

# Classroom Design: Where Aesthetics and Affordability Connect.

Since early 2020, daycare facilities and K12 schools have experienced unprecedented changes. The sudden shift to remote learning for many. Reopening with new healthy and safety protocols. Adjusting classroom instruction to address learning gaps and curriculum changes. Accommodating new needs for individual, small group, whole class, and technology-enabled instruction. And all of this is just a part of what schools and districts are grappling with as they head into the 2022-23 school year.

A critical part of adjusting to these constant changes is rethinking how classroom learning spaces are updated and designed to accommodate rapidly changing instructional needs.

## An Expanding Role for Virtual Reality in Classroom Design

As districts build new schools and update existing classrooms, libraries, and other spaces, there is new emphasis on flexible configurations. Desks and tables that move easily for 1:1 and small group instruction. Areas for quiet independent reading. Centers and learning stations that support STEM and STEAM activities. Places for dramatic play. They're all part of the early learning environment and they all need to happen in a single classroom space.

Designing to meet all these needs and more can be a challenge and that's precisely where virtual reality (VR) tools become practical and highly productive. With virtual reality, educational facilities designers, teachers, and administrators can see how classrooms look and function with new desks, seating, storage, and activity areas. And that same technology can show them how these pieces move around the space to accommodate a range of uses and activities.

Through VR, stakeholders can see how classrooms function when desks come together to become collaborative learning areas. They can see how storage solutions can also function as space dividers. They can understand optimum placement of reading corners, dramatic play items, activity centers, and tech stations and see how these areas can be rearranged to support whole-class activities quickly and easily.

With VR, facilities designers can also see and sense how a learning environment looks and welcomes learners and teachers alike. VR can provide school leaders with a "you are here" experience as they review options for colors, materials, and finishes. This can impact their decisions about how they want spaces to look and function.

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## The Affordability Connection

As every educator will tell you, budgets have always been tight. With the support of VR in the planning and design stages of every construction or renovation project, educators can evaluate a range of options and configurations with an eye not only to function and form, but with the bottom line front and center. Slight changes can have critical budget impacts and the entire process of virtual reality gives classroom designers the tools to show clients options and their effects on the budget for furnishings and accessories.

Nick Schwarz, Chief Operating Officer at Jonti-Craft, a Wabasso, MN-based educational furniture manufacturer noted, "We've made VR a part of standard component of our room design services, because it enables educators and designers to collaborate more closely and accurately. Seeing a classroom come together, trying different furniture pieces and placements, and putting it all in the context of budgets and instructional needs empowers educators to make decisions that work optimally in their learning environments. We think that's essential for schools as they meet current needs and plan for future requirements."

## Equipping Field Staff with the Technology Tools that Matter

Matt Hinkle, Jonti-Craft's National Sales Manager, collaborates closely with the company inside Customer Support Specialists and Dealer Channel Representatives. He explained that these professionals also inspired Jonti-Craft to leverage additional design technology to support the need for compelling visual proposals created in real time, as representatives and designers work onsite with school clients. Jonti-Craft is among the first early childhood furniture designers and manufacturers to launch sales-based design furniture. Said Hinkle, "We now use the KITS Collaborator digital toolset to offer in-field design capabilities to our dealers and end users. This opens the design and product selection process and invites freer exchange of ideas. As room designs take shape, we can generate proposals and options as we collaborate and that streamlines the design and decision-making process.

## Innovation Drives Opportunity

Schwarz explained further, "We've integrated sophisticated technology into our manufacturing and production workflows. It makes sense to tap the power of technology, including VR, to support our clients in the design and specification processes as well. Education evolves rapidly. Our success depends on our ability to stay ahead of the curve and make innovative furniture, storage, activity, and accessories available to schools and daycare centers everywhere. We're learning constantly from our customers and we're using that knowledge to design furniture that will meet the needs of students as they learn, grow, and thrive."

For more information about Jonti-Craft and to see their complete collection of educational products, visit [www.jonti-craft.com](http://www.jonti-craft.com). To contact them directly, email [sales@jonti-craft.com](mailto:sales@jonti-craft.com), or call 507.342.5169.