

# GET ACTIVE

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## Reimagining Learning Spaces for Student Success

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## INTRODUCTION

One of the primary goals educators are tasked with today is to help students become college ready and—more importantly—*career* ready. If you look at modern workspaces, not just in the high-tech industries but most everywhere, you will see that workers are collaborating and connecting across every possible boundary, and with increasing frequency and urgency. Our digital-age workforce relies on dynamic and flexible teams composed of individuals who possess critical thinking skills. Active learning spaces are part of a movement to help today's students become ready for such workplaces so they may better serve the communities in which they'll work and live.

Active learning is a practice and philosophy that supports student engagement. It offers students a variety of learning styles and choices so that they can more easily collaborate with one another, nurture their innate curiosity and creativity, and ultimately succeed. It enables them to go deeper into their education and become immersed in more meaningful learning experiences. Active learning spaces promote student choice, allow for flexibility, and provide profound opportunities to bring the outside world into a student's learning. These spaces also push learning *beyond* the walls of the classroom through blended, flipped, and online learning approaches. It represents a paradigm shift for how we think about learning in school as well as out of school.

This type of multi-disciplined flexibility is, unfortunately, not necessarily a part of the normal skill set that the traditional learning experience instills in students. But it is vital that they learn this way.

Students who become well versed in active learning—earning them the capabilities that colleges, vocational schools, and the workforce demand—will be far more successful than those who are educated in traditional classrooms. It's not that some students can't succeed in a traditional learning environment. Many have. But a more modern, smartly designed learning space offers *more* flexibility and *more* choice to engage students *more* deeply in the process of their own education, thus allowing for *more* adaptable personalized learning approaches that help students to achieve, well . . . *more*.

As schools invest in modernizing their systems, they have to look more holistically in regard to how they design learning environments (both the physical and the blended),

where they spend their money, and how they focus on increasing student engagement and achievement. To have a facilities person strictly focusing on space, an IT person strictly focusing on blended space . . . this doesn't make sense anymore.

It's important to have a variety of skills and expertise at your work table, so make sure that your decision-makers are "all-in" when establishing these new, powerful places of learning. This means you must include leaders in finance, operations, facilities, leadership, instruction, and IT. This book is designed to support multiple stakeholders across *all* team efforts, across *all* boundaries, so that they may create multifaceted plans to help modernize schools—whatever it takes to keep students learning and growing.

Expectations of schools, educators, and students have never been higher. These expectations demand the fostering of new digital-age skills such as literacy, collaboration, and problem solving. It's not just about having education in the classroom becoming more relevant to the outside world: it's about preparing today's students for tomorrow's job skills and helping them to work more efficiently both face-to-face and virtually. Active learning spaces help students build these vital skills while bringing the world into the classroom and allowing for dynamic learning choice.

And creating these vibrant spaces and environments *today* will make classrooms more enduring, adaptable, and accommodating for what learning will look like *tomorrow*. I hope the information and insights provided in this book will help you and your school or district make the important first steps toward bringing the promise of active learning to your students and communities.

—Paige Johnson  
Education Strategist, Intel Corporation  
ISTE Board of Directors

## How to Use This Book

This book is designed to guide thinking about how schools and classrooms can be designed to reflect how students learn and how people work and live in the digital age. Whether you are a classroom teacher, an administrator, a school board member, or an interested parent or community member, you will find information and resources to help you design more responsive, flexible learning spaces that meet the needs of students and teachers.

This book is geared toward the following audiences:

- Teachers who teach in a school environment with a traditional design but would like to make some changes to their classroom arrangement. These individuals will find low-cost, simple suggestions that can help them update their classroom environment.
- Education leaders with progressive pedagogies who feel that their learning spaces are holding back their efforts. These individuals will find strategies for moving an educational community toward more responsive school design.
- School leaders and community members who are planning new buildings or are considering renovating existing schools to accommodate digital-age learners. These individuals will find design suggestions and planning advice to help them update their buildings to reflect how today's students learn best.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) stands at the forefront of the movement to realize the benefits of technology-rich education and transform how teachers teach and students learn in the modern world. The ISTE Standards for Students, Teachers, and Administrators help guide the digital transition in schools and define best practices in learning, teaching, and leading with technology. As you read, look for these different sets of standards as well as many of ISTE's Essential Conditions for effective technology integrations (2015).

Throughout the book, you will find exercises and activities to help you apply the ideas you are reading about to your current school or classroom, or the school or classroom you would like to create. These exercises include reflections and goal-setting prompts, discussion questions, planning documents, and activities that ask you to investigate various topics related to the learning spaces you have and the spaces you would like to design for the future. Of course, you can complete these activities on your own, but you will find them far more valuable if you partner with a colleague to explore your thinking about what you are reading here.

## Overview

Chapter 1, *Learning Spaces of the Future*, provides an overview of the ways in which schools must be designed in order to meet the needs of students and teachers in this digital age.

Chapter 2, *Teaching and Learning in the Digital Age*, describes the most effective instructional methods for helping students develop the skills and knowledge they need to be successful, which is accomplished by integrating technology, pedagogy, and learning spaces to create active learning environments.

After establishing the importance of active learning and active learning spaces, the book focuses its attention on the primary learning space in any school: the classroom. In Chapter 3, *Reimagining the Classroom*, teachers can find practical ideas for designing and furnishing a flexible, student-centered classroom.

In Chapter 4, *Redesigning Your Classroom*, Donna Teuber, Technology Integration Team Leader for South Carolina's Richland School District Two, empowers teachers to reimagine the classroom. She shares a process for redesigning the classroom and provides helpful tips on involving students and overcoming common challenges.

The most effective learning spaces expand beyond the classroom and utilize spaces throughout a school campus for learning. In Chapter 5, *Schools for the Future*, the book shifts its focus to the big picture of school design and explores how spaces like school grounds, entryways, and multi-purpose rooms can be transformed for active learning.

Technology removes limits to where and when learning happens. In Chapter 6, *Digital Spaces for Learning*, ed tech leader and blogger David Jakes explores how virtual spaces extend and enhance learning experiences that are traditionally reserved for the classroom.

Chapter 7, *Planning for Active Learning Spaces*, describes a process for planning a new or updated school building that supports active learning. This chapter lays out the kinds of decisions that need to be made, who should be involved in the process, and how best to make decisions that will support active learning and grow with the times.

## Case Studies

Throughout the book you will read case studies of districts, schools, and classrooms that have used their learning spaces in flexible and innovative ways. These are real-life success stories that illustrate the principles of active learning spaces. In these case studies, you will meet the following educators:

- Kecia Ray, executive director of Learning Technology and Library Services, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, Nashville, Tennessee
- Anthony Saba, head of school, The Academy, Santa Ana, California
- Pamela Kennedy, teacher, Meriwether Lewis Elementary School, Portland, Oregon
- Megan Power, teacher and school designer, Design39Campus, Poway, California
- Michael Delp and Jennifer Felke, co-directors, Weidner School of Inquiry, Plymouth, Indiana



### YOUR TURN

Now that you have a general sense about what is in this book, identify how you want to use it. Answer the following questions to help guide your exploration.

1. Why are you interested in active learning spaces?
2. What is your role in creating active learning spaces? An administrator? Teacher? Interested community member?
3. What is the scope of your project? One classroom or a whole school? A repurposing of an existing structure or a brand new building?
4. Who else might be interested in reading this book or discussing learning spaces for the digital age with you?

Identify three goals you hope to accomplish by the end of reading this book.

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