



FACILITY FOCUS

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DR. GRANT HENDERSON
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MEDICINE HAT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 76
601 - 1 AVENUE S.W.
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Lessons Learned: DESIGNING FOR TOMORROW

BY MELANIE FRANNER



Medicine Hat High School in Medicine Hat, Alberta.

The fundamentals behind getting a good education may have remained the same over the years, but the manner in which

you learn them has changed significantly. And like the lessons themselves, the institutions have also evolved.

A IS FOR ADAPTABLE

Architects have a double role to play in today's educational world. Not only do they need to create a classroom environment that is conducive to learning, they also need to do so in the broader context of looking ahead to accommodate future needs.

"Today's schools require that architects be more aware and that they anticipate how and why the spaces are going to be used," states Mike Woodland, principal, Marshall-Tittlemore Architects (MTA) Ltd., Edmonton. "You have to think about how the demographics may change from year one to 10 years out

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to make sure that you've created spaces that are flexible and adaptable enough."

Flexible and adaptable are instrumental to the designs of today's institutions.

"Requirements change slightly between school districts and between principals, but lately we've seen a trend for schools to have a large gathering space that is usually near the front entrance, as well as small common areas where anywhere from a couple to 10 students can get together," says Janay Stenberg, intern architect, Ferrari Westwood Babits Architects. "These flexible collaborative spaces, as we call them, are available to teachers or students throughout the day."

Having common areas or even classrooms that are adaptable and flexible is part and parcel of how schools are currently being designed.

"You still get dedicated classrooms, like science labs for example, but you also need to accommodate modular classrooms that can be used to teach a variety of subjects and any number of students," explains Woodland.

Dedicated teacher classrooms typically contain lots of storage (be it for art supplies or other hands-on learning tools). They also have more permanent allowances for technology.

"Today's schools usually have Wi-Fi throughout, but the classrooms typically need to accommodate other technology like smart boards, whiteboards and touch screens," says Stenberg. "As a result, these classrooms usually have a designated 'teaching' wall that can accommodate the technology, regardless of what type it is."

B IS FOR BOOKS

Flexible classrooms and common areas aren't the only trends apparent in today's newly designed institutions. Other important elements include an abundance of natural light and a new definition of library.

"The library used to sit at the heart of the school," says Stenberg. "Today, the library is quite a bit smaller and usually



Cardston Elementary School in Cardston, Alberta.

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Passing Grades

Like the lessons being taught within, the institutions themselves have changed over time – opening up new possibilities and creating the structural flexibility needed to adapt to changing needs. One thing for sure, the students are reaping the rewards of a more effective environment, one that encourages creativity and collaboration and, in the process, helps build stronger leaders for tomorrow. ♦



Willow Creek High School in Claresholm, Alberta.

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