

# Life **Learn**

SUMMER 2015

**I.J. Holton Intermediate School**

MOST PERSISTENT AND URGENT QUESTION IS: "WHAT ARE YOU DOING FOR OTHERS?"



**The Open School Design:  
Recognizing the New Normal**

**Capital Funding Approaches  
for Minnesota**

**Associate Partners Announced**

**ATS&R**  
PLANNERS / ARCHITECTS / ENGINEERS

# THE OPEN SCHOOL DESIGN: RECOGNIZING THE NEW NORMAL

**Open concepts in school design are here to stay, Tom Tapper, Ed.D., ATS&R Senior Education Planner**



**Today's classrooms offer openness and flexibility while providing areas for break-out, collaboration, sharing and hands-on learning.**

Today, realtors and property managers are often asked by prospective investors and buyers to show them properties that are open and filled with natural light; spaces that are void of permanent walls and other structures that might get in the way of creating spaces uniquely suited to an array of possible uses. And the reason for this change in design concept is rather simple, people want the opportunity to create their own space. They understand that what might be a good 'fit' between space and utilization today may not be a good fit between space and utilization tomorrow.

Both the 'what' we do in the space and 'how' we do it will inevitably change and if the original design in space lacks flexibility, the ability to utilize the space effectively and efficiently diminishes. In fact, the probability that the space becomes obsolete increases as does the costs of needing to design and construct new; especially when compared to the simple modification of 'open' spaces as utilization changes.

This is certainly the case in school design as well. Increasingly, school leaders and educational design specialists are planning spaces that will accommodate today's instructional approaches to the teaching/learning process, but also have the capability to 'morph' into something totally different as teaching methodologies change. Developing an understanding of the need for a different school design is not always an easy task because of an all too often refrain, been there done that.

There is little question that a vast majority of school buildings constructed prior to the 60's were designs modeled after the designs of industrial age factories. Classrooms were lined up along hallways. Windows were large (a good thing) and walls were made out of concrete blocks separating one room from another (a not so good thing). Students all sat in rows of desks and teachers stood before them as the 'dispensers' of information. This

'stand and deliver' approach to teaching was the standard method of instruction for the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Then in the 60's and early 70's, a new concept in school design emerged; the 'open' classroom. The open classroom was designed to support a 'new' approach to the teaching/learning process; an approach that provided greater autonomy for student learning. It was, after all, the 60's and everything was open!

Classrooms were opened into central areas of the building; creating areas where students could access a resource center that was filled with books and printed materials. Learning was thought to be a more 'open' activity and building designs encouraged personal pursuit of subjects that were of special interest to students.

The problem with this emerging design was that the teaching/learning process was changing and that new approaches to instruction actually worked. Temporary and/or artificial barriers (such as book shelves, coat racks and walls) were put into place to 'recreate' the traditional classroom with four walls. So, after a brief period of open concept schools, school planners and designers returned to more traditional design concepts.

Today and moving forward, school design is once again morphing towards open spaces. Classroom designs offer flexibility and accommodate the myriad of changes that are taking place in the teaching/learning process of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Open flexible spaces and well-lit spaces with multi-purpose learning areas and comfortable, mobile furnishings are the new normal that's here to stay. And here are three reasons why.

Since the early 70's, extensive research has been conducted on 'how' people learn. The net result is that everyone has their own unique learning style. Intelligence

has been recognized to be more than just a singular measure of verbal and logical competence. Social intelligence, emotional intelligence, spatial intelligence and musical intelligence have been 'discovered' to be important attributes we all possess; attributes that influence how we learn. This better understanding of how the brain works has led to significant changes in the teaching/learning process.

For example, differentiated instruction has become the classroom norm rather than the exception. And recognizing that we learn best through our own intelligence 'strong suit' has led to instructional practices such as 'project-based learning' and 'experiential learning.' In addition, new school scheduling practices such as the lengthening of the typical class period and 'flipping' classrooms make the old 'stand and deliver' approach to instruction obsolete. To accommodate these changes in instruction, classroom designs are more open, unencumbered by immovable walls, counters and cabinets and feature demountable walls and moveable furniture. This is the new norm.

Gone are the days when there was a bookshelf in the back of the classroom that was filled with the latest edition of

the Encyclopedia Britannica. In its place are lap tops with the capacity to bring virtually any information to the user when needed. Walls that were lined with 'chalk boards' or the more modern 'white boards' have been replaced with interactive Smart Boards/monitors that allow students/teachers to interact directly with their subject matter and reach out into the world.

There is no going back. Technology is here to stay. It will continue to evolve and become even more enmeshed within the teaching/learning process. This is the new norm and more open and flexible classroom designs support it.

And finally, beginning in the last decade, consensus has evolved around the identification of a new set of skills that will require mastery by all students for them to

be successful in life. Reading, writing and arithmetic will continue to be essential competencies with a mastery of skills in 'communication,' 'collaboration,' 'creativity,' and 'consumerism.' Noted educational futurist Don Tapscott suggests that educational instruction will be characterized as being customized, individualized, delivered asynchronously, decentralized, small, self-directed, virtual and empowering. And the open nature of school design will be in the best position to accommodate such changes.

In other words, open concepts in school design, like the open concepts in our homes and businesses, will be the new norm. It's here to stay.



## DID YOU KNOW?

### CAPITAL FUNDING APPROACHES FOR MINNESOTA

Today school districts are in search of revenue to upgrade, update, and expand their facilities. There are numerous funding mechanisms in place for work to begin! Your financial advisor and architect can provide direction for funding your capital projects for the long-term. Here are a few examples:

- **Building Bonds:** To issue general obligation bonds through voter approval. This can be used for capital expenses of equipment, facilities, and other supporting expenses.
- **Operating Referendums:** In addition to traditional operating costs, this can be used to finance capital projects including technology, computers, and deferred maintenance.
- **Capital Project Levy:** To establish a capital project account funded by an annual tax levy. This is an annual stream of revenue versus a one-time amount, and is frequently used for funding technology.
- **Alternative Facilities Bond and Levy:** To fund maintenance/replacement projects. Twenty-five districts (with an average building age of 35+ years with 1,850,000+ total square feet) qualify for the "complete" program. Remaining districts may participate in a limited program with maximum funding limits.
- **QZABs:** Purchasers receive federal income tax credits for these bonds. Depending on the structure and market, the district pays little or no interest. A district must qualify to utilize this funding mechanism.
- **Capital Facilities Bonds:** To issue general obligation bonds without voter approval, but without additional levy authority or state aid. It enables a district to finance certain facility improvements and repairs.

These are just a few of the funding types you can utilize for upcoming projects. For more information and detail, your financial advisor and architect are excellent resources for finding the right funding for the right projects.



8501 Golden Valley Road, Suite 300  
Minneapolis, MN 55427  
T 763.545.3731 | F 763.525.3289  
www.atsr.com | information@atsr.com

To opt out of receiving LifeLearn or to add a recipient, please e-mail information@atsr.com.

## CONGRATS TO OUR NEW ASSOCIATE PARTNERS



Nick Achina, PE



Eric Anderson, Assoc. AIA



Nancy LaBissoniere, AIA

ATS&R announces the promotions of Nick Achina, Eric Anderson, Nancy LaBissoniere, Peter Lacey, Blayne Parkos and Kara Rise to associate partners. These dedicated members of the firm earned these promotions based on professional achievements, leadership and commitment to exceptional client service.

ATS&R President Paul Erickson states, "I am delighted to announce the promotions of Nick, Eric, Nancy, Peter, Blayne and Kara. Their success is a direct result of their commitment to our firm and to our clients. In addition to demonstrating their leadership and value, their professional advancement will help to strengthen our firm's capabilities and services and ensure we continue to deliver forward thinking design solutions through their relevant experience and expertise."



Peter Lacey, LEED™AP



Blayne Parkos, PE/ LEED™AP BD+C



Kara Rise, LEED™AP