

If You Had a Blank Canvas to Design Your Ideal School, What Would You Paint?

By Kieren Corcoran



Congressional School, a Patcraft School of the Future

Schools are challenged to fill many important roles today. They must provide stimulating education to promote critical thinking, creativity and measurable academic success. They must create warm, welcoming environments that are safe and sustainable. They must balance students' physical and emotional wellness while inspiring them to reach their goals. All within strict budgets and timelines.

Do school administrators, teachers and facilities managers ever get the chance to ask themselves: *What will the schools of the future look and feel like...if I could design them without any limits?*

Four Key Elements of School Design

What goes into a transformative educational design? We asked a group of decision makers for their thoughts, including designers, an architect, a safety expert and a facilities manager.

Their vision incorporates these four elements:

- Community
- Environment
- Innovation
- Wellness

Community

School design must involve both the internal (students, faculty, parents) and external (district, municipality, taxpayers) communities. The school is part of its community, and also serves as its students' own mini-community: it is another home, a welcoming place where they forge peer networks and nurture their dreams. Students should feel connected to their school the moment they walk through the doors—it is their community.

Congressional School's administration redesigned its 60-year-old building to embrace community: a wall emblazoned with words from their mission statement, new carpet customized with school colors to inspire collaborative learning. "I see students spilling out the classroom into the hallways, sitting down on the floor and working together," says Chris Pryor, Assistant Head for Advancement.

Environment

A successful school design incorporates elements of sustainability, preserving and protecting the environment while giving students the tools to be productive. That may mean energy-saving lighting, sensible waste management or flooring that can be cleaned with water, not harmful chemicals. Sustainability is the ideal for today's schools, because we must protect the environment for our students' future.

In 2016, Portsmouth Public Schools replaced replaced vinyl composite tile, which had to be regularly

stripped with chemicals and waxed, with new resilient in its school buildings. Now, says Tom Marsh, the system's facilities manager, crews save time, energy and the environment with flooring that's cleaned only with a dust mop and damp mop—and water. What can they spend this time on instead?

Innovation

Technology is rapidly changing, and schools must keep up. This requires investment, upgrades, careful planning and flexible educational spaces – including wayfinding elements and creative use of color to guide learning without the need for physical dividers. Innovative school spaces are teaching tools.

Mishicot Schools created new designs that encompass STEM initiatives, including its FAB Lab, where high school students design and fabricate innovative products. They installed new flooring with wayfinding colors and letters that first graders recognize and use to expand their vocabularies, says Becky Spengler, Director of Special Education and Pupil Services..

Wellness

Students need a safe, healthy and welcoming school. Their surroundings must be comfortable, inviting and



Patcraft School of the Future, Mishicot School System

clean, but also truly protective of their well-being every single day. Lighting, calming or uplifting colorways, open classrooms and soft, inviting flooring can make students feel safe, welcome, protected and inspired. Wellness in our built environment supports students' physical, emotional and mental health.

Santos Manuel Student Union is the heart of California State University, the place where students hang out, collaborate, study and dream.

According to Facilities Director Anthony Roberson, the student union's new carpet tile and resilient, which includes the university's signature blue, not only makes its students feel at home, but proud.

Kieren Corcoran is Director of Performance Markets for Patcraft. He has a wide range of experience in the flooring industry including marketing, sales management, strategic development and financial analysis.



Photography by Kristin Faye Photography

Portsmouth Public Schools system was named a Patcraft School of the Future



Photography by Kristin Faye Photography

Santos Manuel Student Union, the heart of Patcraft's School of the Future California State University, San Bernardino