

# Navigating the Constant of Change

*Communicating your vision for a brighter, more resilient future for education.*

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**S**chools have always been adaptable, creative, and resourceful in meeting the needs of students. However, today's rapid-fire changes have made it even more difficult to keep up. The newest generation of learners was born into a technology-driven world raised by intuitive devices, interconnectivity, and platforms ripe with instant information at their fingertips.

Today's K–12 students are not even “programmed” for the same approaches that found success in the past. So how do we plan for the future and communicate change with today's challenges and tomorrow's unknown?

## Emerging Education

Demands and needs are evolving, with requests for realistic workforce training, collaborative learning, cutting-edge technology, sustainably responsible buildings, and energized environments that can keep up with new and emerging interests. Educators are now challenged with foreseeing the future to readily anticipate student needs and to adapt on the fly, heavily influencing pedagogy, building design, classroom configuration, security, inclusivity, career and technical education programs, and technology platforms.

We can't slow down the changes, but we can offer educators smart architectural solutions that are built to flex for the future, reinforce mental health, and support social-emotional well-being.

## Five Pathways for Navigating Change

To fulfill these needs, a new educational environment that embraces learning beyond the classroom will be required, featuring robust, flexible infrastructure

prepared to meet the future. This change to the learning environment can create tension with stakeholders who are averse to change within their own experiences in school. Navigating these changes includes difficult



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conversations and requires open communication between the leadership, the staff, and the community. Here are a few tools to help you communicate your vision for a brighter, more resilient future.

### 1. Align with the Community

The values and expectations of your community can affect the success or failure of any proposed change. Often, they are not in the building regularly, so it can be difficult to communicate why changes are needed. To bring on board those outside the school, think of the space within your building as a prime opportunity to support the community. Superintendent of McKenzie County School District Steve Holen notes 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."

Connecting with the community could be as simple as a thriving local coffee shop's becoming a great partner for your school district's career and technical education program or opening up athletic spaces as a community recreation and gathering space. When community members see themselves in what's happening within the building, navigating change is undoubtedly easier.

### 2. Make Change Part of the 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 Cs. A fifth C to add to that list is change, part of the unlearning and relearning process that is now a coveted character asset. This fifth C is just as important to integrate into your school culture.

Modern facilities are equipped with spaces that can flex with pedagogical, enrollment, and drastic world changes. It's more evident than ever that modernized spaces with integrated technology can pivot with unexpected changes more quickly than traditional learning environments that were not designed to adapt.

"Just like instruction needs to change, our learning environments also need to change," says Kay Nelson, former assistant superintendent for Sartell-St. Stephen Schools. She adds:

"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."

When adaptability is part of the everyday culture, navigating change is less intimidating and creates more resilient educators and learners.

### 3. Be Purposeful and Model Expectations

It's hard to embrace the unknown, and a building that challenges the status quo is emotional, often triggering apprehension, mistrust, anxiety, and fear. Hesitancy is common, as there will always be those who want to stick with what they know and the way things have always been done, regardless of its effectiveness. Your building should not get in the way but rather should reinforce your school's mission and driving pedagogy. As you develop your pedagogy, be intentional in setting expectations for staff and help them understand how the building can support their goals.

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**"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

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"Be purposeful. Know the why behind the change, and make sure it is student-centered," says Nelson. "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." Open and engaging conversations with both your designers and your staff ensure that 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 a building renovation can be an opportunity to reevaluate procedures and redefine spaces that present new opportunities for teaching and learning. You have a year—or sometimes several years—between design and construction, so use this time wisely to



communicate the “why” behind the changes and “how” the building supports that why. Effective institutional change is a matter of balancing perspective and expectation. Stakeholders need to feel informed about what is happening and, most importantly, to understand why something is happening.

“Change is the only constant, and this is challenging for educators,” adds Nelson. “Educational changes take time to be fully implemented and effective, so being deliberate and focused when tackling new initiatives is critical. When teachers understand ‘the why,’ they are more open to change.”

## 5. Plan and Pilot Professional Development

In this fast-paced digital age, environments that foster creativity and a variety of learning styles are now essential to meaningful learning and teaching. These new techniques and environments may be unfamiliar to staff who are unsure of how to use them within their curriculum.

Pivotal to communicating the potential of new opportunities is incorporating time for staff to experiment and learn through professional development programs. Provide time and space to ask questions, try things out, and understand how a new idea can be incorporated into their lesson plans.

Creating a “pilot learning space” can mimic the space to be provided, allowing staff to work in a prototype of the proposed spaces and technology. This is a great way to relay meaningful feedback to the design team while building familiarity that helps everyone feel comfortable with the change. Putting the extra effort into planning can ensure a high probability of success.

## Future Readiness

Navigating the new is difficult but ultimately exciting if districts put the “why” and “how” at the heart of the conversation, validating everyone’s voice through thoughtful listening and clear communication. Buildings and walls don’t need to be barriers to greater goals; instead, they need to change shape and intent to strategically support your district in facing today and foreseeing tomorrow. When your building, pedagogy, and people are synchronized, change is a catalyst for new opportunities that demonstrate that your school is listening, adapting, and ready to take on the future of education.

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