
TAKING THE FIRST STEPS INTO 21st CENTURY LEARNING
It's more than just handing out iPads



Brief #16
August 27, 2015

So how can we, as educational facilities leaders and professionals, create an environment that delivers education in a way that resembles real world learning/working environments as they exist now and as they will exist in the future? The need to prepare students for a work place that no longer operates in an industrial economic fashion is critical in order to ensure the next generation is ready for a new economy and workplace.

The critical components of learning that allow the modern student to effectively engage with educators and fellow students alike are the foundation for environments that encourage the four C's: critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. This new model of education that focuses on engaging with students in a variety of ways is referred to as 21st century learning and the supporting facilities are 21st century learning environments.

So what defines these 21st century learning environments? The words we most often use are *flexible*, *agile*, and *adaptable*, words that ultimately mean being able to adjust to new conditions, modify for a new use or purpose, and allow flexibility to engage students in a variety of ways. The 21st century learning environments respond, not react, to individual learning styles, teaching styles, and a variety of educational paradigms, including new Common Core standards. Educational facilities, similarly, need to respond to the needs of students, teachers, and community – form follows function – and provide a variety of opportunities for students to experience authentic interaction with real world involvement.

This, of course, means that facility planners must continue striving to identify drivers that produce the educational outcomes schools seek for their students, ones that help owners make informed capital improvement decisions to achieve a new targeted reality. There is much we continue to learn about transforming our K-12 schools into adaptable and flexible spaces and careful capital planning is as important now as it has ever been. Maybe more so.

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The Education Facilities Clearinghouse (EFC) is a program of The George Washington University and the Graduate School of Education and Human Development and is funded by the U.S. Department of Education.