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Designing the Future of Education

Columbus, OH | November 5-7, 2025

Inclusive Design: Strategies to Enhance Student Success Through Choice, Movement, and Intentional Design

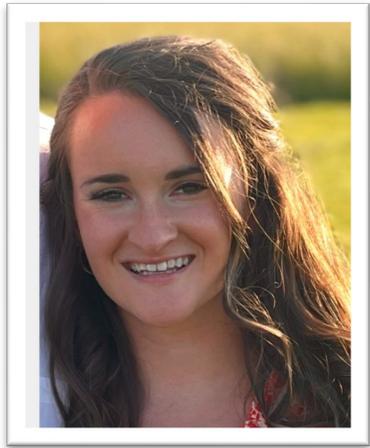
November 7, 9am-10am

THROUGH
THEIR EYES

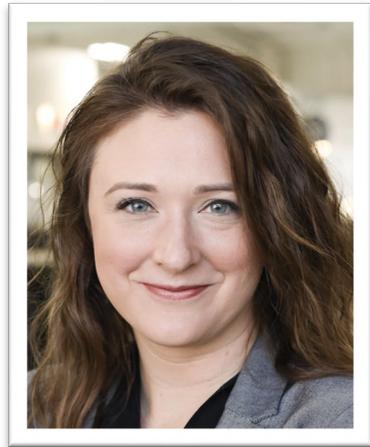


Inclusive Design: Strategies to Enhance Student Success Through Choice, Movement, and Intentional Design

Meet the Team:



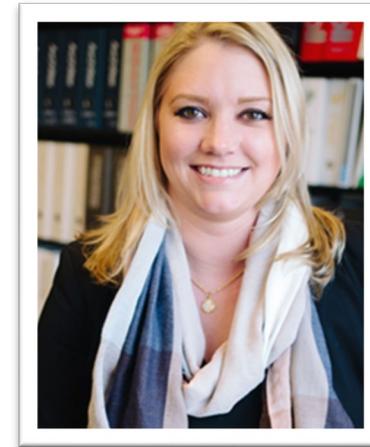
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Learning Objectives



Understanding Diverse Needs

Recognize how thoughtful classroom design can positively or negatively affect students with ADHD, sensory sensitivities, physical disabilities, and other neurodiverse conditions



Empathy Driven Design

Participants will examine architectural methods that effectively address diverse student needs focused on spatial arrangements



Dysregulation and the Learning Environment

Define dysregulation and understand its implications for classroom design, particularly the role of flexible seating in supporting emotional and physical self-regulation



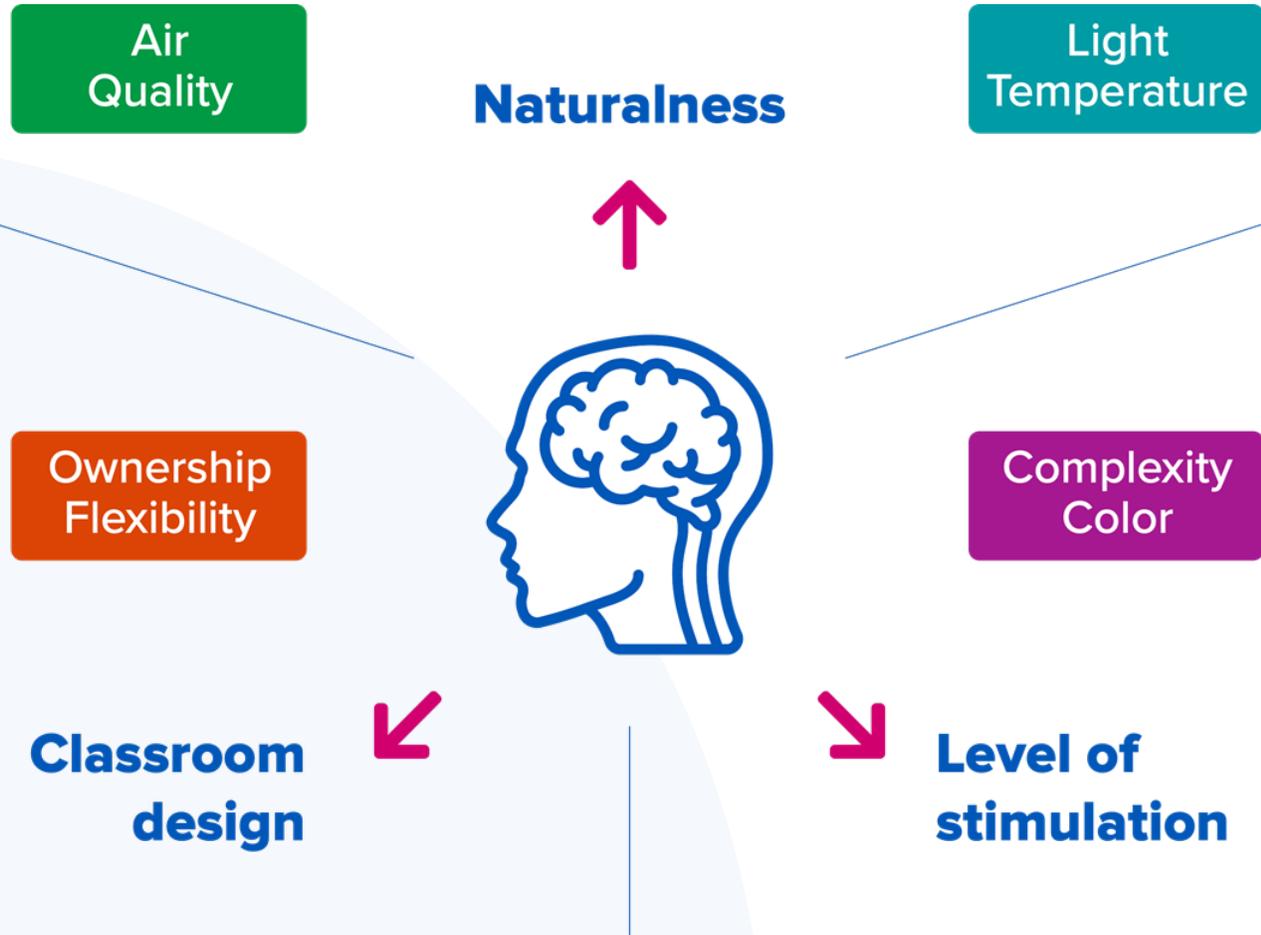
Designing for All

Identify practical, real-world design approaches that promote choice, movement, and flexibility in the learning space to create adaptable, student-centered environments that improve accessibility, collaboration, and engagement across a spectrum of learners

Classroom
Design
Student
Success



Why Design Matters



Source: the **HEAD Project** (Holistic Evidence and Design)

16%

the difference between a struggling student and one who thrives.

Why Design Matters

- ✓ **Cognitive Impact:** layouts can influence focus, memory, and learning outcomes
- ✓ **Emotional & Behavioral Effects:** lighting, noise, and movement shape student engagement
- ✓ **Accessibility:** thoughtful design choices ensure all students, regardless of ability, have an equal opportunity to succeed



Cognitive Impact

Classroom design isn't just about aesthetics—it's a **learning tool** that directly shapes student success.



Emotional & Behavioral Effects

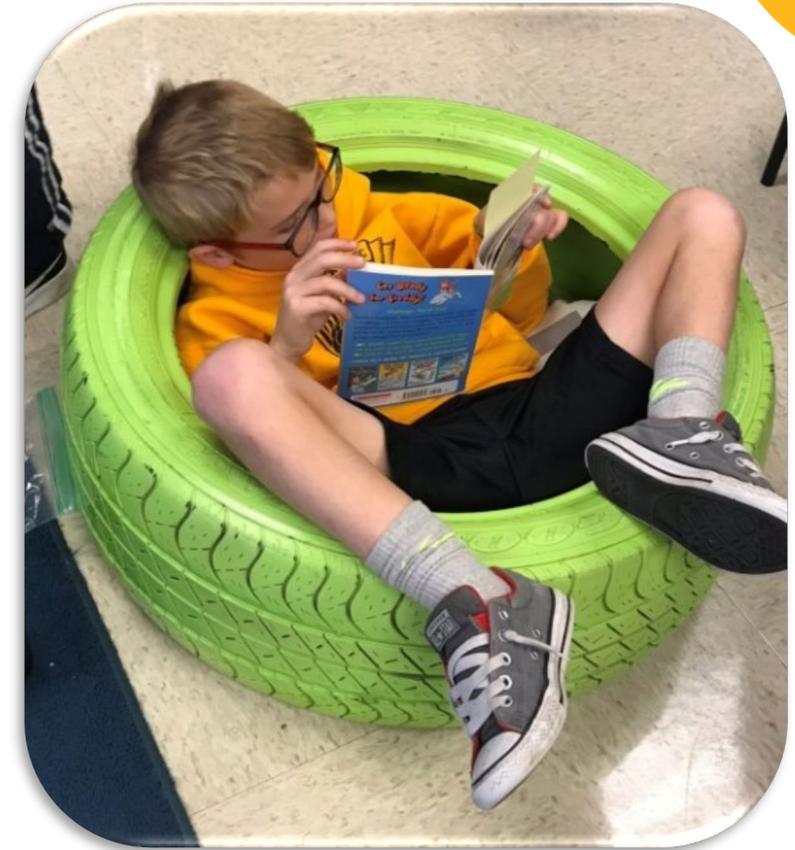
- ✓ **Soft, adjustable lighting** to reduce sensory overload
- ✓ **Calm, organized spaces** to minimize visual distractions
- ✓ **Movement-friendly areas** so students can self-regulate without being disruptive
- ✓ **Comfortable, flexible seating** that supports different physical needs



Accessibility & Inclusivity

“Every child deserves an education that guarantees the safety to learn in the comfort of one’s own skin”

Educator- Dena Simmons



Understanding Diverse Needs in Learning Environments



What is Neurodiversity & Physical Diversity?



Neurodiversity- natural variations in how people think, learn, and process information

- ADHD
- Autism & Sensory Processing Disorder
- Gifted and Talented
- Dyslexia & Other Learning Differences

Physical Diversity -variations in mobility, strength, or coordination that impact movement within the classroom

- Assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers, or prosthetics
- Fine motor skill
- Chronic conditions affecting energy levels & comfort

There is no TYPICAL learner!



What is Dysregulation?

Signs of Emotional Dysregulation



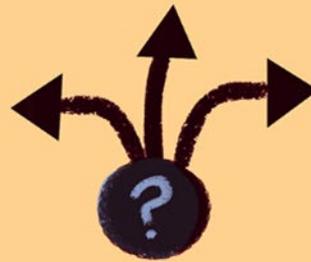
Overly intense emotions



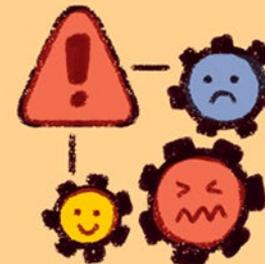
Impulsive behavior



Lack of emotional awareness



Trouble making decisions



Inability to manage behavior

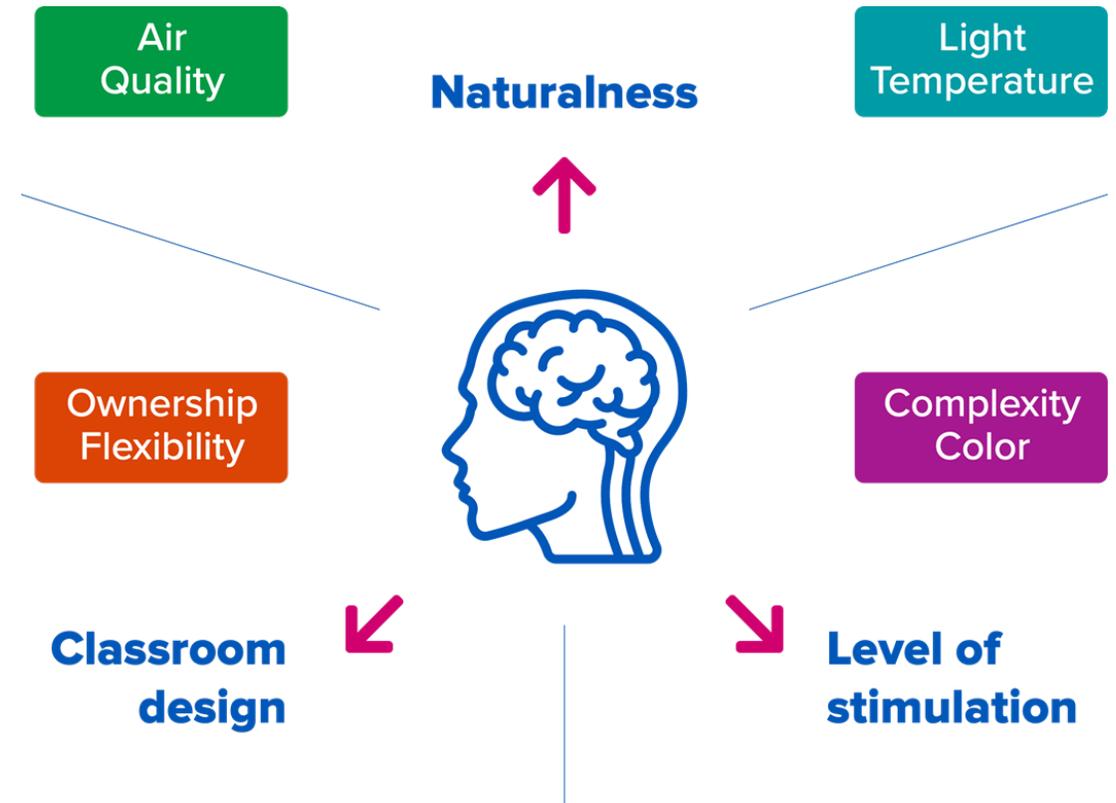


Avoids difficult emotions

Learning Environments for Diversity

Key components for ALL students:

- **Level of Stimulation:** Sensory Regulation and Emotional Control
- **Choice:** Engagement and Cognitive Stimulation
- **Flexibility:** Accessible spaces



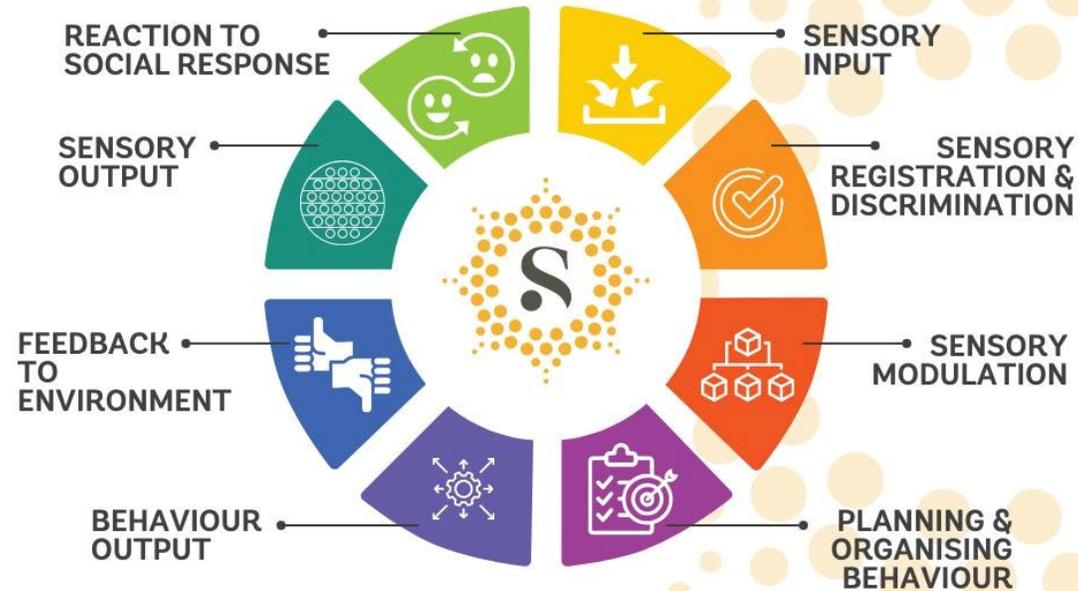
Source: the EDC's *Guide to Holistic Evidence and Design*

Level of Stimulation



Design: Sensory Awareness

THE SENSORY PROCESSING CYCLE



 **DESIGNED AND PRODUCED BY SUNSHINE SUPPORT**
BASED ON OUR RESEARCH & EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD OF SEND
www.sunshine-support.org



Example Images



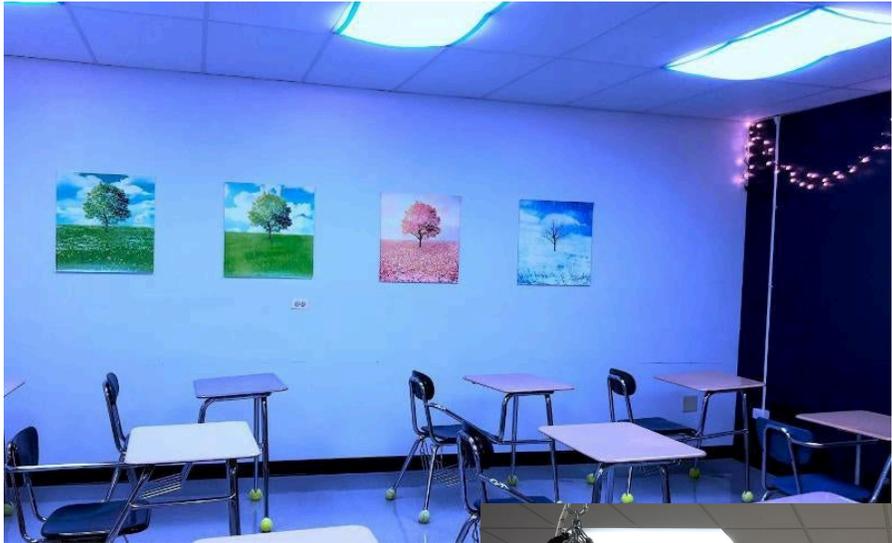
Visual Clutter



FGM Architects - SD34 Glenview Henking ES



Natural Daylight



Example Image



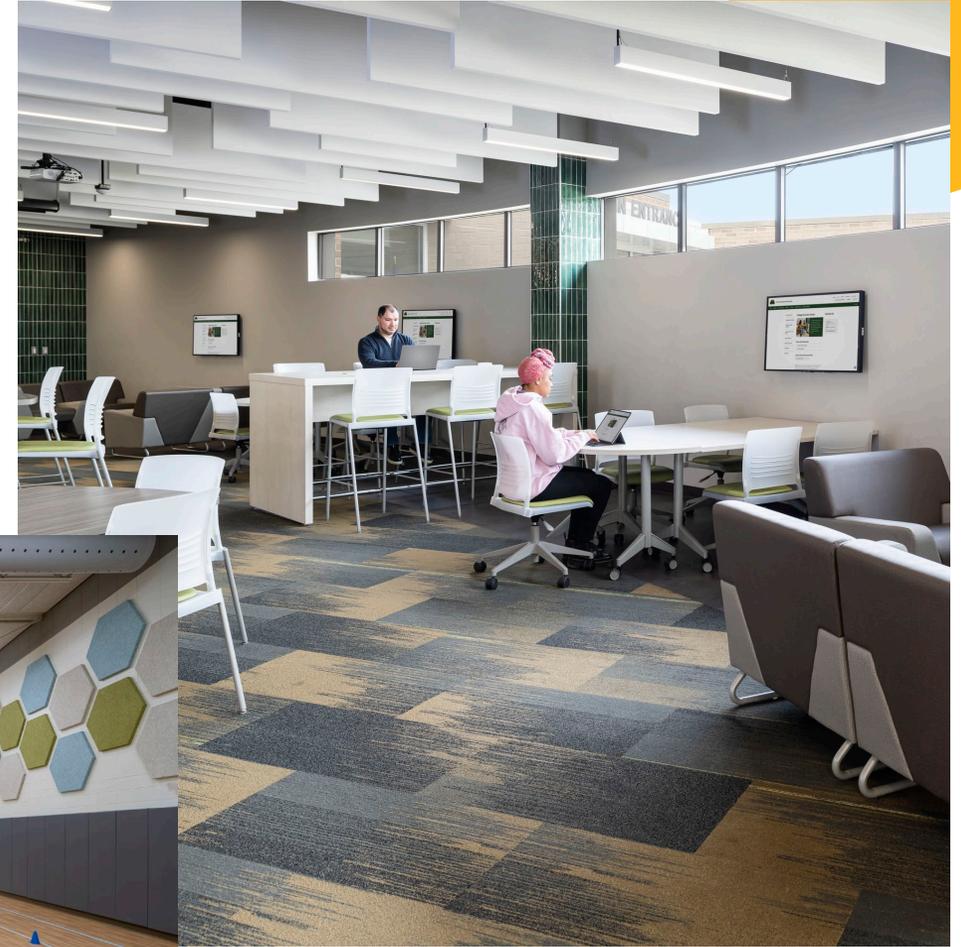
Example Image

FGM Architects – Highland CUSD 5 New Primary School

Lighting



FGM Architects - SD20 Keeneyville Springfield Middle School



FGM Architects - CHSD155 Crystal Lake South High School



FGM Architects - SD26 Prairie Trails Early Learning Center

Acoustics



FGM Architects - SD157-C Frankfort Chelsea Intermediate School



FGM Architects – St. Austin Catholic School

Color & Material



FGM Architects – CUSD 5 Highland New Primary School



FGM Architects – CUSD 5 Highland New Primary School



Page Architects – Austin ISD Rosedale School

Wayfinding

Classroom Design Choice and Flexibility



Architectural Planning for Inclusion

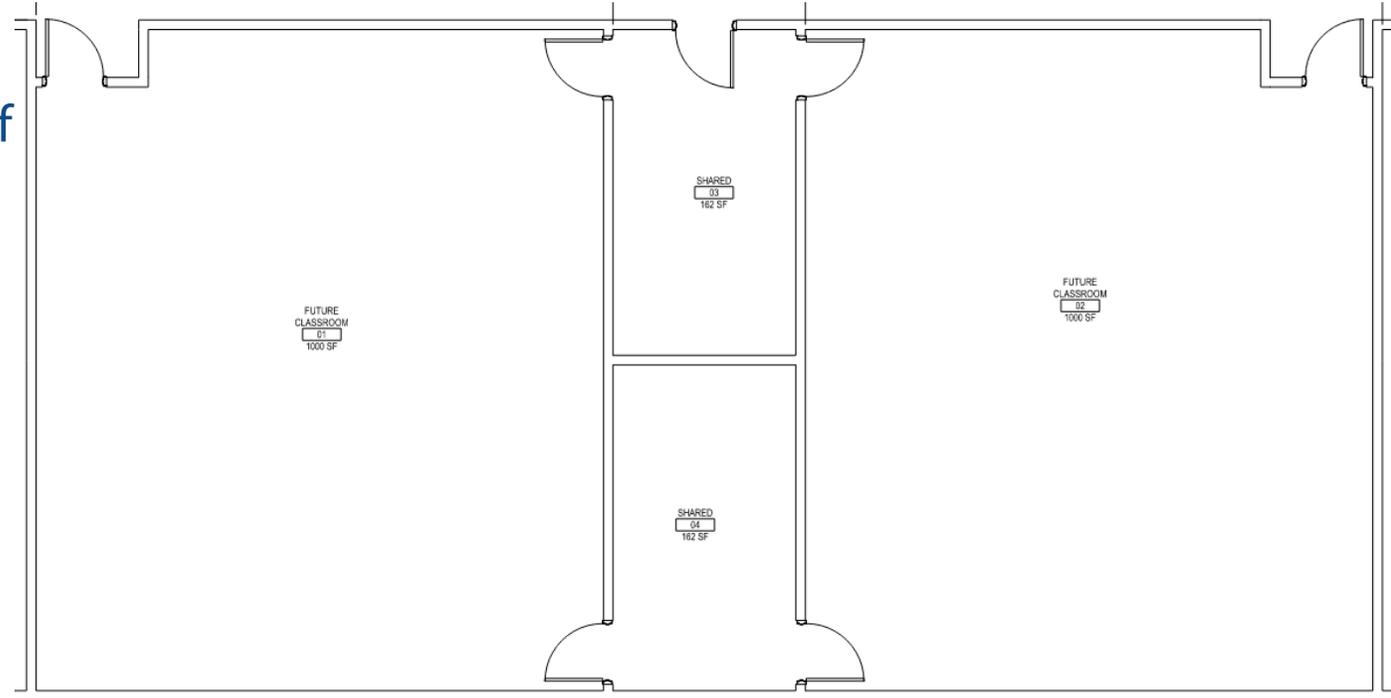
Space Needs- Midwest Standards

- Gen Ed Students – 35/sf per student
- Sp Ed Students – 60/sf+

SPACE PLANNING STANDARD GUIDELINES								
Room/Space	2003 /MN State BOE SF/Student Standards Range		2009 ISBE Illinois Code 151.50 SF/Student Standards		2012 IN School Design Guideline & SF Standards Range		2023 Ohio School Facilities SF/Student Standards Range	
	Low	High	SF/Student		Low	High	Low	High
General Classroom - Elementary	34	57	35		45	46	36	
Elementary School Special Ed	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	~60, finalize per child needs per Ch 1 of OSDM	
Elementary School Special Ed Quiet Area	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	75	150
Elementary School Restroom/Shower	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	Included above	
Elementary School Special Ed Resource	100	120	NI	NI	NI	NI	~60, finalize per child needs per Ch 1 of OSDM	
Elementary/Middle Kinesthetic Learning Studio	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	48	96
Elementary/Middle Small Group Room	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	30	37.5
Middle School General Classroom	34	43	35		45	46	36	
Middle School Special Ed Classroom	56	90	35		80	100	~60, finalize per child needs per Ch 1 of OSDM	
Middle School Special Ed Quiet Area	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	75	150
Middle School Restroom/Shower	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI	NI		
Middle School Special Ed Resource	100	120	NI	NI	80	100	~60, finalize per child needs per Ch 1 of OSDM	

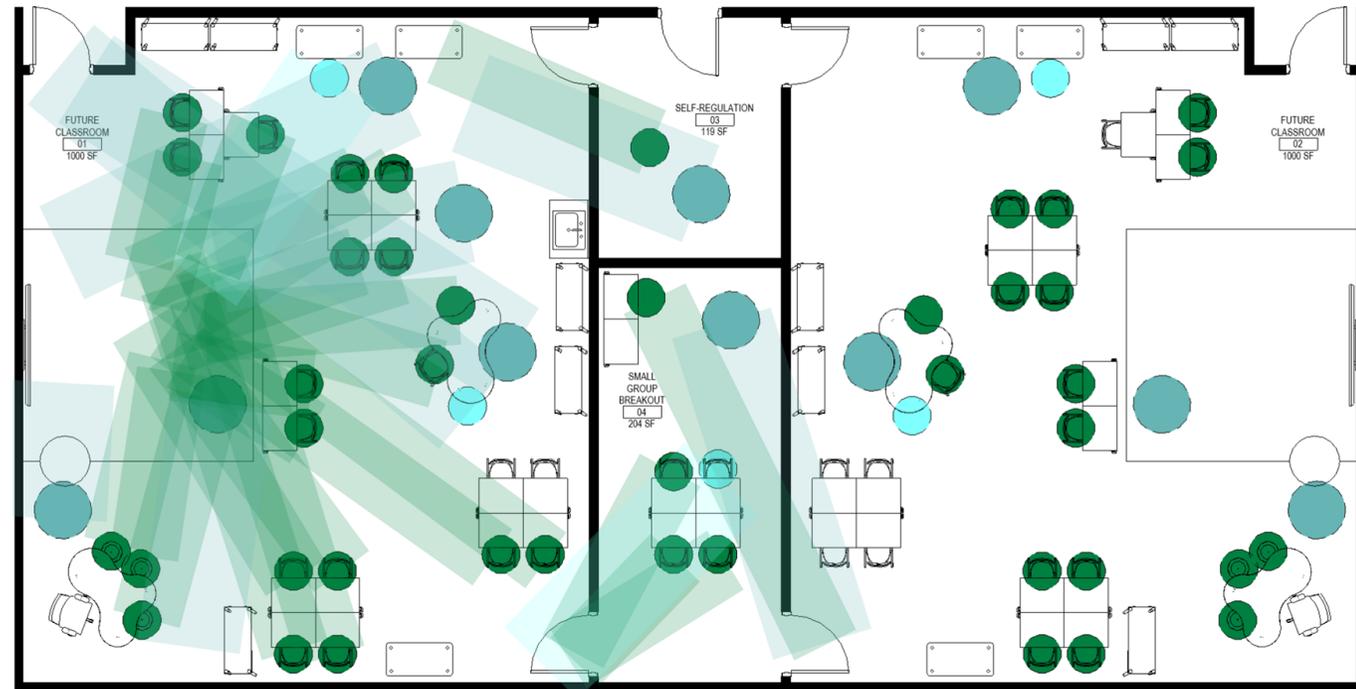
Understanding Space Needs - Inclusion

- Classroom - Number of students per class?
- Inclusion in the classroom - Number of students with additional needs and number of support staff?
- Self-Regulation - In the classroom or adjacent?
- Specialized Support – Number of students with additional needs and types of needs?
- Paraprofessional Space - Number of staff?
- Storage - Grade level or subject teams?



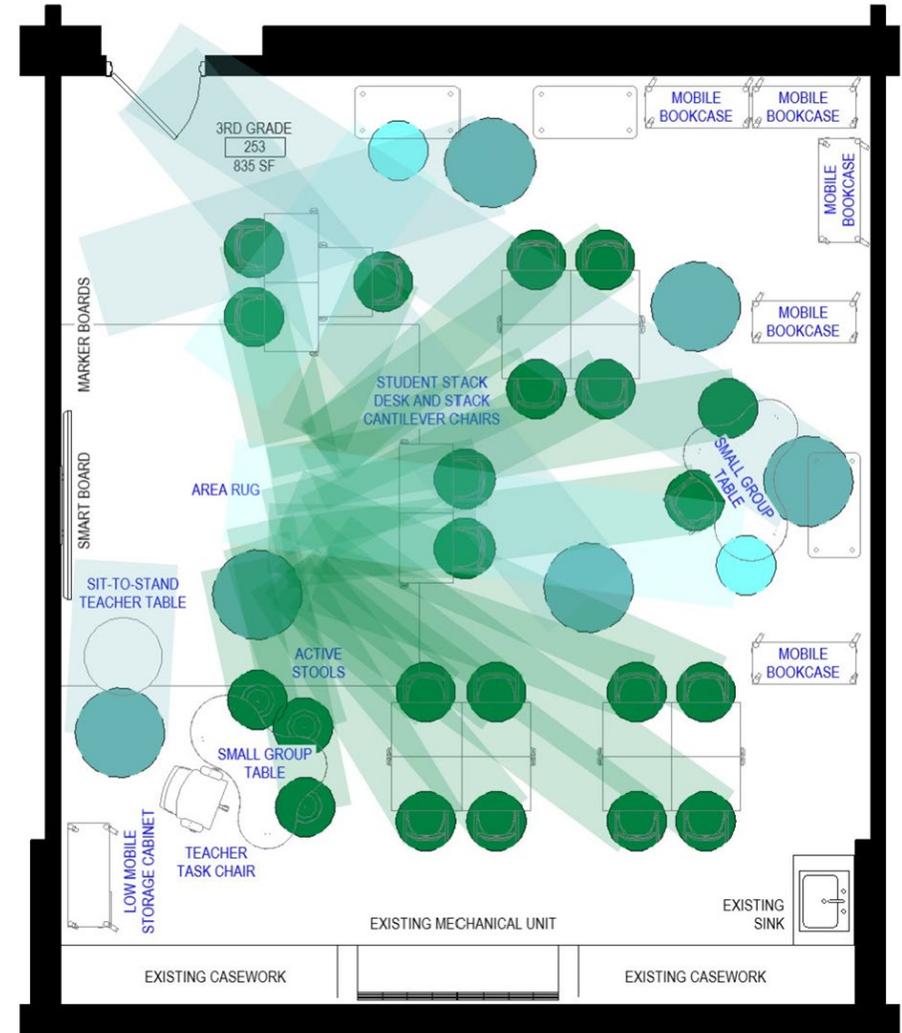
Understanding Space Needs - Movement

- Classroom - Number of transition per day?
- Inclusion in the classroom - Schedule of students with additional needs and their support staff?
- Self-Regulation – Process for students to access?
- Specialized Support – Process of transition?
- Paraprofessional Space - Process of transition?
- Storage – Schedule of access?



Understanding Space Needs - Movement

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Activity Parameters (Insert timer 20 min)

Step 1: Pick a Barrier

- Choose one classroom from the pile (e.g., too loud, too cluttered, poor layout)

Step 2: Reflect and Discuss

- Think: *As an educator, what could I do to impact this barrier?*

Step 3: Collaborate at Your Table

- Talk through your ideas together.

Step 4: Through The Eyes of the Kids

- Now discuss barriers **through the eyes of the kids** —how might students experience the barrier?

Jamie
(Fine Motor Delays)



Mia
(Autism Spectrum Disorder)



Liam
(Muscular Dystrophy)



Alex
(ADHD)





Alex (ADHD)

Alex is a curious and creative 15-year-old with a big imagination and a love for hands-on activities!

Whether it's building, designing, or problem-solving, Alex shines when given the chance to think outside the box. But sitting still for too long? No thanks!

Alex loves to wiggle, tap, and move to stay focused. Long periods in a regular chair can feel like a challenge, so having options like wobble stools, standing desks, or a cozy corner makes learning way more fun!

**Disclaimer: While these activities aim to foster understanding, they cannot fully replicate the lived experiences of students with disabilities. Each individual experiences their challenges uniquely, and this simulation serves only as an introduction to some of the obstacles they may face*

Liam (Muscular Dystrophy)



Liam is a bright and friendly 12-year-old who loves a good conversation!

Whether he's debating big ideas, sharing stories, or brainstorming with friends, he's always ready to contribute with great insights and a big smile. Since Liam uses a wheelchair, he needs plenty of space to move and furniture that adjusts to his height so he can comfortably join in on all the action.

Traditional desks and cluttered spaces? Not ideal! But with clear pathways and inclusive seating arrangements, Liam can be right where he belongs—in the heart of the discussion.

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Mia (Autism Spectrum Disorder)

Mia is a brilliant and thoughtful 9-year-old who loves patterns, puzzles, and anything with a clear structure! She thrives in organized spaces where expectations are clear, and routines help her feel comfortable and confident.

Loud, unpredictable environments? Not Mia's favorite. Too much noise or sudden changes can feel overwhelming, so having a quiet, cozy workstation and a predictable schedule helps her stay focused and at ease.

Social situations can be a little tricky, but Mia has a sharp eye for details and loves activities where she can spot patterns and solve problems.

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Jamie (Fine Motor Delays)

Jamie is a bright and enthusiastic 9 year-old who loves to learn and share ideas! Jamie enjoys storytelling, group discussions, and using big-picture thinking to explore new topics. Ask Jamie about a favorite book or science experiment, and you'll get an animated response full of curiosity.

But when it comes to writing by hand, Jamie can sometimes feel frustrated. Tasks that involve cutting, writing, or using small objects can be tricky and tiring. That's why tools like pencil grips, speech to text apps, typing and extra time for written assignments help Jamie show what they know without getting stuck on the fine motor part.

With the right supports, Jamie creativity and knowledge really shine!

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Review & Reflect

- ✓ Design shapes student success
- ✓ Empathy turns space into connection
- ✓ Choice, movement, flexibility = belonging

“When we see the classroom through their eyes, we design spaces where every student belongs.”



THROUGH
THEIR EYES

Thank you!



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2. In the left sidebar, tap "Schedule"
3. Locate and select the session you are attending
4. After opening the individual session page, tap the "Session Survey" link to evaluate the session.

Thank You!

Please scan the QR code to provide session feedback.

