

# SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

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## What the future holds for school design

• *Industry will lead a transition toward more technology-driven, team-oriented spaces*

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If you are at all like me, you know of a lot of people for whom high school was a defining event in their lives.

People vividly remember their high school experiences and the relationships they built. People often remember a particularly inspirational teacher they had or a course that changed them, but most often they remember the social aspects of high school, the blossoming of new emotions and the good times they had.

Schools have always played an important socialization function in our society. They teach students how to deal with success and adversity, how to work alone and in groups, and encourage the development of a work ethic. Increasingly, schools are also being asked to help students develop a moral compass by which to navigate the decisions in their lives. This teaching starts at the kindergarten level and continues throughout the K-12 educational experience.

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## Adapting to a ‘flat world’

This social component of the educational process is a consequence of the coming together of students and teachers in the school environment. It is not easily replicated outside that environment, and even increasingly sophisticated technology that allows virtually instant electronic communication does not replace the face-to-face interaction and social development that occurs in school.

Schools are also an increasingly important community asset. They often serve as community center, athletic venue, recreation center, meeting hall, and increasingly provide space for everything from entertainment activities



Photo by Larry Conboy

Students work together in a meeting space at West Valley High School in Spokane. Future schools will require more environments where teams can collaborate like they do in the working world.

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to religious services. These activities are also socializing functions in that they build community by bringing people with common interests together.

In the future, schools are likely to continue to provide these vital socialization functions as a key contribution. Additionally, schools will be adapting to teach core academic and specialty subjects in new ways. Our new “flat world” is demanding more skills in science and mathematics, and American schools will need to improve their performance in turning out students that meet these needs.

In the future, industry will play an increasingly important role in developing these skills. Today ExxonMobil supports math and science teaching even at the elementary school level. They have also developed academies to help develop math and science teachers.

In the future, partnerships between educators and business will increase simply to help meet workforce demands. Schools will also need to help American students understand their place in the world and the level of competition they will face from up-and-coming societies such as India and China. Only by understanding that the world has changed will students and hence Americans be able to continue successful competition in the global economy.

## **Social spaces**

What will these forces mean for the buildings that house education?

First, the socialization function of schools will continue to require that students come together with teachers and their community to learn how to become socially responsible members of our democratic society.

This means that schools will need to increasingly provide spaces for social interaction as well as those required for more traditional academic pursuits. Spaces that help students come together and collaborate, be creative and interact will be very important.

For the broader community, schools will also need to provide spaces that invite the community to become part of the school. Permanent spaces for organizations that use the school, and spaces that can serve double duty as learning spaces and community spaces will become the norm.

## **Industry partners**

What will truly transform schools of the future though are the spaces that are created for the business and industry partners in the educational process.

For students to be interested in learning it must be relevant. Relevance is achieved by allowing students to connect what they learn with real-world situations that require the knowledge they have developed.

In the future, schools will provide these real-world situations by teaming with industry to provide opportunities for learning both in the classroom and on the job site.

In the classroom this will require the creation of environments in which teams can thrive. Individual work stations, group areas, conference rooms, collaboration lounges and technology accessible in all locations will be standard. These will simulate the environments of many office-related industries from software to advertising.

Beyond this, spaces will need to be adaptable to technical environments including machine shops, avionics labs, electronics labs, construction and similar technologies that simulate real-world situations. These will be developed in conjunction with industry partners who will help advise schools on how best to simulate the relevant environments students are likely to experience.

## **Skills for success**

This transformation will not shut out development of classic learning or the appreciation of literature and the arts. Rather they will encourage this learning as students learn that the thinking skills these pursuits sharpen are vital to their success.

The ability to read for meaning, speak and write clearly, and have a broad foundation of knowledge and history will remain highly sought-after skills by employers for the foreseeable future.

The socialization, community, academic and business partnership aspects of schools of the future are likely to transform schools as we know them into being more of a work/community/educational environment. Schools will likely have businesses and community facilities such as libraries, clinics and gathering venues integrated into them. Students will not have to go as far to get relevant real-world experience, and industry partners will be closer to the students they are helping to educate.

Schools of the future have the potential to remake the model of education in America in a way that improves success for both students and our communities.

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