

# 2026 Wisconsin State Education Convention

JANUARY 21-23, 2026 • BAIRD CENTER • MILWAUKEE • #EdCon2026

## Learning Places Matter -

It's the Third Educator  
in the Room

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Thursday, January 22, 2026  
8:45am - Room 101D/E



# Leadership Panel

**Deb Kerr - Superintendent - 1,100 Students**  
**St. Francis Public School District, St. Francis**

**Monica Kelsey-Brown - Superintendent - 4,500 Students**  
**Waunakee Community School District, Waunakee**

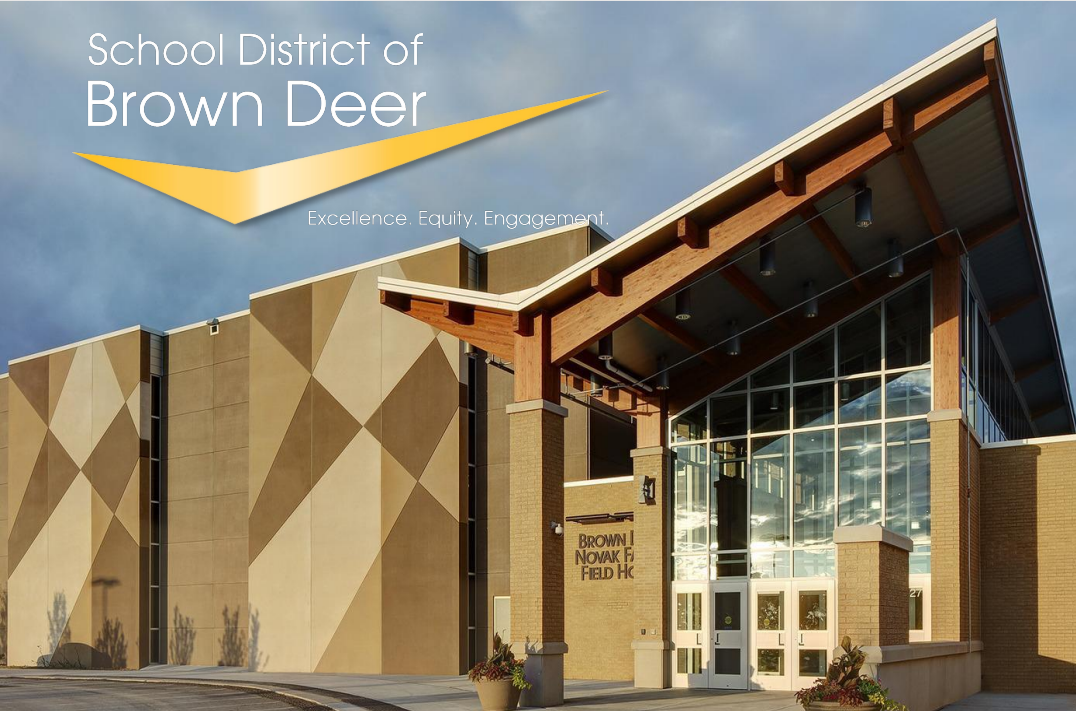
**Melissa Thompson - Former Superintendent**  
**PRA - Director of Education Strategy - Milwaukee**

**Jeff Wright - Superintendent - 2,700 Students**  
**Sauk Prairie School District, Sauk Prairie**



School District of  
Brown Deer

Excellence. Equity. Engagement.



## St. Francis Public High School Instructional Media Center



**Deb Kerr**  
**Superintendent**  
[dkerr@sfsd.k12.wi.us](mailto:dkerr@sfsd.k12.wi.us)







**Monica Kelsey-Brown**  
**Superintendent**

**monicakelsey-brown@**  
**waunakee.k12.wi.us**







**Jeff Wright**  
**Superintendent**  
jeff.wright@  
saukprarieschools.org







**SWALLOW SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
INSPIRING EXCELLENCE SINCE 1844

## Elementary Collaboration Space



**Melissa Thompson**  
(Former Superintendent)  
**Director**  
**Education Strategy**  
mthompson@  
prarch.com

**pra**  
PLUNKETT RAYSICH  
ARCHITECTS, LLP





# What's Keeping Us Up at Night:

- Safety & Security
- Mental Health Needs of Students & Staff
- Creating Sense of Belonging & Connection
- Accelerated Learning Needs
- Preparing Students for the Uncertain Future
- Financial Resources Needed



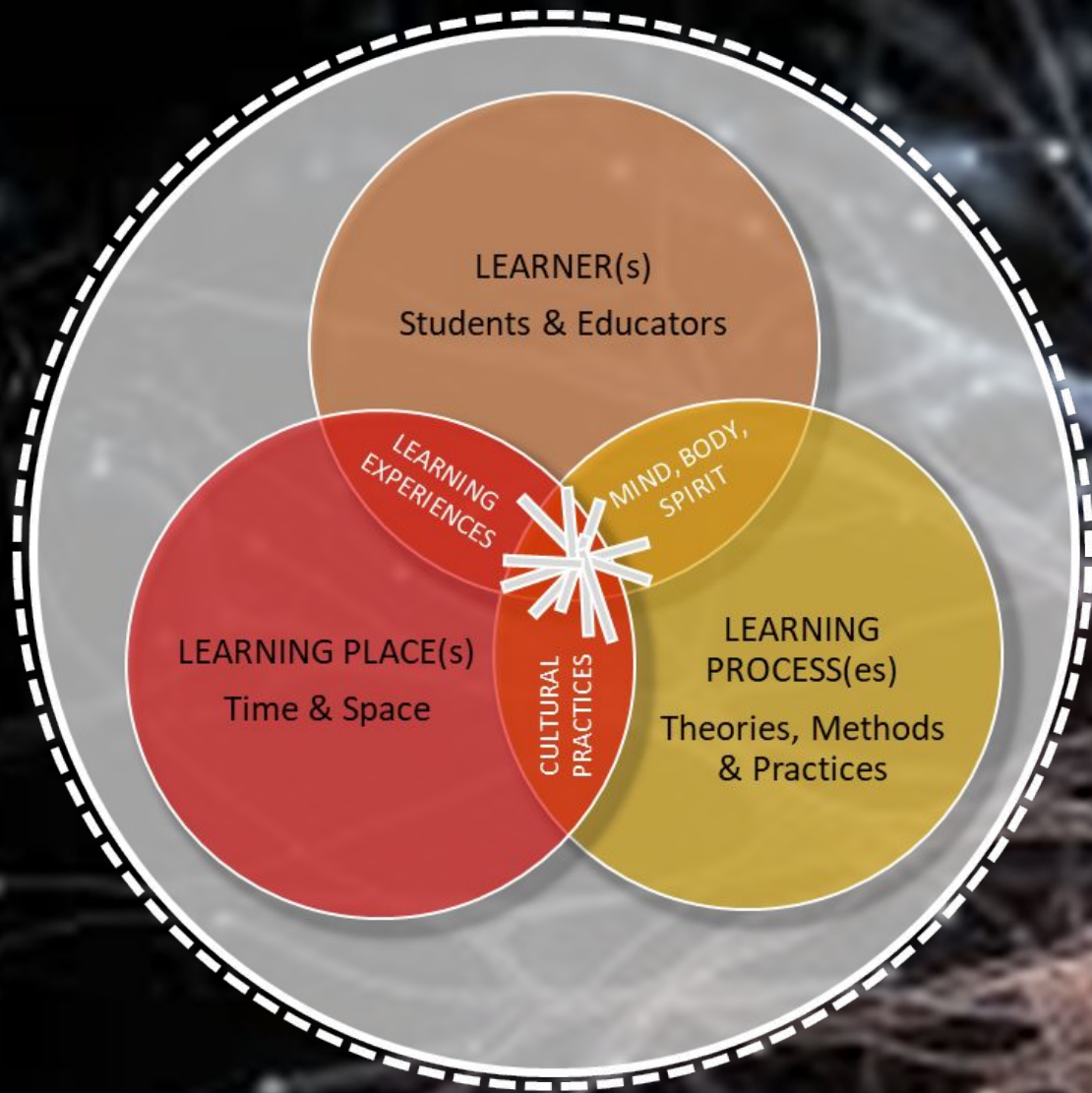
# Learning Places Matter

- Understand the Context
  - *Learners and their needs*
- More than Bricks & Mortar
  - *Positive Territoriality*
- Transformation of Learning Spaces
  - *Effective delivery of curriculum, instruction, and assessment*



# The Networked Learning Ecosystem

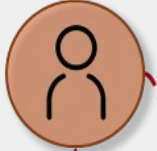
- Learners
- Learning Processes
- Learning Places



**THE NETWORKED LEARNING ECOSYSTEM**

Developed by Dr. Lennie Scott-Webber (2022)





## **LEARNER(s)**

Two learner types: 'The people at the center'

Students & Teachers [you'll find in this program we always put the student learner first / learning is the priority];

- Linked with the Body, Mind and Spirit needs to thrive.



## **LEARNING PROCESS(es)**

Process segments: 'provides the seeking to learn tools'

Theories, Methods & Practices

- Linked with the Movement and Engagement needs to be successful.



## **LEARNING PLACE(s)**

Two place typologies: 'connecting 'all' the learning experience dots'

Time & Space

- Linked with Design & Affordances across a continuum.



# Learning Places Matter

## Influences:

- Behavior
- Mindset
- Engagement
- Agency
- Sense of Belonging

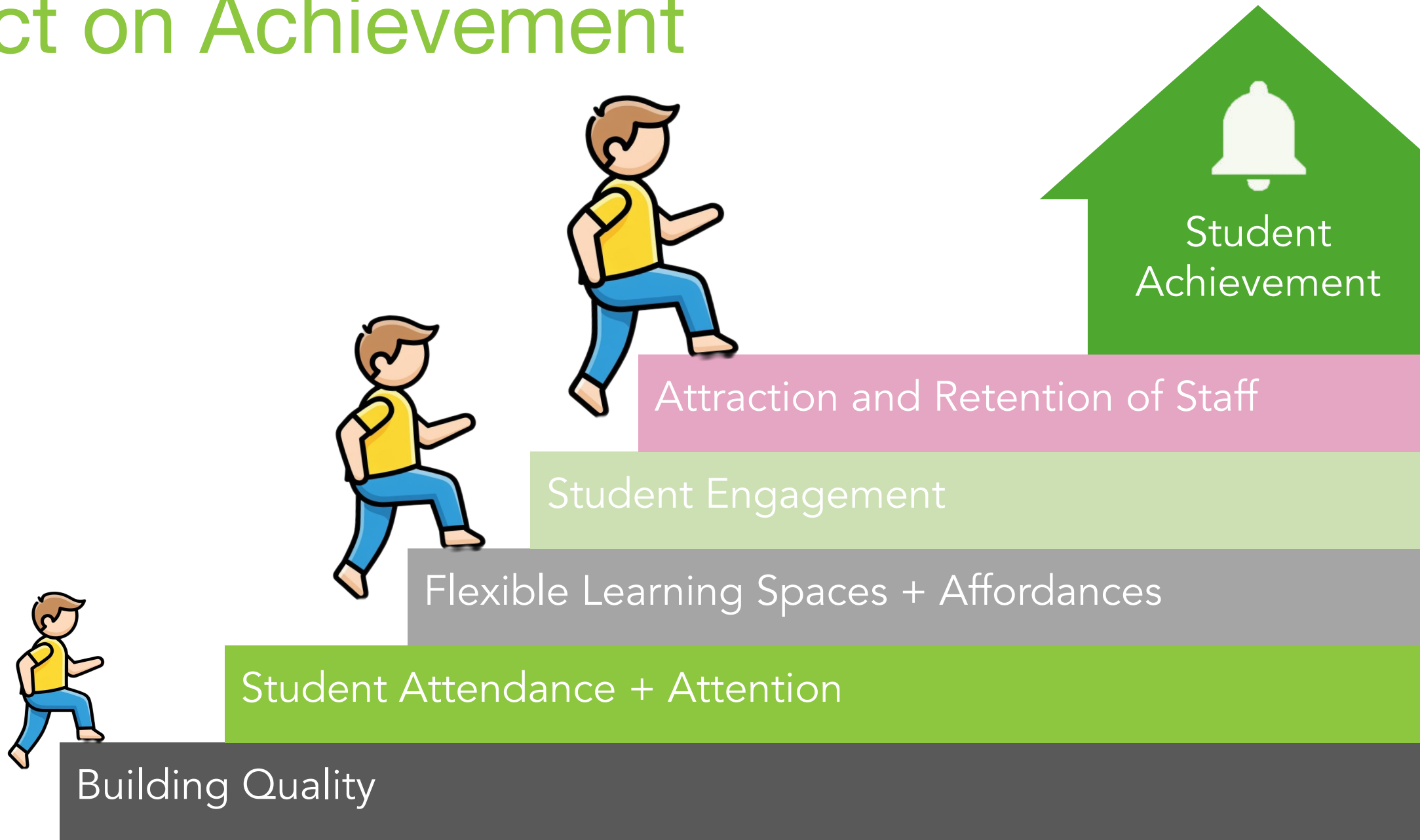


What  
does the  
**research**  
tell us?





# Impact on Achievement





# PERFORMANCE-BASED DESIGN | **Begin with the End in Mind**

Performance-based design is founded on the premise that [built] systems must meet specific **research-informed performance objectives.**

Specific performance expectations are set for the **completed design.**

*The central question is what design and affordances ensure the **best human experience?***

Performance-based design, therefore, reverses the design process by **defining the end goal** as the starting point.



I HAVE TO  
BE ABLE TO  
**SEE**



I HAVE TO  
BE ABLE TO  
**HEAR**

I HAVE TO BE  
ABLE TO BE  
**COMFORTABLE**



If not, learning shuts down.

“How you feel is  
how you learn:

*based upon the  
influence of emotions  
during the learning  
process*

See, Listen, Hear,  
and Comfort



# PERFORMANCE-BASED DESIGN | 8 Key Considerations



**Universal Design**

Building Design + Affordances



**Lighting**

Building Design + Affordances



**Acoustics**

Building Design + Affordances



**Physiological**

Building Design (via Mechanicals) +  
Location/Setting of Building +  
Affordances



**Ergonomics**

Affordances



**Emotional Safety + Belonging**

Building Design + Affordances



**Physical Safety + Security**

Building Design + Affordances



**Sustainability + Stewardship**

Building Design + Affordances



# Design for the Learner, Not the Lesson




**audible**

I learn best when I can hear distinctly.




Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces




**ergonomic**

I learn best when I feel physically comfortable.



Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces



**physiological**

I learn best with fresh air, nature, and a comfy climate.



Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces




**behavioral**

I learn best when my space help me focus.




Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces



**Visual**

I learn best when I can see clearly.



Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces



**belonging**

I learn best when I feel connected to others.



Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces

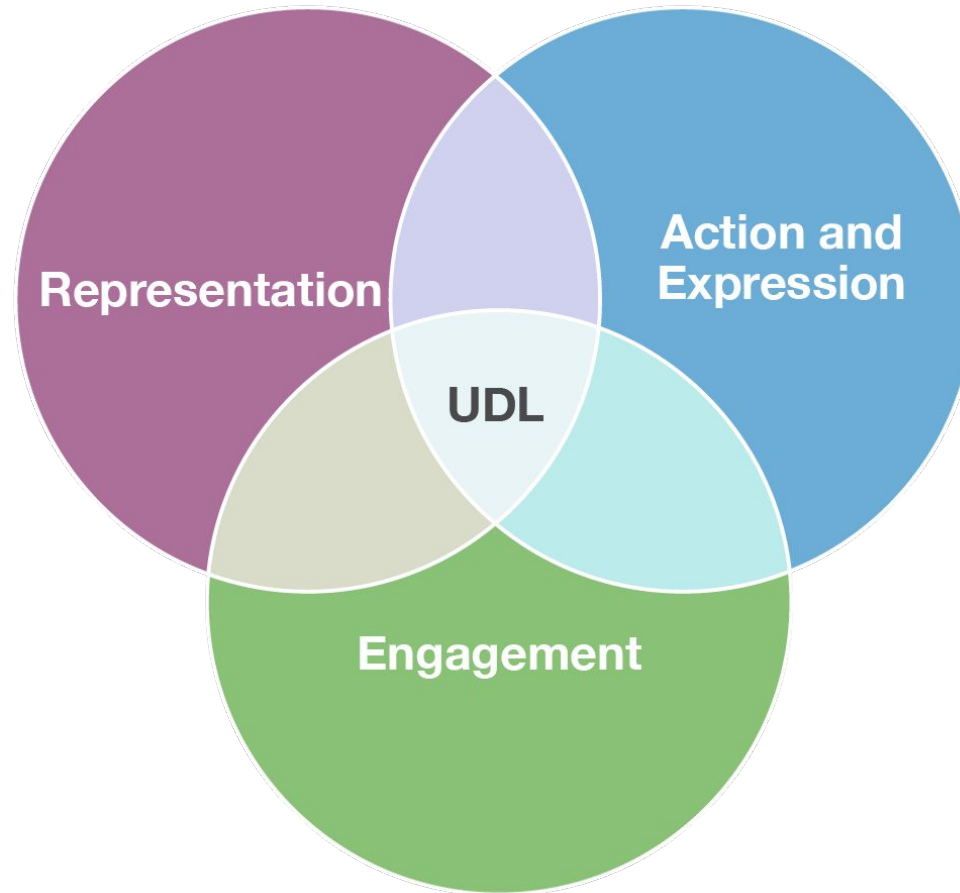






# Universal Design

- *Multiple means of...*
  - Representation
  - Action and Expression
  - Engagement



# Universal Design: Ties to Design

	<p><b>Design Multiple Means of Engagement</b> ➔</p> 	<p><b>Design Multiple Means of Representation</b> ➔</p> 	<p><b>Design Multiple Means of Action &amp; Expression</b> ➔</p> 
<b>Access</b>	<p>Design Options for <b>Welcoming Interests &amp; Identities</b> (7) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Optimize choice and autonomy (7.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Optimize relevance, value, and authenticity (7.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Nurture joy and play (7.3) &gt;</li> <li>• Address biases, threats, and distractions (7.4) &gt;</li> </ul>	<p>Design Options for <b>Perception</b> (1) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support opportunities to customize the display of information (1.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Support multiple ways to perceive information (1.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Represent a diversity of perspectives and identities in authentic ways (1.3) &gt;</li> </ul>	<p>Design Options for <b>Interaction</b> (4) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vary and honor the methods for response, navigation, and movement (4.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Optimize access to accessible materials and assistive and accessible technologies and tools (4.2) &gt;</li> </ul>
<b>Support</b>	<p>Design Options for <b>Sustaining Effort &amp; Persistence</b> (8) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify the meaning and purpose of goals (8.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Optimize challenge and support (8.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Foster collaboration, interdependence, and collective learning (8.3) &gt;</li> <li>• Foster belonging and community (8.4) &gt;</li> <li>• Offer action-oriented feedback (8.5) &gt;</li> </ul>	<p>Design Options for <b>Language &amp; Symbols</b> (2) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify vocabulary, symbols, and language structures (2.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Support decoding of text, mathematical notation, and symbols (2.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Cultivate understanding and respect across languages and dialects (2.3) &gt;</li> <li>• Address biases in the use of language and symbols (2.4) &gt;</li> <li>• Illustrate through multiple media (2.5) &gt;</li> </ul>	<p>Design Options for <b>Expression &amp; Communication</b> (5) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use multiple media for communication (5.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Use multiple tools for construction, composition, and creativity (5.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Build fluencies with graduated support for practice and performance (5.3) &gt;</li> <li>• Address biases related to modes of expression and communication (5.4) &gt;</li> </ul>
<b>Executive Function</b>	<p>Design Options for <b>Emotional Capacity</b> (9) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize expectations, beliefs, and motivations (9.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Develop awareness of self and others (9.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Promote individual and collective reflection (9.3) &gt;</li> <li>• Cultivate empathy and restorative practices (9.4) &gt;</li> </ul>	<p>Design Options for <b>Building Knowledge</b> (3) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connect prior knowledge to new learning (3.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Highlight and explore patterns, critical features, big ideas, and relationships (3.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Cultivate multiple ways of knowing and making meaning (3.3) &gt;</li> <li>• Maximize transfer and generalization (3.4) &gt;</li> </ul>	<p>Design Options for <b>Strategy Development</b> (6) ➔</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set meaningful goals (6.1) &gt;</li> <li>• Anticipate and plan for challenges (6.2) &gt;</li> <li>• Organize information and resources (6.3) &gt;</li> <li>• Enhance capacity for monitoring progress (6.4) &gt;</li> <li>• Challenge exclusionary practices (6.5) &gt;</li> </ul>



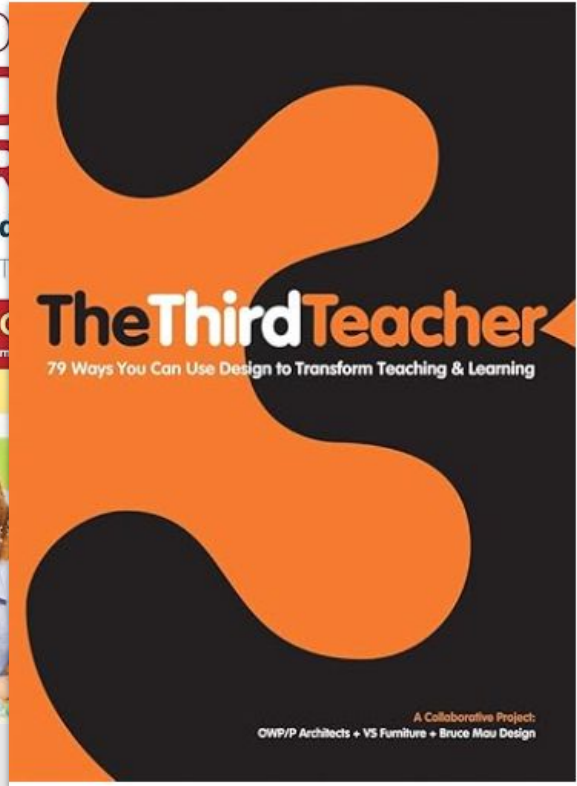
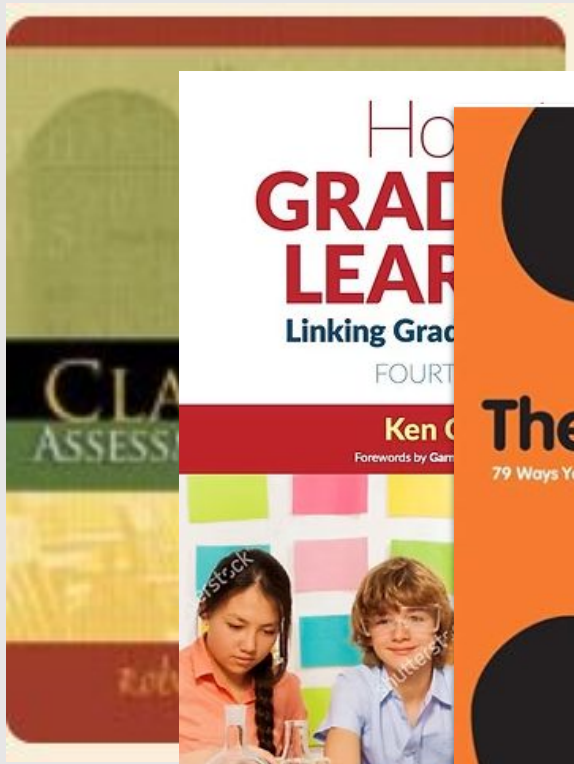
# PERFORMANCE-BASED DESIGN | Resources + References



## Question #1 for Panel

*How did you support your school communities' dreams and understand the need to re-design learning spaces?*





- Book studies + reading roundtables
- Pilot spaces
- Peer-to-peer Open Door program
- Wins along the way to validate, energize





Grew Pedagogical Agility  
Pressure for Affordances to Support



# Winter Design Guidelines

## Transforming Edmonton into a Great Winter City

### Winter Design in a Nutshell

The Winter Design Guidelines are comprehensive. For the sake of simplicity, however, the five main principles of winter city design are:

1. Incorporate design strategies to block wind, particularly prevailing winds and downdrafts.
2. Maximize exposure to sunshine through orientation and design.
3. Use colour to enliven the winterscape.
4. Create visual interest with light, while being mindful of intensity, spread, contrast and colour.
5. Design and provide infrastructure that supports desired winter life and improves comfort and access in cold weather.

The five main principles are applied in all contexts throughout these guidelines. Multiple examples are provided for how to apply the principles in all scales, from building to site to neighbourhood. The following image demonstrates how all five principles can be used in one space.



“We should not have to struggle against climate; we must form alliances with it.”







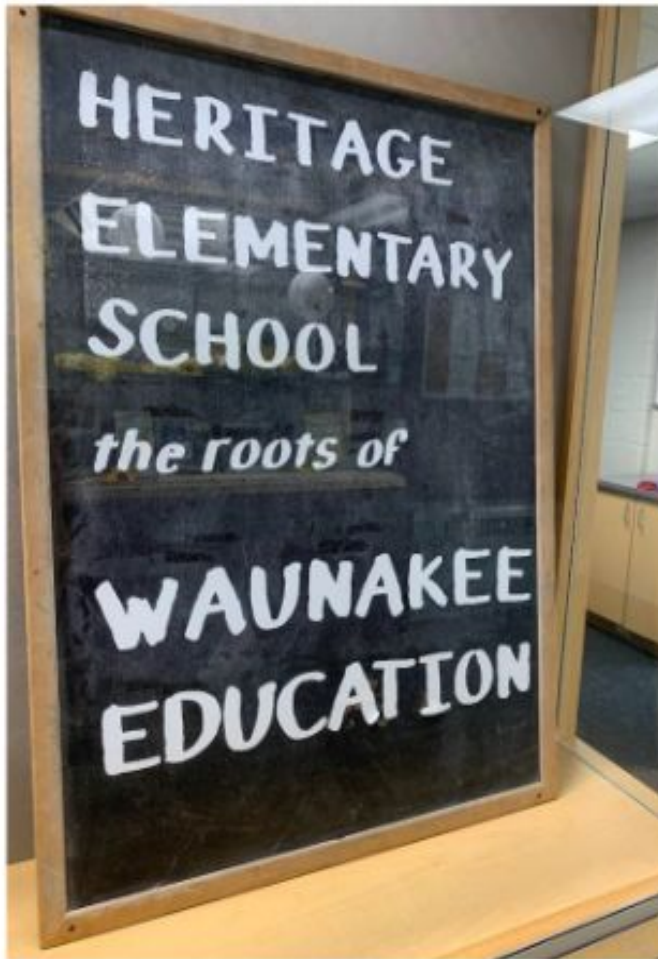






# ROOT and GROW

ORIGIN : POSSIBILITY : GROWTH





# Before and After Projects - Budget Friendly



HIGH SCHOOL COMMONS



# Before and After Projects - Budget Friendly



HIGH SCHOOL FIELD HOUSE



# Before and After Projects - Budget Friendly



AUDITORIUM



# Before and After Projects - Budget Friendly



INNOVATION CENTER TECH ED AREA





# Learning Space Matters

- Understand the Context
- More than Bricks & Mortar
- Transformation of Learning Spaces









## Question #2 for Panel

*How did you help your staff understand the design of the new spaces and opportunities for growth for students in the spaces?*













THE HEARTH







# Learning Places Matters

- Understand the Context
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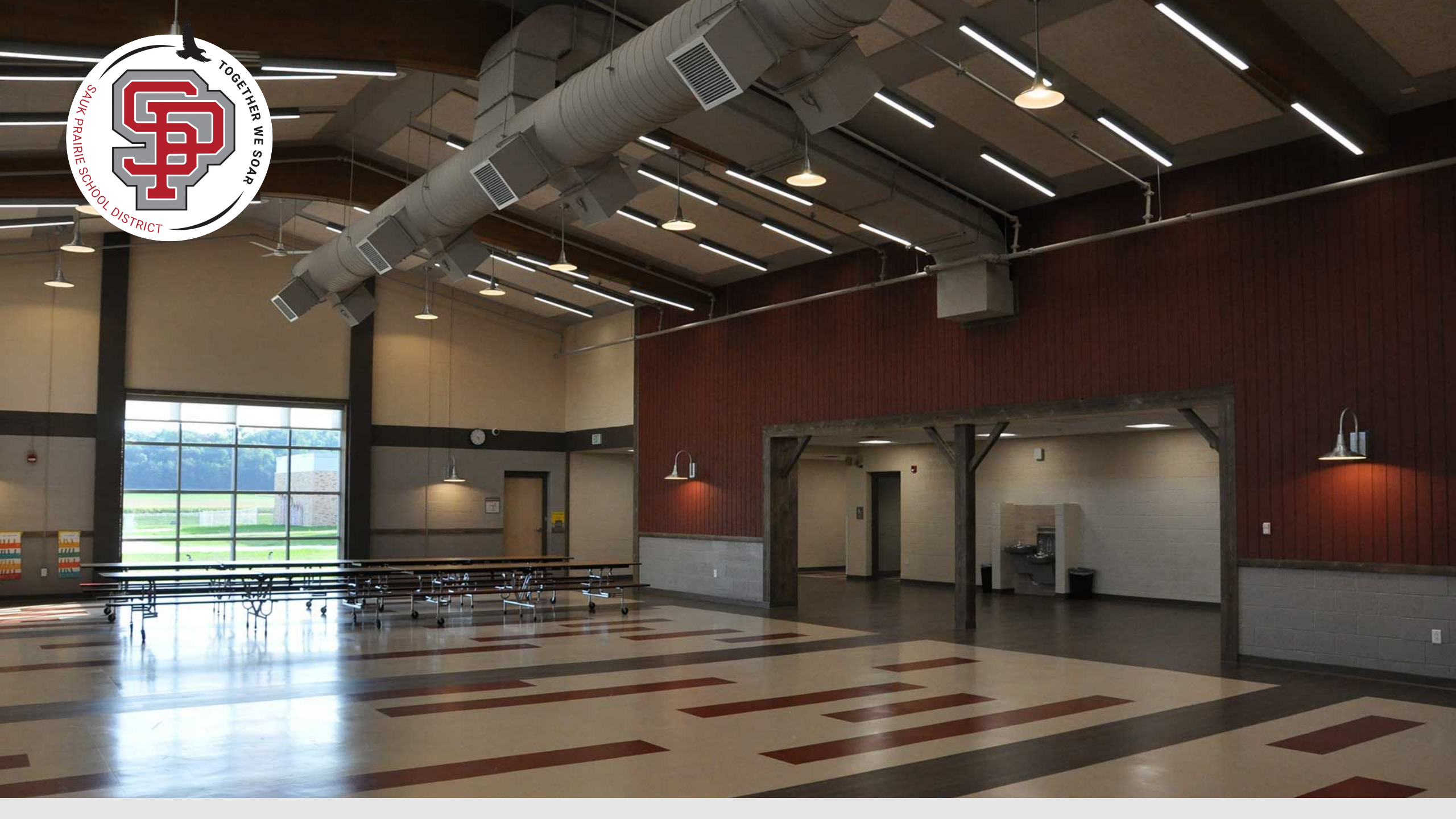




Question #3 for Panel

*Lessons learned - what are 2-3 things you learned or would do differently in your next project?*















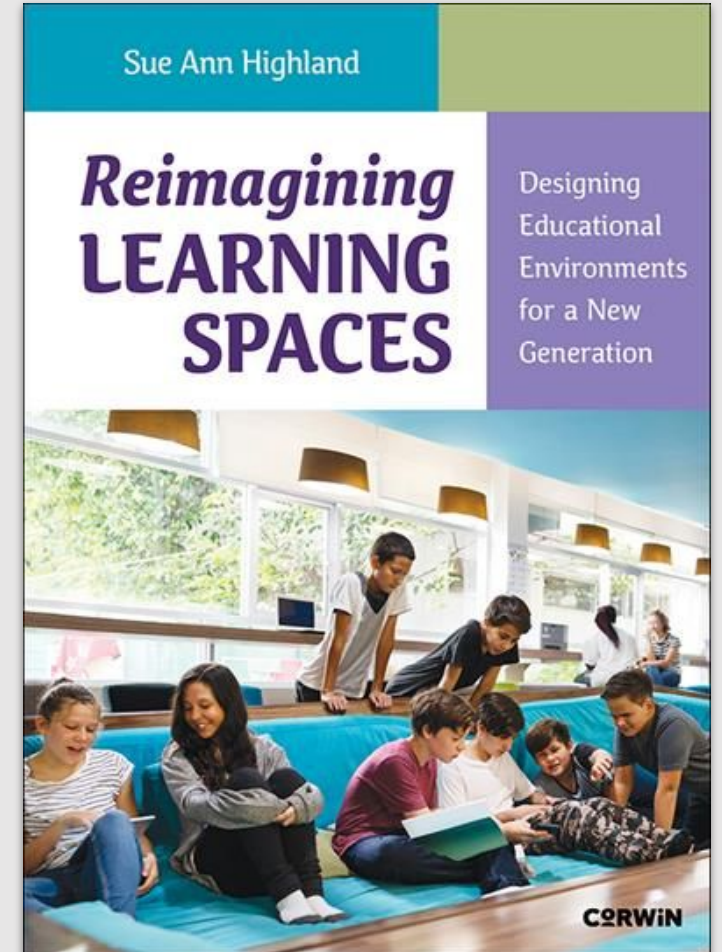
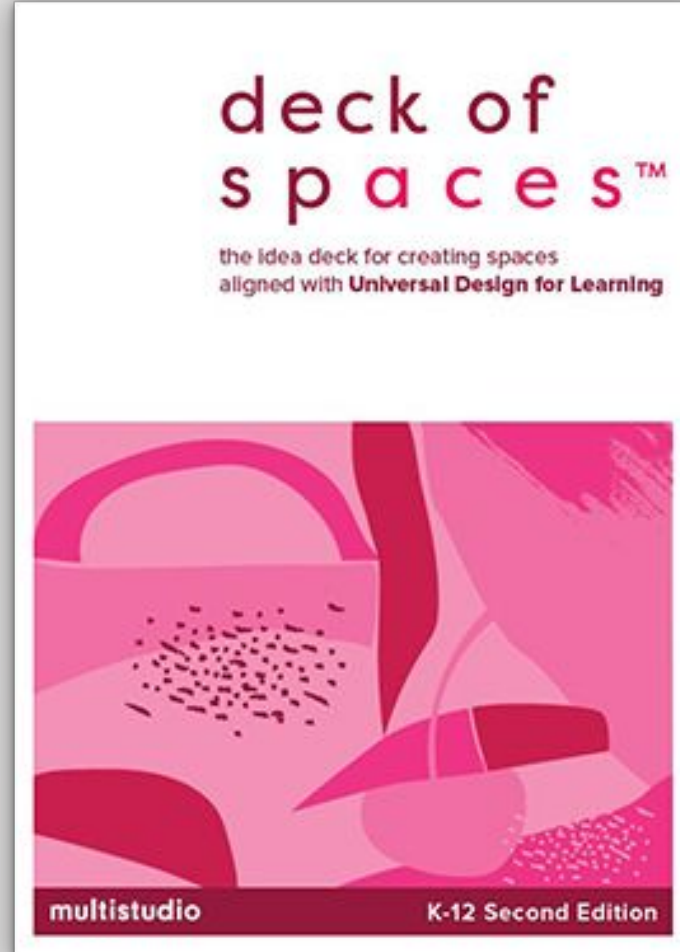
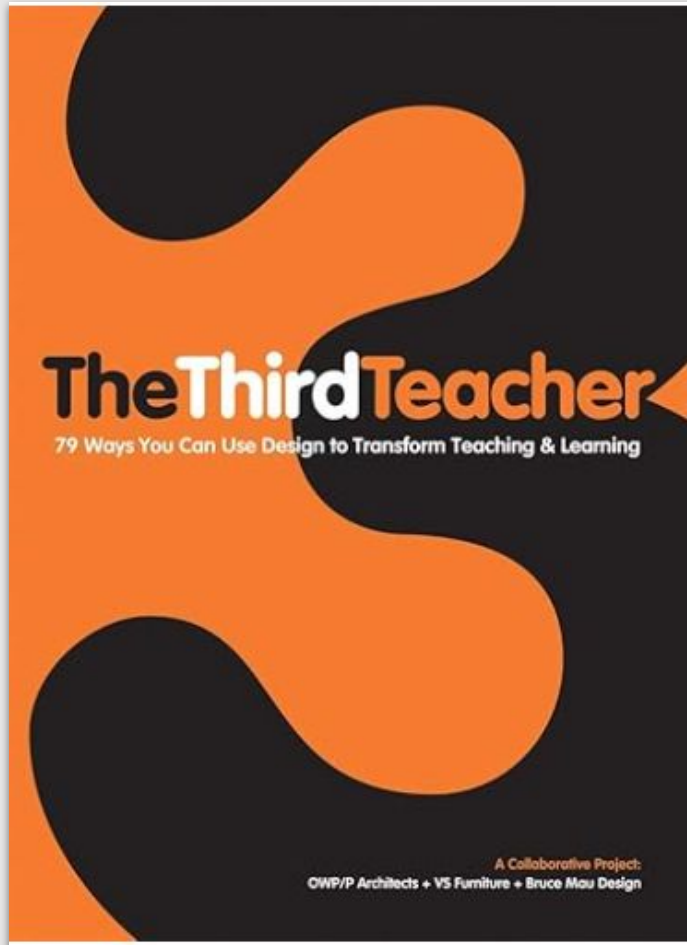
# Audience Takeaways and Questions



**Modern Learning Spaces: What the Research Tells Us**



# Resources





# Resources



<https://www.edmarket.org>

<https://www.A4LE.org>



**EDspaces**  
Designing the Future of Education  
Kansas City, MO | October 28-30, 2026

**A4LE LearningSCAPES**  
**2026**  
SEATTLE

November 4-7, 2026



*“Look to many sources for design and inspiration. Teaching and Learning should drive your project. A great school gives its neighbors a park to hang out in, a goal to aspire to, a building and green space to be proud of, and a standard to maintain.”*

*The Third Teacher*

