

# Education Specifications

## Teaching is Collaborative

### Support teachers working together

Supporting a variety of student learning styles changes how teachers work together. Teachers work with a number of para-educators, student teachers, and special education professionals. Counterparts may share the classroom, use the shared learning space, or work in a designated area. Further still, team teaching is another manner in which educators are approaching the student-centered model. Team teaching allows teachers to complement each other as well as offer students the opportunity to work with different teacher styles and personalities, while still promoting self-directed, and small group learning experiences.

As teachers work in teams, the relationship between learning spaces becomes even more important. For example imagine a series of smaller spaces flexibly reconfigured into a larger space. Offering the ability to open and physically join classrooms supports team teaching, self-directed learning and small group work. In addition providing shared learning space supports teachers and students engaging in long-term projects. Visibility is essential for teachers as a larger, more open space allows for the supervision of students. Transparent walls provide visual connection for student supervision while offering acoustical separation. A group of students doing contemplative learning and another doing collaborative learning can be visually connected while working separately. With flexible space, learning becomes both pervasive and visible.

How will we ensure that our students are relentlessly supported and continuously challenged?

### Learning requires a positive teaching culture

#### Foster collaboration among teachers

Not only are students expected to become strong collaborators, the teacher also becomes a key collaborator with students and colleagues in order to foster a student-centered learning environment. As the curriculum changes becomes more rigorous, involves a variety of technological tools and resources, collaboration becomes more important than ever. Interdisciplinary and project-based learning, for example, require creativity, constant iteration and critical feedback from peers. To facilitate communication, space for teachers also must extend beyond the traditional classrooms. Alternatives to working alone in an isolated space. School design must include spaces where teachers create, concentrate, prepare, and collaborate within their professional learning communities. The inhabitable space in-between, from classroom portals to corridors, is just as important to collaboration as formal spaces. And given the challenging nature of the work, teachers require ample downtime. Give them spaces to get away, relax and recharge.

How will we create environments that foster collaboration?

### Interview with a Teacher

#### 1. How should the building support a culture of collaboration between teachers?

In the school where I first taught, everyone met in the staff lounge because planning space was limited. In the second, each grade level met in a particular classroom. The building has a major impact on how teachers work together. Ultimately, promoting sustaining collaboration between teachers starts with the feeling of the space. Like a café, it should feel comfortable and familiar. Teachers should immediately recognize space for relaxing, enjoying the company of others, professionally collaborate, or just getting work done. Resources should be readily available. At the end of the day, space should be a nice place to work; therefore it should be inviting, not utilitarian. If the space feels like little care was put into it, then it won't be used.

#### 2. Beyond teacher planning spaces, are there other opportunities within the school?

Consider the typical traditional workroom that often looks and feels more like a storage room. Imagine the possibilities of a workroom reimagined into a leadership space. While it may still house the copier, paper, and typical resources, the room is transformed into a collaboration zone where resources are readily available. Because the space is open, you see what's going on, and it feels inviting and welcoming to everyone.

#### 3. Should spaces for teacher collaboration be centralized or distributed?

Proximity to the classroom is key. With a thirty-minute lunch, a lounge that requires a five-minute walk gives you only twenty minutes to relax, socialize or work. Time is a valuable resource to teachers. If a space is convenient, then it is more likely to

be used. If a space is truly special, then teachers are more inclined to use it. However at the end of the day, convenience matters most. With that said, are we losing resources if we move to a decentralized model? While spaces for smaller planning and team meetings are great, we still need a main space for larger meetings and larger group work. It is important to understand the culture and find the right balance.

#### 4. If we are visioning and really thinking big, then what might that balance look like?

Ideally, there is a large space for whole group collaboration and smaller ones for daily informal and spontaneous interaction. Google solves the problem in an interesting way. We saw some really cool spaces when we toured their Kirkland campus. There are really small spaces, almost broom closet size, for Skyping abroad. There are reading nooks, where you face another person, almost like a couch. There are lots of booths that are large enough for four to five people. Some are open; others have sliding doors with frosted glass so they can be open or private. And there are spaces for larger gathering and recreation. Providing a variety of spaces encourages people to get together and meet up for a variety of activities and outcomes.

#### 5. Are educators open to moving away from the model of “one teacher, one classroom” to a learning suite where a team of teachers own a series of spaces?

In addition to supporting all learners, adult and students, teachers who understand the value and significance of collaboration recognize the limits of only designing and configuring space in a traditional “one classroom” setting. Flexibility isn't limiting, it permits being able to arrange space in a variety of configurations. When a high degree of collaboration is necessary,

learning suites are available. If team projects require both self-directed and collaborative interactions, transparent walls are available. If a traditional lecture and test setting are necessary, then it is configured to support this activity. Overall, collaboration is essential for the adults who are responsible for the planning and teaching as well as the students who must actively engage with others in project-based learning experiences.

#### 6. What features are critical to extending flexible learning spaces a success?

Visibility. It must be easy to see out. Consider behavior management. If a student must leave the classroom to calm down, then teachers have the ability to send the student into a different learning space, deescalate, and then return. A hallway may evoke a feeling of being punished as well as put a student in an unsupervised situation. Minimizing student distractions works best if teachers can actively and safely supervise at all times. But most importantly, when students are sent out to work as group in a shared learning space, the teacher wants to be sure they are doing their work.

#### 7. In terms of sharing resources and staying connected with your teaching team, is there an ideal number of core learning spaces within a single suite?

If it is important that teachers meet on a regular basis, then eight is definitely too high. While three works, it is on the low end. Between four and six is good, but personally, I feel that five works very well. Suites may include teachers from different teams representing each of the content areas, such as language arts, social studies, science, math, and an elective. Or suites may include teachers from the same team, such as all of the language arts teachers together.