

# Get it Together!

## Fostering Collaboration with Interior Design & Furniture

The morning bell rings, excited young learners file into the classroom, and the door closes until lunchtime. This traditional idea that a teacher is sequestered with his or her students in a classroom for hours at a time is becoming a less relevant model for many districts.

For all schools, maintaining and fostering a positive climate for learning is a core objective. In order to accomplish this goal, the spotlight should be as much on the teacher as it is on the learner. The context of the teacher's experience can be changed by encouraging teacher collaboration within our schools.

### The Home Base

Energy between people in a workplace is often accomplished with spontaneous encounters, but can also be affected with a school's interior design and furniture. Creating a dedicated "home base" for teachers with touchdown stations (wireless-friendly kiosks) and collaborative furniture allows for scheduled, deliberate mind share as well as spontaneous collaboration. A true workstation can exude a professional air. Low-tech solutions such as whiteboard paint and lounge furniture at the home

base will spur casual information exchange. The integration of technology allows teachers to not only create and edit content together, but to extend their network beyond the bricks and mortar of the school. In a high school setting particularly, the home base should be highly visible and welcoming. If it is accessible, students will be more likely to stop by with questions or requests for help.

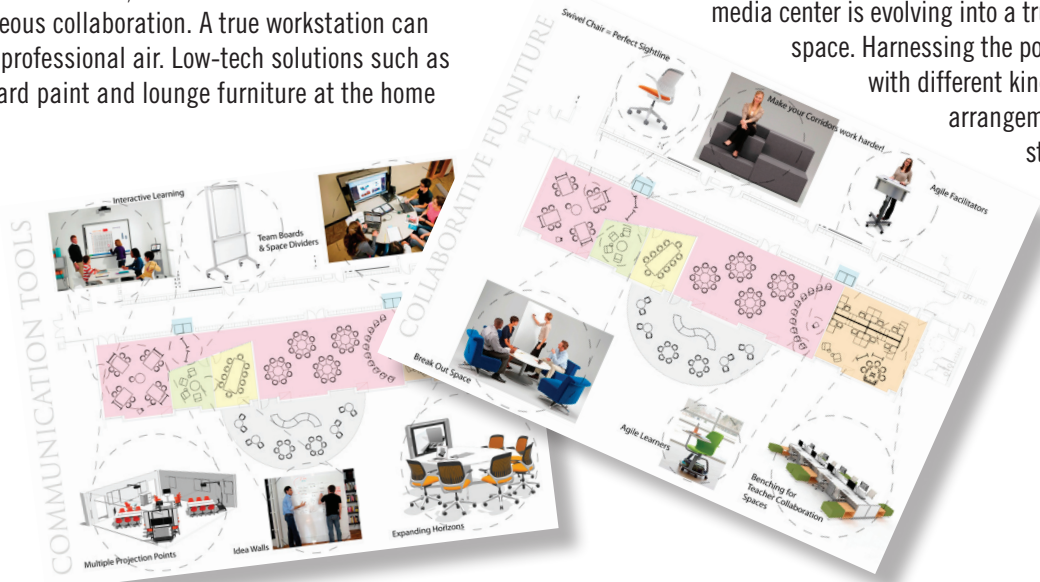
### Outside the Classroom

When class is held outside of the classroom, teachers discover opportunities for creativity with their delivery and with student activities. The consideration of under utilized existing spaces within a school can prove inspiring. The school theater, for example, offers an appropriate place for an english class to read and discuss Shakespeare, or a physics class to experiment with projectile flight. Beyond existing spaces, the creation of breakout enclaves can foster different kinds of pedagogy and encourage differentiated instruction. For example, the traditional media center is evolving into a true collaboration space. Harnessing the potential of this area with different kinds of furniture arrangements will allow for student break-out,



team teaching and group presentations/content share activities. This instruction outside of the classroom allows teachers to collaborate on lessons, which can result in subject cross-fertilization. Teaching in teams can ultimately lead to enhanced mentoring between newer and senior level teachers as well.

Considering the teacher experience outside of the rigid classroom unit allows teachers to develop relationships not only with each other, but also with students beyond their designated class. If the camaraderie that is nurtured within the traditional classroom unit can be expanded to include the entire school, the resources each teacher holds will be increased exponentially. Observing a school from a macro perspective, it is apparent that partitioning teachers limits the effectiveness of the school. Getting creative with under utilized space, incorporating dedicated teacher collaboration areas, and rethinking the functions of existing spaces can encourage teacher collaboration and therefore fulfill the age-old adage that the whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts.



TMP Architecture has offices in Bloomfield Hills and Portage. They produce a variety of projects for K-12 educational, college/university and municipal clients. Recent award-winning projects include a new LEED Gold Certified Math & Science Center for Jenks Public Schools in Oklahoma and LEED Gold Certified Martin Luther King, Jr. Senior High School in Detroit. The firm's current work includes various projects for Troy School District, Port Huron Area School District and Ferndale Public Schools.

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