

# 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**



## 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](mailto:monicakelsey-brown@waunakee.k12.wi.us)**





**Jeff Wright**  
**Superintendent**  
**[jeff.wright@saukprairieschools.org](mailto:jeff.wright@saukprairieschools.org)**





SWALLOW SCHOOL DISTRICT  
INSPIRING EXCELLENCE SINCE 1844

## Elementary Collaboration Space



**Melissa Thompson**  
(Former Superintendent)  
Director  
Education Strategy  
[mthompson@  
prarch.com](mailto:mthompson@prarch.com)

**pra**  
PLUNKETT RAYSICH  
ARCHITECTS, LLP

A girl with long dark hair, wearing a white dress, stands on a wooden deck at night. She is holding a small teddy bear. A black cat is sitting on the deck next to her. The background shows a city skyline with many lit-up buildings and red lanterns hanging from the eaves of the buildings. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and somewhat somber.

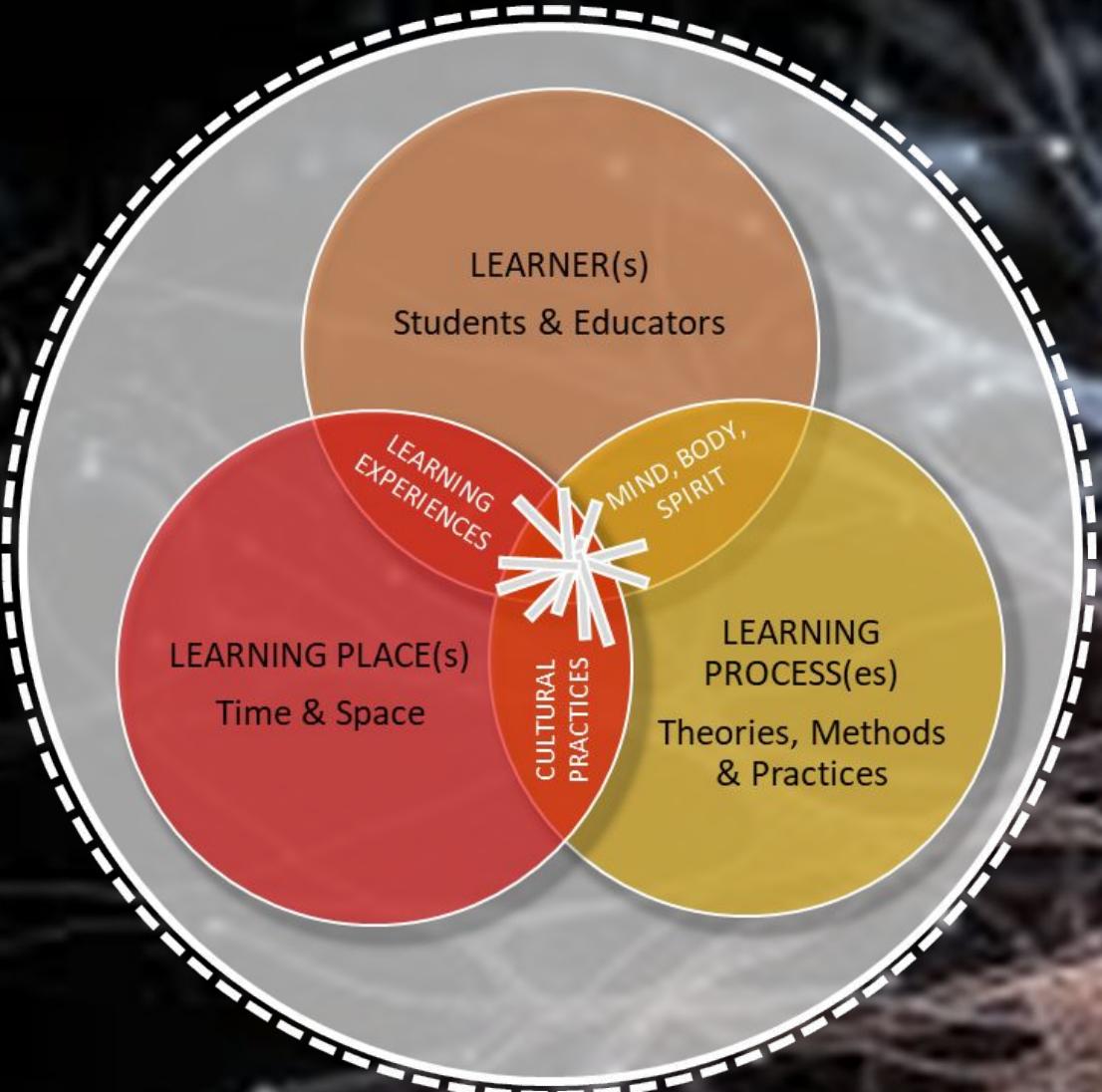
# What's Keeping Us Up at Night:

- 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



## 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

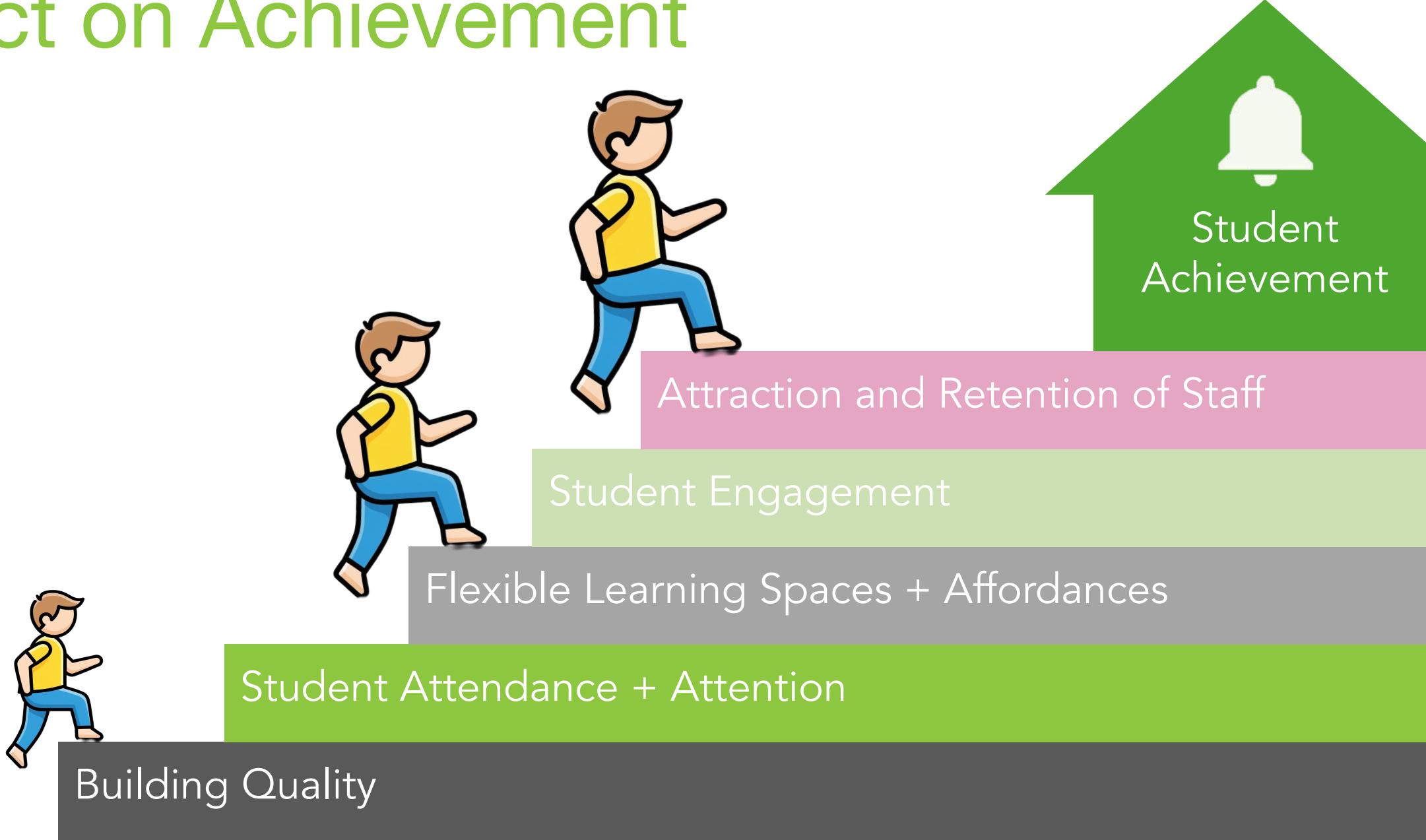
## Influences:

- 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

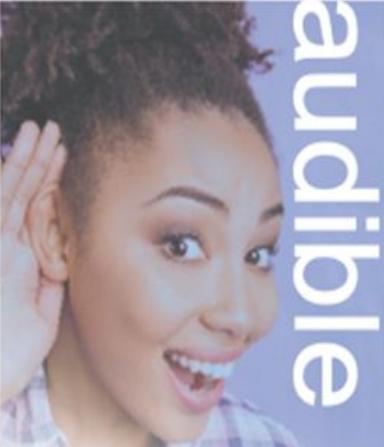
Building Design + Affordances



## 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



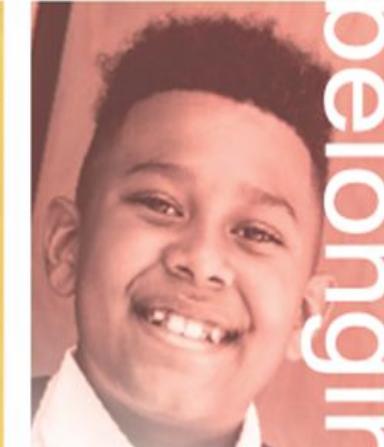
visual

I learn best when I can see clearly.



Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces



belonging

I learn best when I feel connected to others.



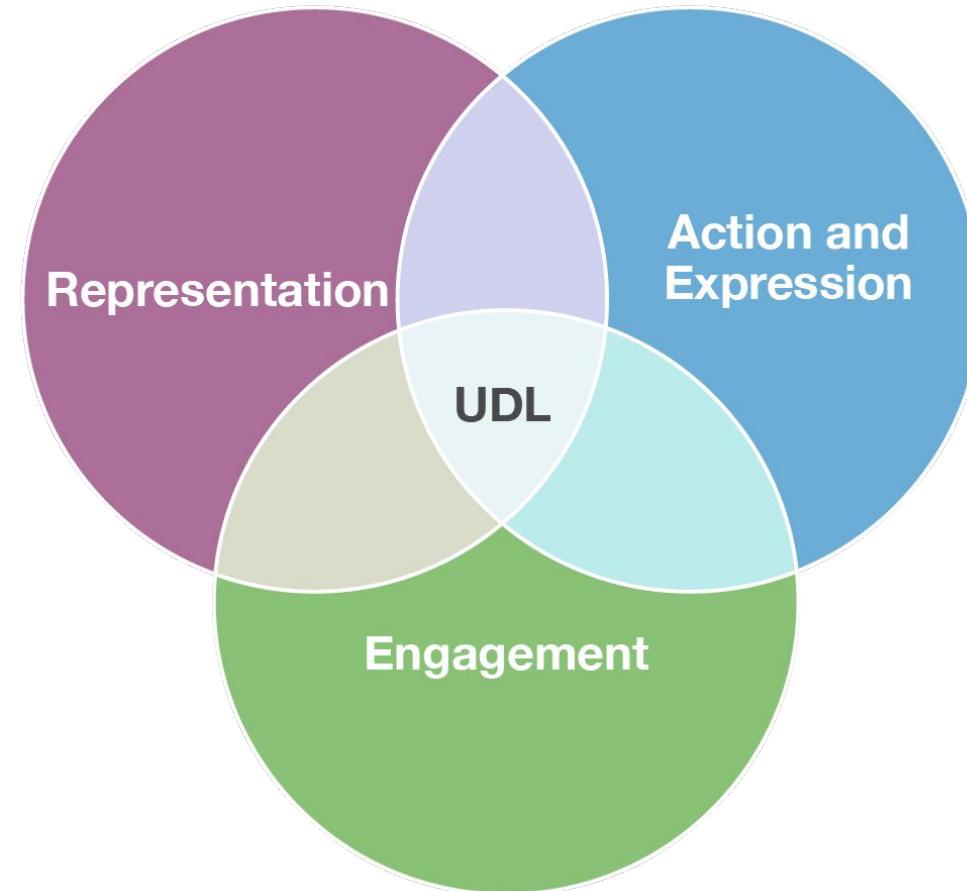
Rethink Space.  
Ignite Learning.

EDspaces



# Universal Design

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



# Universal Design Ties to Design



# PERFORMANCE-BASED DESIGN | Resources + References



## Design for Well-being



## LEED rating system



## WELL rating system



## WBDG Whole Building Design Guide

Beyond Accessibility To Universal Design / UD & UDL



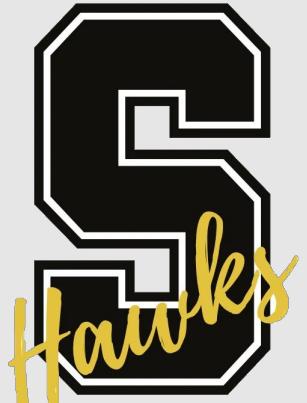
[International Green Construction Code®](#) powered by ASHRAE Standard 189.1



Furniture Comfort, Safety, Sustainability, and Durability Standards

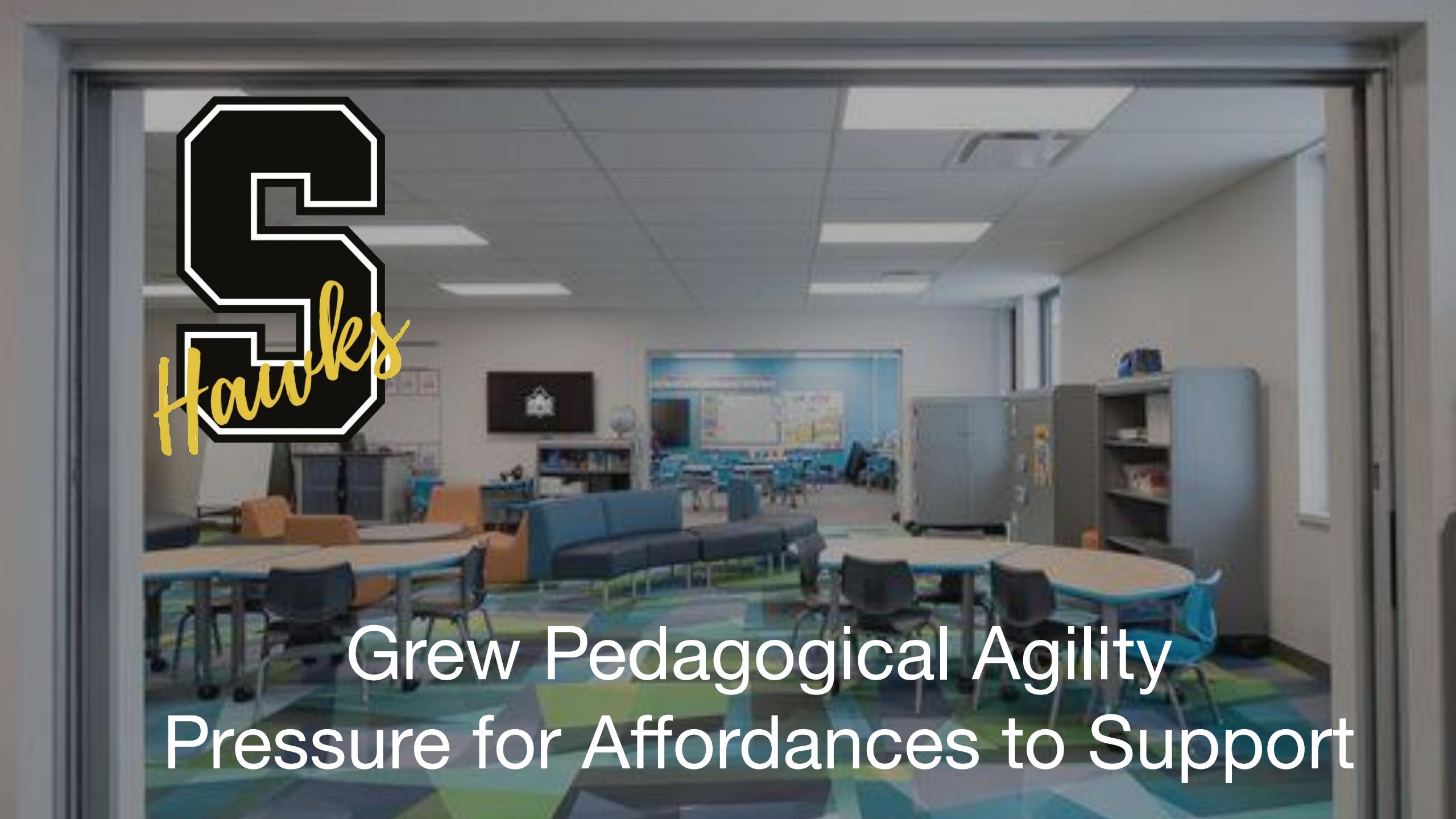
## Question #1 for Panel

*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



A photograph of a modern classroom interior. The room is spacious with high ceilings and recessed lighting. The floor is covered with a large, colorful, geometric rug. In the foreground, there are several round, blue tables with chairs. In the background, there is a large projection screen displaying a colorful image, and a set of grey filing cabinets. The walls are light-colored and decorated with various educational materials and charts.

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.

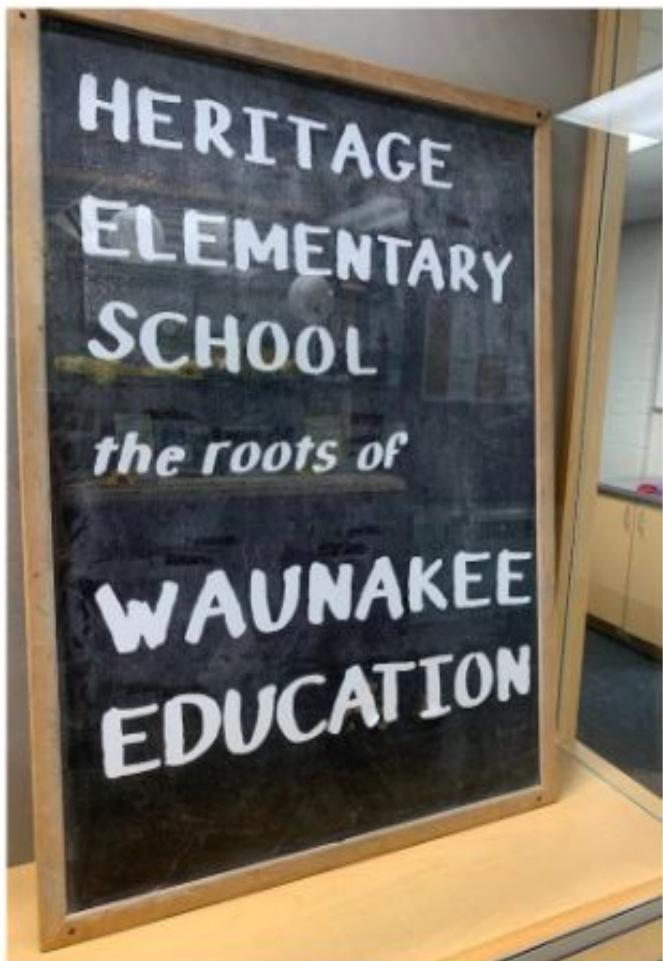




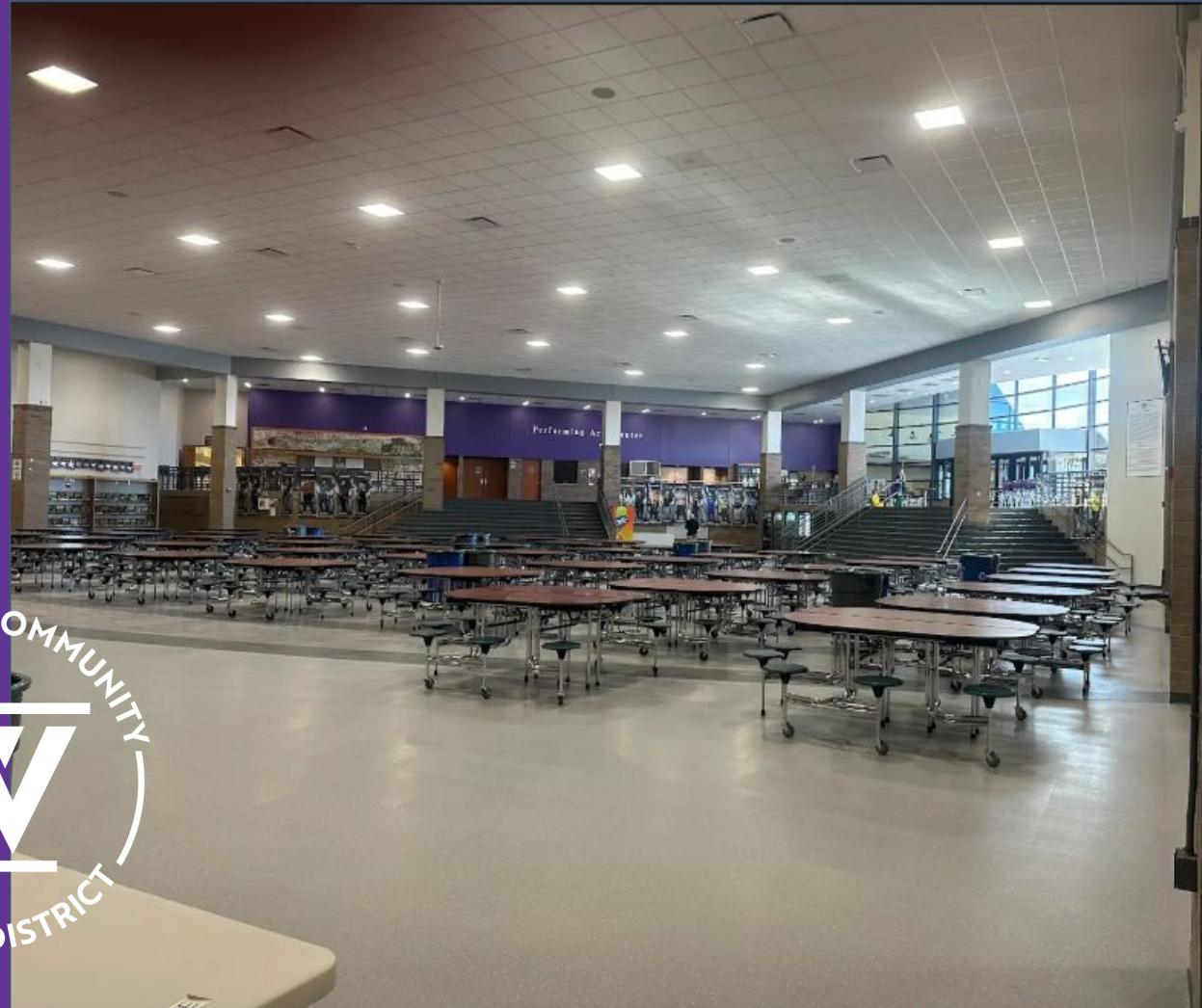


# ROOT and GROW

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

BROWN I  
NOVAK F  
FIELD Hc

27



## **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?*







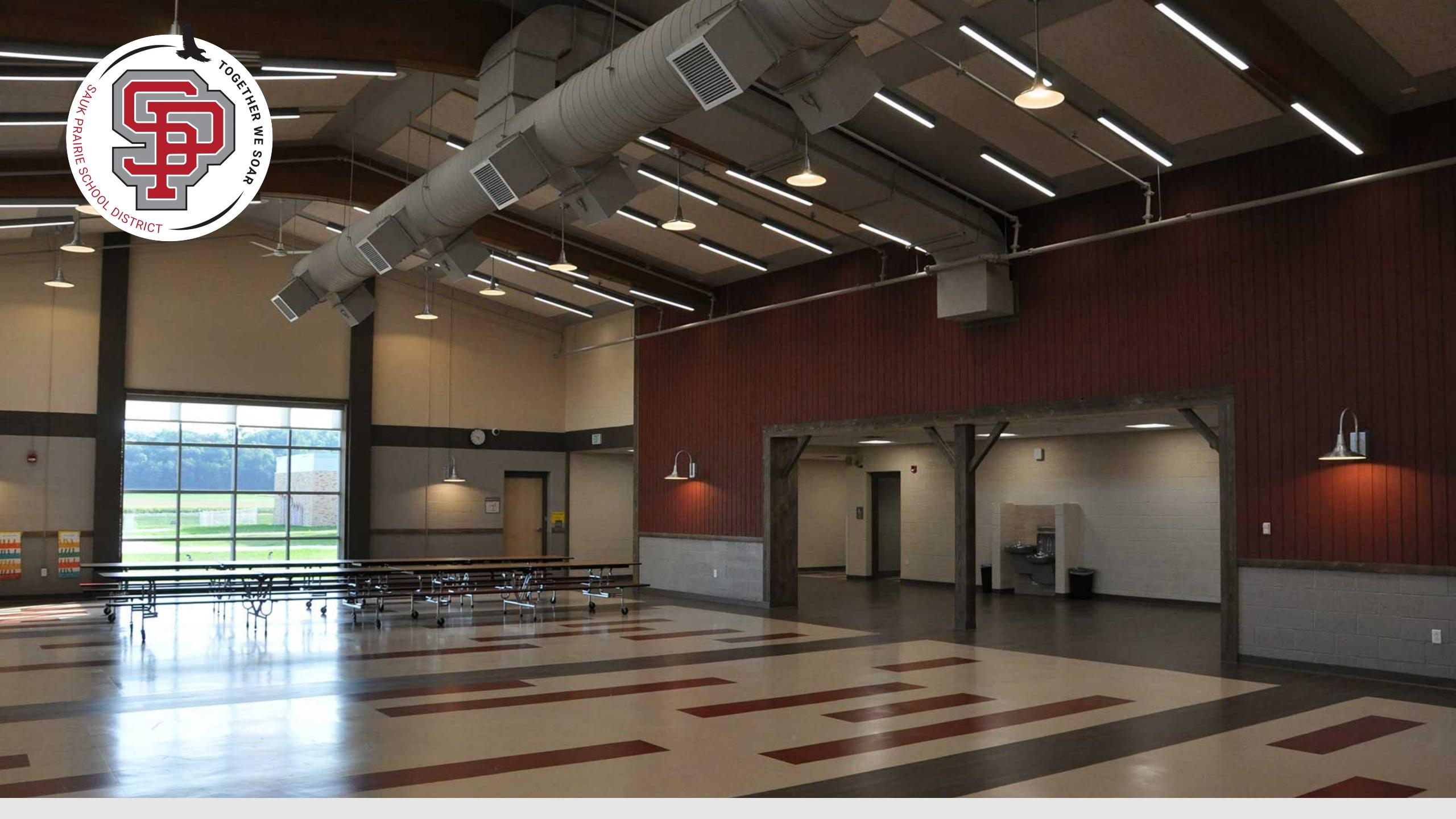


# Learning Places Matters

- Understand the Context
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- Transformation of Learning Spaces

Question #3 for Panel

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





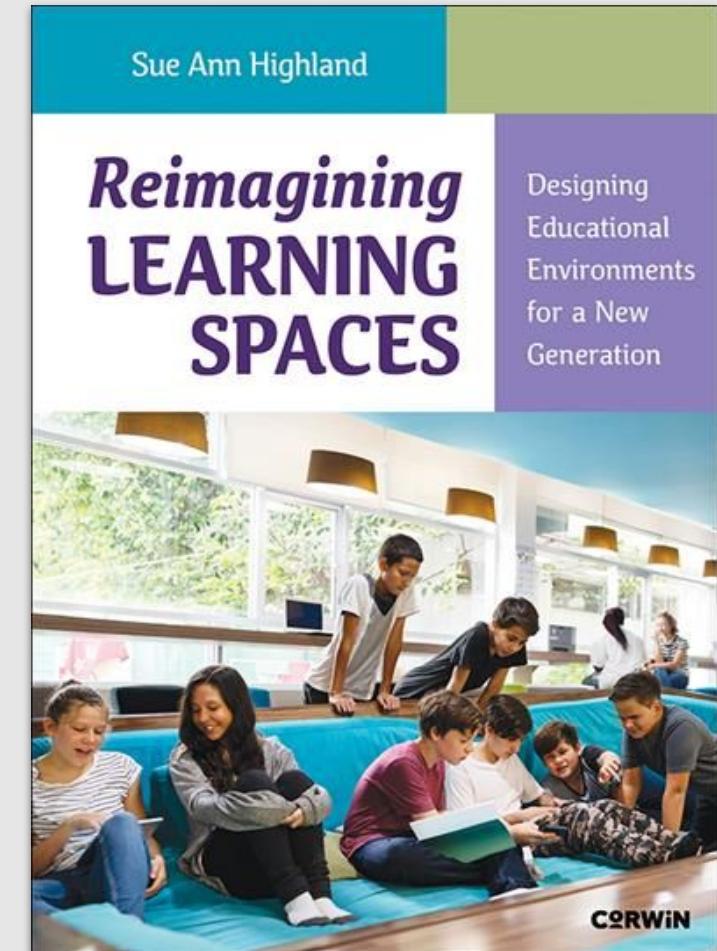
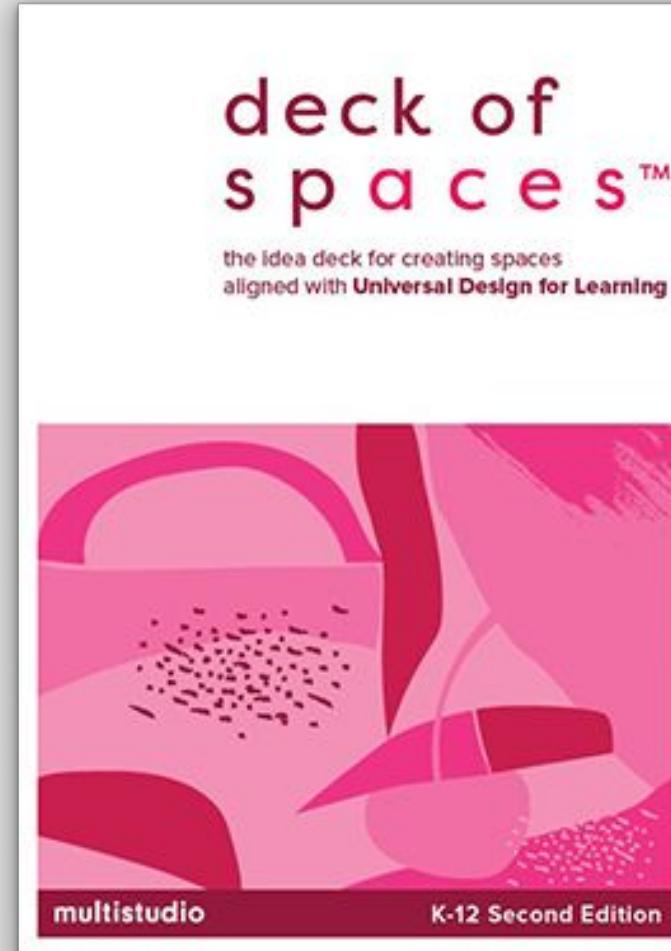
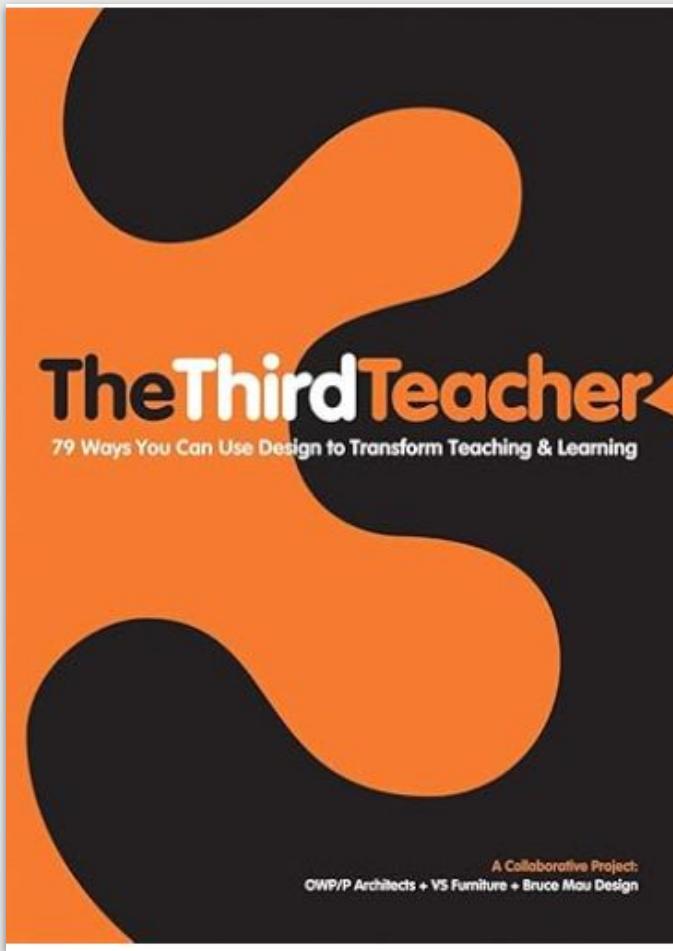


# Audience Takeaways and Questions

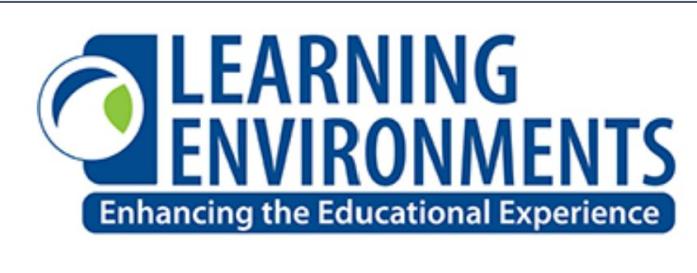


[Modern Learning Spaces: What the Research Tells Us](#)

# 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*

