



# School of *Dreams*

Honoring the  
Future of Learning

BY DANIELLE O'GRADY,  
IIDA, TMP ARCHITECTURE  
& DR. KADEE ANSTADT, ED.D.,  
PERRYSBURG SCHOOLS

Photos by Chris Lark Photography and RT Photography





## Learning Environments

When Perrysburg Schools initiated the planning for a cutting-edge school building, we envisioned change. This community in northwest Ohio had always had a storied history of lifting up its educational establishments along with a reputation for award-winning schools. Again, district leadership chose to reach far into the future in creating its newest beacon for 21st Century Teaching and

Learning ideals. In order to do so Perrysburg Schools identified The Collaborative-TMP design team as the ideal partner in making our vision a reality.

We dreamed of a school designed to reinforce teaming; to be built utilizing dynamic, multi-purpose spaces facilitating richer interaction between students and teachers. A hub for learners to explore STEM curriculums through making and modeling, engaging in autonomous activities alongside various methods of individualized



## Learning Environments



instruction, and the opportunity to take ownership over their own educational experience. Meaningful change does not come easily; but with enough hard work the project team knew that these dreams could be realized.

We embarked on a journey to catapult the district's newest facility into the 21st Century. To answer the question on everyone's minds, "How can we make the greatest impact on the educational experience of our

students?" we asked the community and staff for input. By engaging the community, we were able to focus the scope of the construction project and define the pillars of which the new school would architecturally represent. Guiding Principles were defined as follows:

- Flexible Learning Studios allowing for "hands on" project-based learning

**MULTI-PURPOSE SPACES** housing dining, large group gathering, and presentations facilitate richer interaction between students and teachers.

- Individual and Group learning opportunities promoting collaboration
- Organized Learning Communities to encourage teaming
- Reinforce a sense of community by encouraging socialization and interaction
- Focus on the Arts by supporting their specific needs for instruction and performance
- Elevate circulation routes to encourage a "Learning happens EVERYWHERE!" mentality
- Develop professional space for all staff that reinforces the collaborative nature of "school"
- Create a strong visual image that is progressive, inviting, innovative and "full of light"
- Focus on a timeless design aesthetic that reinforces sustainability
- Encourage positive outreach to the community

We explored existing projects that exuded similar guiding principles. We toured Mentor Public Schools (a K-12 at the forefront of the blended learning model), the Lenawee Intermediate School District Center for a Sustainable Future (the first Michigan K-12 school building with LEED Platinum certification in that state), La-Z-Boy's corporate headquarters (touted for





**FLEXIBLE LEARNING STUDIOS** allow for “hands on” project-based learning.

“out-Googling Google” with regards to facility planning and design), and Steelcase University Learning Center in Grand Rapids. Each of these organizations had experimented with a cultural shift through an evolution in their facilities. It was clear that establishing strategies in “change management” were just as important as any drawing detail or product specification.

In educational design we have all experienced the “if you build it, they will come” mentality. However, we know this strategy could not be further from the truth. In fact, it is not about the building at all, but the experiences that occur inside the building. The oft sought bridge of transformation can only be built by the hands of educators one day, one lesson, one “ah-ha!” moment at a time. Metaphorically speaking, a modern “School of Dreams” abandons the walls completely; relying on technology and tools, curriculum, and community partnerships to foster the skills so desperately needed by our students. It seizes new opportunities to connect students to content through relationships built on a common quest for excellence in education.

Hull Prairie Intermediate School (HPI), as it would be named, was identified as a facility for 5th and 6th grade students only; an age group resilient to diversity, aching for autonomy, but still moldable to a guiding hand. This

would be the first time these collective classes would be together from across the district to celebrate the Jacket Way: “Be Respectful, Be Responsible, Be Ready.” As a design team we challenged ourselves to develop an interior that would expand upon our collective years of experience and recent investigations, but in a way that would be authentic and navigable.

This same sense of empathy is what led the administration to start ideating years in advance of opening day. How would we prepare teaching staff for such a radical change in environment? Professional development would have to lead the way, as it is critical to supporting best practices. Interviews were conducted of internal district staff, where attributes of open mindedness, courage, and positivity were sought from potential candidates. Positions were assigned, often adjusting areas of content and grade level in support for a long term vision of “looping” schedules and developing teams that students would be a part of for their tenure at HPI. Staff participated in a multi-day retreat aimed at cultivating connections between the staff, a Writers Workshop by Linda Rief, author of “Read, Write, Teach,” and Project Based Learning training from Dr. Jodi J. Haney of Xcite Learning. Subject and grade level teacher teams met throughout the prior school year to plan common units



of study. Three months before opening, all staff gathered again to return to exercises rooted in Team Building, the vein in which they started their journey towards transformational instruction.

The design team drafted progressive configurations of space that could help facilitate collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. A core of common spaces was developed as the “trunk” of the facility where activities of socializing, meeting, and making would be held of the highest regard. A





Multi-Purpose room housing dining, large group gathering, and presentations is the focal point. Soft seating, Parsons' tables, and cozy Inglenooks scatter the landscape. Centralized STEM Labs are the hinges of the Academic Wings where process and exploration unapologetically spill out

into circulation. Shared Collaboration Zones are comprised of Front Porches, Hearths, Enclaves, Learn Labs, and Small Group Rooms. As we were developing each space, we worked alongside faculty, who were simultaneously styling their instructional techniques intended for these specialized areas.

**CENTRALIZED STEM LABS** are the hinges of the Academic Wings where process and exploration unapologetically spill out into Shared Collaboration Zones.

We mitigated fears by thoughtfully addressing the following questions: "Where would we place writeable wall surfaces? Magnetic materials? Electrical outlets? Interactive Monitors? Which walls would be totally transparent, how would we integrate signage and careful cues of color for building identity and dividing open space?"

Failure is a word that is not typically correlated with a successful education or a successful construction project. However, we turned that notion on its head. In order to fully develop these new curricular goals we had to accept the challenges that our staff and administration faced. When faced with hardship, we hoped to teach our students to view failure as an opportunity to learn. By allowing our students to experiment, take risks, and fail multiple times before reaching a resolution; we are instilling a deep understanding





of creativity and innovation. When our staff was exploring updated curricular program options and embracing change throughout our district, we implored them to focus on these same principles. How could we expect our students to embrace the change without fully adapting ourselves?

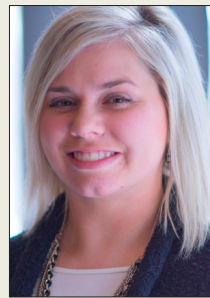
The students flourished under this mentality and we found ourselves unexpectedly learning from them in the process. Examples can be found from the fine arts suite to the outdoor learning pavilion to the STEM Labs where you will find students working out a variety of self-imposed “challenges.” A group of students were challenged to build a working Lego set using Tinkercad and 3-D Printers. After trial and error, they would eventually present their final iteration to the School Board inscribed as “V8,” an idea of their own. It took seven failures to conquer the quest, but they persevered. In another case, students began taking ownership of their independent study opportunities. They noticed a fellow student sitting alone at lunch and it sparked a presentation arguing for a week long community building project. A visit from a chaperoned leader dog inspired students to ask, “How could we make this a project?”

These catalysts encouraged our staff to issue greater autonomy to their student teams. And before you knew it, a new mindset at Perrysburg Schools radiated outward from the project address, uncontainable by any wall type.

It was not on the day the doors opened at Hull Prairie that we believed we had succeeded in our years’ long efforts to build a modern day “School of Dreams.” We began to feel an increasing sense of accomplishment with each new story or the reactions of visitors who came in expecting a traditional “school” and instead were able to visualize the shift in the teacher/student relationships. By thinking beyond the conventional constructs of what truly makes a school building a school building or a design process a design process, our project team was able to realize what we only imagined in our dreams...a place fit for the future of learning. ■

**Danielle O’Grady and Dr. Kadee Anstadt will be presenting “School of Dreams” on Wednesday, November 7 at 11:30 am during EDspaces 2018.**

**DANIELLE O’GRADY** has led the interior design efforts on many significant school projects for TMP Architecture. She holds



her National Council for Interior Design Qualification certificate, and has completed over 350 projects for 40 clients. Danielle graduated Cum Laude from Lawrence Technological University in 2009.

**DR. KADEE ANSTADT** is currently the Assistant Superintendent for Perrysburg Schools in Ohio.



Her expertise has been instrumental in implementing project-based education, blended learning curriculum in the district. She leads with 21st century educational leadership practices and an innovative approach to curriculum development.