

CHAPTER



ENVISIONING INTERIOR DESIGN

FOR INFRASTRUCTURES OF LEARNING

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Use the Arts and Design as Vehicles for Positive Change!

The CIC approach fosters a climate of civility that promotes learning, positive growth and collaboration for students, staff, and the greater school community. Working with what you already have, you can generate new types of learning spaces.

Each learning space should be allowed the opportunity to be something greater than its box.

–Wyck Knox, Lead Architect,
Discovery Design Team



No lobby benches. A dire environment. Students sitting on the floor.



Benches! They drastically changed the perception of the lobby. Students sitting on new lobby benches.

Informal Learning Spaces

“Informal Learning” is the highly valuable and spontaneous process of learning that is an unplanned and unscripted exchange of ideas, experiences, and knowledge between students, staff, and the community. Informal learning occurs in lobbies, hallways, cafeterias, offices, conference rooms, and beyond. Some experts believe up to 70% more learning takes place in “Informal Learning” environments than “Formal Learning” environments like classrooms, libraries, media labs, etc. Informal learning promotes skills in communication, collaboration, risk taking, creative (expressive) thinking, and it sparks curiosity, play, innovation, and relationship-building. Everyone is both a learner and teacher. Today’s students—more than ever in a post-COVID world—need authentic learning opportunities to connect with their peers, staff, and communities for a better tomorrow.



Simply creating a space for positive social interaction: Students sitting in the redesigned lobby.



Students in their new welcoming lobby.

“Remarkable things can happen when we come together in small groups.”

—Henry Hemming

Designing “Integrated Cross-Generational Learning Environments” builds a culture of collaboration. It is increasingly understood that common spaces have valuable educational opportunities. An example of CIC’s community “Informal Learning Space” design took place in one high school’s main lobby by adding comfortable seating and an art display system. These changes and additional design improvements had an instant positive impact. Students, staff, and community members were now provided an environment which supported natural social interactions. It was exciting to witness senior citizens sitting and interacting with high school students during intermissions of musicals, school functions, and other community events. The lobby was transformed into a comfortable multipurpose space that became a place to exchange thoughts and ideas while encouraging informal cross generational interactions.

How do you create and design “Informal Learning” spaces? It is important to be open minded and flexible when brainstorming potential spaces. Recognize that your school may have opportunities which have not been developed. Assess underutilized interior spaces and areas throughout your campus. Consider the life cycle of the school. How might your school adapt and change as students and teachers adapt and change? How will the informal learning spaces integrate with the community? Will your redesign be multipurpose, flexible, and adaptable to support a multi-generational community?

**USE THE ARTS
AND DESIGN
AS VEHICLES
FOR POSITIVE
CHANGE!**

Lobbies and Common Areas

As a reminder, when developing your makeover projects, it's necessary to comply with building codes. Every school has a facilities director/manager who is a great resource and can help navigate your team's Game Plan. It's important to be creative and flexible when working with codes and any restrictions that may develop. Your initial design may need revisions to comply. An example of a design revision in order to comply with fire codes was a CIC guidance lobby and hallway makeover. The initial plan called for reclaimed wood wainscot (wall paneling) to be installed. The facilities manager checked with the local Fire Department and was informed that there were too many flammable materials in the initial design. The CIC team revised their interior design plan to meet code. Less wood (flammable material) was used along with faux finishing the cinder block walls to achieve the wood grain effect desired.

In addition to the wainscot, an “information management” system was created. Brightly painted bulletin boards for each grade level were installed. Leftover paints were used to create “Pour” paintings and included in the makeover. The stark hallway was transformed into a welcoming, vibrant, engaging space.



Students creating a “Pour Painting” with



Pour Painting installed on lobby wall.



Faux finishes and wainscot transform a generic white hallway.

Interior Signage

“Wayfinding” is navigating and finding one’s way to locations, through buildings, and outdoor spaces. Knowing where to go and how to move from place to place is of utmost importance. There are elements in your branding and color palette that can readily be integrated in your signage and wayfinding. Remember signage needs to be consistent with and support your branding. Building upon your branding and incorporating it into your interior signage adds great value to once generic hallways. Find a balance between messaging and creativity in your signage. Wayfinding signage doesn’t have to be restrictive in its design. This is a design opportunity to promote your branding, mission and values. Be aware that “overusing your branding” will hinder the wayfinding impact by blurring the message and directions. It is also a poor use of design. Signage should be sharp, welcoming, and easily readable.



Mosaic signage made from left over linoleum floor tiles.

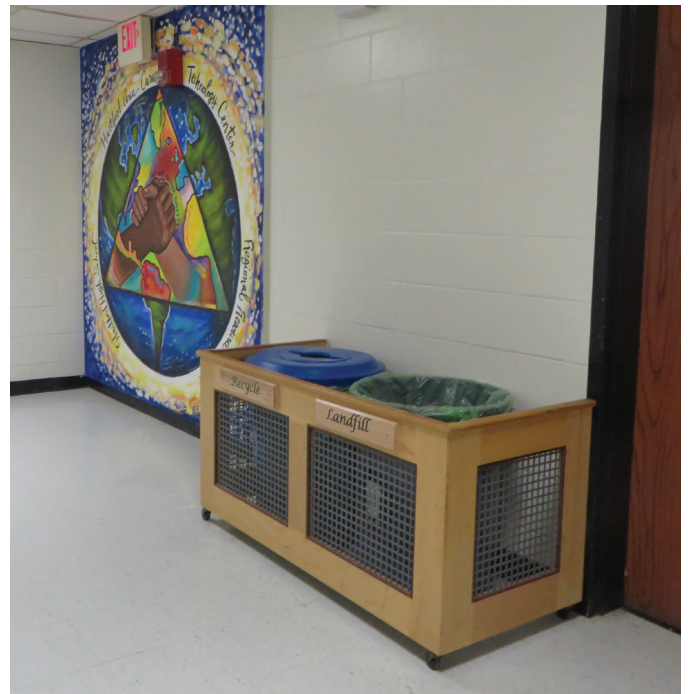
Furniture

Furniture is a key element in your school's interior design of classrooms and informal spaces. Tables, seating, technology, etc., need to adapt to ever changing demands of instruction and learning. Well planned furniture will support differentiated learning. Having the ability to reconfigure "learning spaces" will accommodate a variety of learning and teaching styles. Maintaining flexibility that allows seamless transitions between lessons, project work, lectures, and discussions will yield positive opportunities for classroom performance and social behavior. Arrangements provide freedom to experiment, move easily for cleaning and multiple uses. Being adaptable and flexible in your approach is critical in creating active learning spaces.

Furniture design and affordability evolve as does technology. Do your research and discover what products will meet your needs and budget. Integrating a variety of furniture styles may yield positive outcomes. A mixed use of high cafe tables and chairs along with sectional furniture, benches and tables of different heights can transform a lobby into an interactive "informal learning" environment. Furniture that includes your expanded color palette and branding will visually connect the spaces throughout your school and campus. Reconfiguring drab common areas and incorporating flexible and comfortable furniture dramatically changes interior spaces, behaviors, and the ethos of the school.



High top tables and chairs create a warm environment in a school's lobby.



Trash bin and screen covers using reclaimed wood.



A stairwell splash using school's branding and logo.



Displaying artwork on stairwell wall using CIC display molding.



A student installing an exhibit.

Walls and Hallways

Make walls and hallways come alive!!

A vast number of schools' real estate is located in hallways and passageways. Their initial purpose is to provide access throughout the school. How can walls and hallways become "informal learning" opportunities?

Generic white walls transformed with color accents can make a huge impact. The challenge is to design walls that become alive and interactive. Inspirational words and quotations, use of color, photographs, "information management" systems, and display systems, are tools you can use to transform your interior spaces. In addition to improving your school climate, students and passers-by in hallways will have an opportunity to absorb and reflect. Do not overdo it. Use colors wisely. Have a theme and plan of consistency. Use highlighted colors sparingly, thoughtfully, and tastefully. Understanding "breathing room" is important when collectively



Local photographer's work becomes a permanent collection in a school's library.

designing halls, walls, and floors. Less is more. Stay away from design that is too busy or overstimulating. Maintain the design principles of balance, unity, and harmony. Give students & passers-by in hallways an opportunity to absorb and reflect through comfortable messages that are positive in nature.

A cost-effective way to enliven and engage your stakeholders is to install effective and flexible display systems. Student work shown in high traffic areas creates a stronger bond and appreciation throughout the school. Having the opportunity to showcase rotating exhibits is also a great way to connect your school and community. One high school that completed a high priority makeover project installed a display system in their main lobby. This improvement allowed them to exhibit a well-known local photographer's works. The synergy that was generated from the historic black and white photographs was palpable. The reactions and connections to the works displayed supported the goals of the makeover project. Since that installation took place, several other local artists have exhibited their works in this space. The ongoing outreach with the community continues to reinforce the positive relationships with the school.

Floors

Flooring is more surface area to use when expanding your logo, branding and elements of design. As previously noted, the CIC helped redesign a main lobby at a high school by developing an interesting mosaic design, introducing an expanded color palette, while adhering to some of the traditional designs of the school.

Bathrooms and Water Fountains

Often overlooked on schools' campuses are their bathroom facilities. In the “business world” water fountains and break rooms are areas where people congregate, collaborate, and exchange ideas. The same holds true for school campuses. Take advantage of these often-overlooked pieces of real estate and transform them into vibrant and functional “informal learning” spaces.

At the same time, bathrooms and water fountains can be trouble spots, challenging areas to monitor, and often regarded as places for problems waiting to happen. Address these concerns by refocusing efforts to transform these necessary places into areas that are welcoming, positive, bright, and safe.

By designing cost effective accents, signage, upgrading countertops, and general facilities, you will bring these spaces out of the “shadows” of the school. These areas are smaller in scale, are used on a regular basis by all of the school’s stakeholders.



Splash of color! Linoleum tile outside classroom door using school branding.

Linoleum is a relatively inexpensive product that can be used in creative and interesting ways to highlight and design hallways and lobbies. Linoleum can also be incorporated in signage. One school included several colored linoleum tiles from their expanded palette as accents in front classroom doorways. These small “splashes of color” added life to the once generic hallways. It also gave each classroom/department the opportunity to develop their own identity within the larger color palette, thus maintaining a consistency of design.



Reason to Smile! Student in Action!



An aesthetically pleasing, functional, and fun bench made from reclaimed wood and metal.

Mixed Media

From a design perspective, it is always fun and interesting to take a mixed media approach. Using different elements brings depth, interest, and engagement into workspaces. Metal, wood, ceramic, are all affordable and readily available to help create items that will speak to the viewer. We have been involved with several projects using reclaimed materials to build functional furniture that works well and fits in thoughtfully within its surroundings.

LIGHTING: A Bright Outlook

It's important to consider light and how it interacts with surroundings and environment. Take advantage of the natural light and make sure not to block or inhibit its direct impact on the space. Light adds warmth and brightness to the space. Take advantage of the well-documented health and cognitive benefits of natural light. Be cognizant of Seasonal Affect Disorder (SAD) in children and adults. Understand how light in certain areas affects those in proximity. It is important to be aware of these issues in order to create an atmosphere that is relaxed, comforting, balanced, and calming.

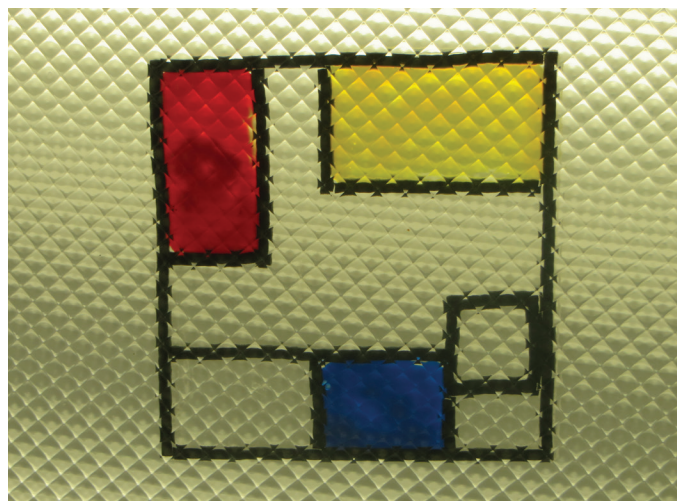
There are also creative ways to enhance the generic non-descript lighting sources that many schools have been using for years. Small “plexi renderings” can be made using branding colors and placed strategically throughout the complex with lighting fixtures. These small transparent pieces of plexi, will allow

“Light creates more than just visual effects (image, shape, intensity, perception, contrast, etc. It also has biological and psychological effects that can impact the health and wellbeing of humans.”

—Kaplan and Kaplan

the light to shine unrestricted, while illuminating the branding colors. These accents will subtly reinforce one's branding colors while weaving design consistency throughout the facility.

Natural light through windows can also provide a great backdrop. These often-ignored spaces can be turned into exciting and interesting areas for display. The CIC facilitated such a use of interior space in a school stairwell. We commissioned a professional sculptor (who happened to be an alum) to create a public art installation. The reclaimed wood sculpture transformed the space with a series of engaging penguins learning to climb, sky dive, and grow.



A creative accent of color. Plexiglass rendering for florescent ceiling light.

Be sure to use natural lit areas in positive ways, don't abuse it. We observed one school that applied their enlarged school logo (9-foot diameter), over a prominent architectural window. The intent was good. The result was dismal. The window is now a distraction rather than being a strong architectural element on its own, no longer allowing natural light into the common space.



Commissioned "Penguin" sculpture by "Individuals Collective" Boston, MA.

RESEARCH INDICATES THAT LIGHTING IN SCHOOLS AFFECTS STUDENT PERFORMANCE, ENGAGEMENT, AND MOOD.

The CIC facilitated a lighting project in a high school auditorium. The entrance was tight and dark. The school used an ineffective, dingy drop light to illuminate the space. The CIC collaborated with two local artisans to design and fabricate a welcoming light box. The costing was manageable as the resources used were minimal, and some of the labor required was donated as in-kind work. This improvement is both visually interesting and fun, while providing the required lighting for the space.

Research indicates that lighting in schools affects student performance, engagement, and mood. Task-appropriate lighting can have a positive impact in the classroom. School lighting upgrades can favorably affect budgets too. Upgrading school light fixtures and adding controls can significantly reduce energy costs. Everyone wins when lighting solutions not only help create an optimized learning environment but also reduce energy use, lower maintenance costs, and comply with codes and budgets.

