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**A K-12 educator's  
guide to furniture  
that fosters engaging,  
active-learning spaces.**

**Classroom**

**WHERE TO  
START**



# Smith System<sup>®</sup>

Today's school classrooms are more than static learning spaces. They're living laboratories of endless opportunity—and ground zero for teaching 21st Century Learning principles. That's why creating an inspiring 21st Century classroom environment with the right furnishings has never been more important.

***But first, let's put that  
importance into context.***





# What do students need to know?

## **QUICK ANSWER:**

More than they used to, and more than they can find online. It's not enough for students to master the core content areas of reading, writing and math, or to be digital device jockies. They need to acquire a skillset to last a lifetime of rapid change. And the unknown.

# CONTEXT



**The gold standard for preparing tomorrow's workforce is solid academics paired with 21st Century skills. Simplified, that means the 4Cs:**

- **COLLABORATION:**  
Students work effectively with diverse groups and compromise to achieve common goals.
- **COMMUNICATION:**  
Students communicate effectively across multiple media platforms and for various purposes.
- **CREATIVITY:** Students generate and improve on original ideas and also work creatively with others.
- **CRITICAL THINKING:**  
Students analyze, evaluate and understand complex systems and apply strategies to solve real-life problems.





# How Educators Are Responding

Schools are adopting curricula and methods to accomplish this tall order in several ways. At the forefront is:

- Project-based learning – challenging students to investigate real-world problems and design their own solutions.
- Technology – making valuable information easily accessible and helping students create their own original content.
- Working collaboratively – helping them navigate the social aspects of teamwork, including cooperation, conflict resolution, and compromise.





# Why Classrooms and Furniture Matter

Much of this learning doesn't come naturally to students. Teachers must guide them, providing abundant opportunities to practice and show that learning is engaging, participatory and fun. It begins by removing physical hurdles. The classroom space and its coordinated furnishings should shape—even direct—the learning environment.

# FURNITURE

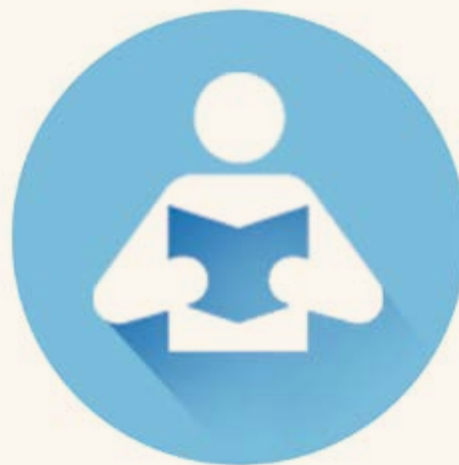


# 3 Essential Aspects of the 21st Century Classroom Layout

Classroom design is a fundamental step in making learning first on the agenda. Here are three modern concepts that can help boost student achievement:



**CLUSTERS  
(OR PODS)**



**LEARNING  
ZONES**



**TEACHER  
MOBILITY**



## **CLUSTERS (OR PODS)**

Small clusters of chairs and desks accommodate today's learners who prefer interactive and social activities. It allows students to work collaboratively in compact pods of two to six, to interact directly, see facial expressions and establish eye contact.

### **Furniture Recommendations:**

- **SEATING:** Durable chairs on wheels or light-weight seating that students can quickly arrange into groups. Chairs should offer generous support and directional movement for comfort.
- **WORK SURFACES:** Versatile and sturdy work surfaces (desks or meeting tables) that can fit snugly together for teamwork within various configurations.
- **POWER:** Instant-access power accessories for uninterrupted learning.



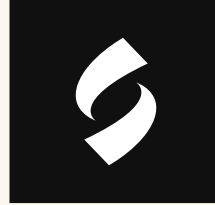


## LEARNING ZONES

Learning zones turn one classroom into several defined spaces that direct the learning behavior desired. There can be a collaborative zone, independent learning zone, play zone, maker zone and more. There are no limits. Defined learning zones empower students to move freely to the area that suits the work they're doing. Moving from one area to another helps them both learn and retain more.

### **Furniture Recommendations:**

- **SEATING:** Various seating options that fit each zone, such as chairs on wheels for collaborative zone, soft seating for reading or independent learning, limited-option seating for forward-facing instruction.
- **WORK SURFACES:** Various desk and table options to fit each zone.
- **POWER:** Instant-access power accessories.
- **STORAGE:** Mobile storage units, either enclosed or with personal totes, to store supplies or rotate out learning props.



## TEACHER MOBILITY

Teachers should move freely about the room, with no barriers. Today's learners like instant access to information and a mobile teacher can move easily from group to group to field questions and facilitate discussions.

### **Furniture Recommendations:**

- **SEATING:** Ergonomically smart teacher chairs that allow them to easily help students.
- **DESKS:** Mobile lecterns or desks that can follow the teacher or be quickly moved aside for presentation space.
- **STORAGE:** Mobile storage units, either enclosed to store supplies out of site, or with personal totes to help students stay organized.



# A Word About Gimmicks

Put simply, skip trendy chairs and desks. Future-proof classrooms by choosing furnishings that are durable and **sensible in design** with plenty of versatility. That means chairs and tables with options for casters, height changes, replacement parts and timeless color choices.

# LEARNING



## POP QUIZ

**How much does classroom design affect student learning?**






- A. 0%                      B. 10%                      C. 20%                      D. 25%

**The Answer:**

A 2013 pilot study by the University of Salford (England) and architects Nightingale Associates found that the classroom environment can affect a typical child's academic progress by 25% (negative or positive) in one academic year. An additional Salford study reinforced that the most powerful impact is made by the physical design of the particular classroom.



# Outdated Classroom vs. 21st Century Classroom

	OUTDATED CLASSROOM	21ST CENTURY CLASSROOM
	<b>SPACE LAYOUT</b>  Desks and chairs in tidy rows that face forward	Multi-use learning zones spread throughout classroom; wireless access
	<b>FURNITURE</b>  Hard, one-size-fits-all stationary desk with attached chair	Comfortable, mobile furniture that meets broad curriculum goals
	<b>TEACHER'S ROLE</b>  Stagnant at front of room or chalkboard	Roving instructor, helper, facilitator
	<b>STUDENT'S ROLE</b>  Listens quietly; rote memory is awarded within competitive environment	Collaborative problem-solver, maker, content generator
	<b>CURRICULUM</b>  Three Rs: reading writing, arithmetic	Project-based, technology driven, collaborative, globally connected



# See what's possible for your school.

Smith System furniture makes incorporating 21st Century learning principles easy. We work with schools and budgets of all sizes and scenarios, from new construction to select classroom upgrades.

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SCHOOL