviors; students not only know they can’t, but also no longer want to.”

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