Environments are a critical factor to determine and enable student success in schools today – and design is the key component. Design not only influences the physical set-up of the school, but also has the ability to create the mood, enhance learning potential, foster productivity and contribute to the overall success of the students.

So, what if we approach design differently? What if we approach it as a collaboration, a partnership between designers, educators and students, rather than a prescribed, universal formula that doesn’t take the unique qualities of the school, community and student population into account?

Many schools, facilities and designers currently take this approach and are having phenomenal success.

Designing for a sense of community

Each student is a product of their community. If they do not learn in a community. If they do not learn in a community, they can’t develop a connection and continued support,” said Molly Smith AICP RFP, school facilities planner, speaker and author.*

It is crucial to understand students’ needs at each stage of their education, and ensure that the school’s design and environment promote student success.

When students, educators and the community are fully engaged in the design process, everyone enjoys a sense of ownership and pride with the final result. Ultimately, if the kids, teachers and administrators are happy, everyone is happy.

Small-town residents foster success in students through future-focused education

That’s exactly what is happening at Mishicot Schools in central Wisconsin. These small-town residents are highly ambitious when it comes to education. They wanted the look of their school buildings to reflect their goals: to foster creative thinking and prepare students for careers in a global economy.

Carmen Cowan, an interior designer at Bray Architects, selected Patcraft patterns to fit perfectly into the chief goals of the renovation: transforming aesthetics while making the space more practical. "As students mature, there tends to be less connectedness, which makes it critical to use the education space to create a sense of community, a personal connection and continued support," said Molly Smith AICP RFP, school facilities planner, speaker and author.*

It is crucial to understand students’ needs at each stage of their education, and ensure that the school’s design and environment promote student success.

Many of the new spaces lend themselves to the school’s STEM initiatives. Rooms include makerspaces at the elementary level and STEM and FAB (fabrication) labs for middle and high school students. Students and staff alike are proud of the physical spaces but, more importantly, their classrooms allow them to learn and to transfer skills to life beyond the school.

Designing for collaboration and innovation

Innovation is hard to measure. It looks different to every community and is a little unpredictable. Designers are often challenged to create a facility that leverages innovation and technology so that the building becomes a teaching tool itself. They want to create the right balance, so innovation and creativity are not capped by the physical environment.

Eve Jennings, associate partner at kR Architecture, explains that students grow up with a set of skills that will apply to some professions we haven’t envisioned yet. Both hands-on and technology-driven skills must be there. Every student should have a toolkit to use each day, and the ability and knowledge to choose the ideal tool.

Where will they learn these skills if not in our community schools?

Designing spaces to inspire creativity

Pine Street Elementary embraced that philosophy with their updated school design. Rhea Davis, associate at architecture firm Smallwood, Reynolds, Stewart, Stewart and Associates, Inc., designed a teaching tool that was innovative and inspirational to truly excite the kids about learning.

Pine Street’s new campus features collaborative spaces for teamwork-oriented, interactive learning and colorful wayfinding features to guide students between the school’s four wings. Each wing has a distinct color—purple, green, red and orange—that identifies its educational focus. The school selected saturated colors to inspire kids about learning. Classroom walls may be pulled back to open up spaces where students can read, work in groups, brainstorm or discuss lessons. Both energy-efficient LED lighting and natural light sources illuminate interior spaces. Drainpipes flow into “rain gardens” in courtyards where students learn how water is collected and preserved.

When the school opened and welcomed the community for the first time, you could see all the kids running around to explore all the different spaces. They were inspired and thrilled about the possibilities of their new learning environment. This innovative design is truly for the students.

*Patcraft spoke with industry thought leaders at AIALE and these are some of their perspectives.

Kieren Corcoran is Director of Performance Markers for Patcraft.

Photography by Kristin Faye Photography

Photography by Robbins Photography Inc.

Design Differently:
Schools of the future help enhance learning and increase student success

By Kieren Corcoran

Pine Street Elementary, a Patcraft School of the Future

Pine Street Elementary provides collaborative spaces for teamwork

Pine Street of the Future, Mishicot School System

Photography by Kristin Faye Photography

Photography by Robbins Photography Inc.