

**CREATING A
CLASSROOM SPACE
THAT WORKS**





The Importance of Proper Classroom Design

The sad fact of today's classrooms is that most space is far from ideal. Perhaps they were originally designed and built with little or no consultation with the teachers who would be working in them. Or maybe they were designed for another purpose, or with tight budgetary restrictions.

Whether the space was originally designed for older students (and therefore, larger) rather than small kindergarteners or the classroom is holding more students than it was originally intended for, teachers and other administrators often have to make use of the space that they are given. By ensuring that

furniture fits – the classroom chairs are not too small or too large and tables not too high or low – even the most inconvenient of spaces can be improved to fit students. While teachers probably won't be able to transform an inadequate classroom space into an ideal one, they can make dramatic improvements.

So where to begin? The first thing to consider is the students. Make it your goal to create a physical learning environment that makes your students feel comfortable and best serves their needs.

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Ensure the Classroom Fits the Student's Bodies

Students often struggle to pay attention as the result of overcrowded spaces and furniture that was not suited to their physical size. Imagine sitting at a too-small desk all day in a chair that was too low to the ground and did not properly fit your body – your productivity level would probably not be so great.

Even if you have yet to meet your students, you can estimate the size ranges based on the age group. From here, you can estimate to:

- Choose classroom desks, tables, and chairs that properly fit the students. School Outlet offers standard height and width calculations based on grade ranges.
- Select and arrange shelving and bookcases. Small children should be able to see and be seen by the teacher over any shelf. Any taller shelving should be placed against a wall.
- Determine where to locate display areas like a standing white board, map, etc. This should be at eye-level for your students whenever possible.
- Plan the amount of space needed for class activities. If you have small children that you plan to read to, they should have approximately three inches in between each child in the circle.
- Plan enough space for table work. Keep in mind that when children sit at a table to work, they need "elbow room" and space to spread out materials – this will also play a role in determining desk size.
- Plan enough space for students to comfortably line up at the exit of your classroom. Plan to allow nine inches in between each student for safety and comfort.
- Plan aisles for students to move about the classroom. A general rule of thumb is to be able to allow two children to walk past each other comfortably in a single aisle.

Make necessary adjustments and invite the students to be part of the design process whenever possible.

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Plan Your Classroom for Students With Special Needs

It's important to plan to accommodate students with special needs for their comfort and help them feel a sense of belonging while at school. After a conversation with the student, the student's family, and the team developing the student's education plan, you will get a better idea of the student's needs. Depending on the student and his or her age, your classroom's adjustments might range from minor changes to major adaptations. For example, a child in a wheelchair will require extra space when sitting in a group or maneuvering the classroom.

A child with a learning disability might need his or her own separate space from other students and perhaps a bigger space to spread out. Having more than one teacher in a classroom, such as an aid, will impact classroom design as well, as another adult will need a desk of their own with access to a computer, among other resources.

For more on teaching children with special needs and making accommodations for them when arranging classroom space, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Technical Assistance Program offers many resources here: www.adata.org.

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Consider General Developmental Needs That Affect Classroom Design

While every child is different, there are predictable stages that students go through. By understanding developmental patterns, you can create a classroom that will work with your students. Start by identifying the general traits you can expect from the group of students you'll be teaching.

This information will allow you to be more effective in creating a space that works for most of the students. As the year progresses and you get to know the students individually, you can make adjustments to best meet their needs. For instance, teenagers will want to be very sociable with their friends and your classroom design may have to combat this in order to prevent socialization from taking away from the learning experience. Information such as this will allow you to be more effective in creating a space that works for most of your students.



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Tips on Choosing Classroom Furniture

When choosing school furniture for your classroom, it's important to keep in mind that less is more. One of the biggest and most common mistakes includes overcrowding the classroom with furniture and materials, creating for an over-stimulating environment that is difficult to keep clean. Uncluttered spaces make for the best learning environments. It's important to decide what's essential and to get rid of what is simply taking up space.

Consider these tips when choosing school furniture for your classroom:

- All classroom furniture should serve a purpose and should be relevant to the student's development and curriculum.
- All furniture should be actively used for some part of each day.
- Students should be able to move around easily around the furniture in the room. This is key for safety in the classroom.
- All furniture should be able to be easily cleaned and sanitized.
- All furniture should be in good condition and safe for the children.
- School furniture should be ideal for your student's age group, as mentioned in page 2.



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