

BEYOND DESIGN

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**'GRAND PRIZE' AWARD
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Photography: Corey Gaffer Photography,
Minneapolis, MN

FROM LOCKER ROOM TO 'THE LOFT' - A RADICAL RENOVATION MINNETONKA HIGH SCHOOL, MINNESOTA

Minnetonka High School (MHS) delivers comprehensive curricular excellence to 9-12th graders. It all began with a simple locker replacement project in underutilized athletic locker rooms. As the design team evaluated the space, a question was asked, 'What can we do here to radically impact learning?' MHS was also looking for space to support their expanding academic offerings, so this turned into an opportunity to create an innovative learning environment.

The design team brainstormed and shared experiences to arrive at a space program and concept. Administrators toured innovative schools and universities across the country; best practices were shared; student workshops were held for feedback on successful renovations. Like so many schools, MHS already has many same-sized classrooms along corridors in a 'cells and bells' format. The 'one-size-fits-all' building style no longer fits educational models for student-centered learning. MHS needed a variety of learning spaces to support students' needs.

Major renovation transformed the locker rooms into 'future-ready' learning space. The only existing elements that remained were four perimeter walls and two staircases. A large opening was created in the structural bearing wall that split the two locker rooms. The floor was leveled where different floors existed (e.g., shower floors and raised office areas). The locker rooms were isolated on an inaccessible route, so an elevator was added.

The space became known as 'The Loft'. It was fitting, being on the upper floor, referencing its industrial locker room past, and its transformation into a home for learning. The term also conveyed nautical ties, important with its proximity to Lake Minnetonka. Spaces were given signatures, named for bays on the lake.

Instead of expanding or building new, underutilized existing space was captured. New windows were cut-in to bring in natural light – essential for learning and environmental connections. Energy efficient lighting systems with occupancy sensors were designed. Mechanical systems were upgraded for efficiency and fresh air. Water-efficient plumbing fixtures were installed. Sound absorptive ceilings and walls-to-deck reduce sound transmission.

At 'The Loft', students are given much choice over their environment; they can select where to work and have control over sound and lighting levels. A variety of furniture settings ensures comfort for students. A kitchenette is available for student use. 'The Loft' can be security-zoned from the remainder of the school. Cameras are utilized for additional supervision.

The objective was to design a learning environment with spaces to enhance each student's learning experience. Varied-sized rooms, niches, and open space support the many different activities that occur in this unique environment. Special design features include:

- Cave spaces for distraction-free quiet study or individual reflection;
- Spaces where students can be 'alone together' as they work independently next to their peers, generating a 'buzz' like a coffee shop;
- Collaborative spaces with ubiquitous technology for students to work with their peers;
- Makerspace to spread-out projects and utilize whiteboards;
- Spaces where teachers conduct lessons and then transform the space into a collaborative team environment with flexible furniture and several presentation niches;
- Space beyond the classroom for student work, with teacher oversight;
- Large flexible space to accommodate the equivalent of two classes.



MHS seized an opportunity to create a 'future-ready' learning environment. It is an uplifting and positive atmosphere for student engagement. As one student remarked, "This is a space I never want to leave!"





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'COVID-19 AS AN EDUCATION DISRUPTER'

American School & University (AS&U) Magazine / August 2020
Article by Paul W. Erickson, AIA/NCARB, ATSR Executive Officer

The pandemic is an education disrupter that could change learning for the future. The resistance to change from physical lecture-based classroom instruction 'flipped' overnight into online learning solutions. Technology has quickly taken center stage to reshape educational delivery and educator roles. School leaders rethink how to educate, what to teach, and for what to prepare students. New ways of communicating with students 'beyond four walls' sheds new light on how this disruption may redefine learning.

Prior to the pandemic, educators were reassessing what students needed to be 'future-ready'. According to a Dell Technologies report, by 2030 85% of jobs this generation of learners enter have yet to be invented. Students today are the generation raised in globalized technology; they now experience a world pandemic with personal ramifications of canceled exams, postponed sporting events, and online graduations. This resilient group engages technology as an extension of their identity, with social media as a way of life. Instant communication through 'chat' apps is normal; most students are at ease with the remote learning situation.

Students learning online at home through interactive apps and live television broadcasts use material via digital platforms augmented with face-to-face video instruction. Online learning extends into subjects like physical education with students creating 'homework' videos of their fitness activities to send to their teacher, integrating learning in videoing/editing/uploading technology into assignments.

Disrupter companies have expanded, taking advantage of 'learning anywhere-anytime' concepts in digital formats. With new deliveries, learning moves further from traditional in-person classroom settings to parallel tracks of online learning choices. Children, however, still need to attend school during the day so parents can return to work...

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