

# Designing a Modern School Library

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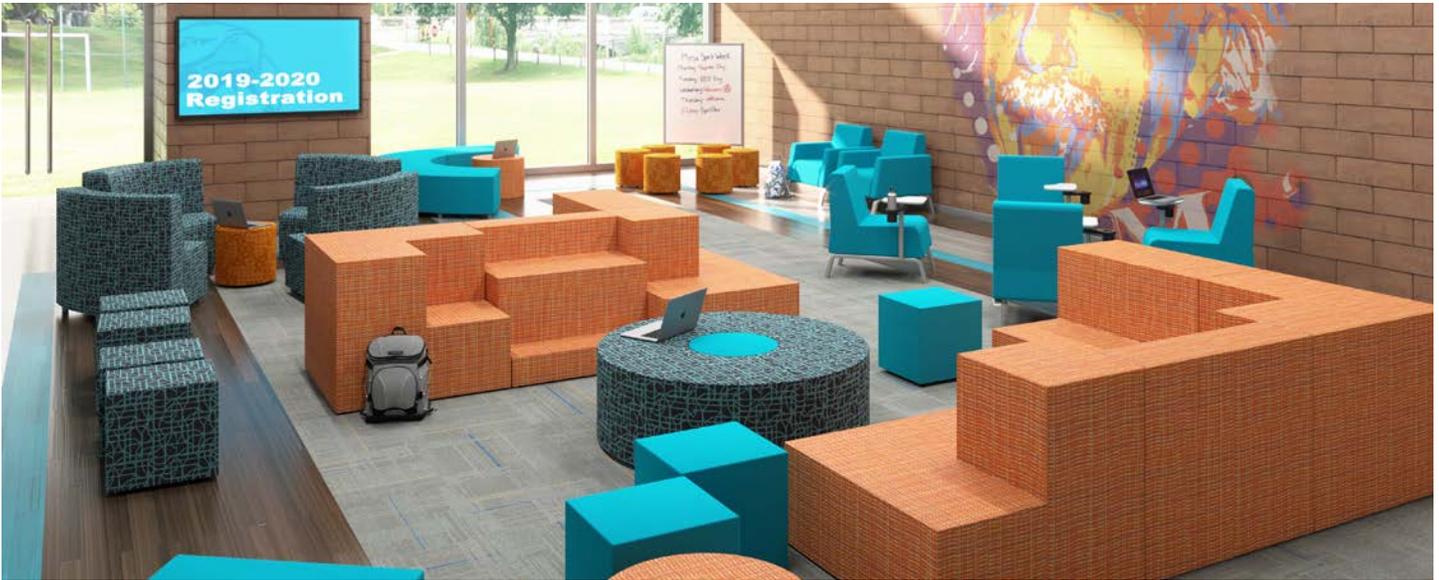


School libraries are no longer places dominated by rows of bookcases, where students sit around blocky wooden tables and study or read quietly. Instead, they're active learning hubs that serve as the epicenter for digital learning and teaching in their school.

Students might be building robots or designing rockets in a makerspace section of the room. They might be recording a video in front of a green screen in another corner or collaborating with their peers to plan a business in yet another section. The media specialist might be leading a discussion

on digital literacy in the center of the room, and students might be sitting at computers doing research. And, oh yeah, individual students might be lounging on soft, comfortable seating located throughout the library, reading or working on laptops.

Today's modern school library is an agile, dynamic space capable of supporting a wide range of 21st century learning activities. The school library is evolving into an active learning commons where students and teachers gather to research, learn, plan, design, create, and collaborate.



This guide is intended to help you reimagine your school library for the future. There are three key steps in this process:

- Understand the role of the modern media specialist and how this is changing.
- Identify all the ways that students, teachers, and other stakeholders might use your modern school library.
- Design the space in a manner that will support each of these activities, paying close attention to the furnishings and other materials.

## 11 ROLES FOR THE FUTURE-READY LIBRARIAN

How is the role of the modern media specialist changing? As part of its **Future Ready Schools** initiative, the Alliance for Excellent Education has answered this question by creating a framework for the “Future-Ready Librarian.”

A library media specialist who is future-ready supports student-centered learning in the following 11 ways, the organization believes.

**Designs collaborative spaces:** A future-ready librarian provides flexible spaces that promote inquiry, creativity, collaboration, and community.

**Leads beyond the library:** A future-ready librarian helps set the school district’s vision and strategic plan for digital learning; fosters a culture of collaboration and innovation to empower teachers and learners.

**Cultivates community partnerships:** A future-ready librarian builds partnerships within the school and local communities to promote engagement and a community of readers.

**Inspires and supports both student and teacher literacy:** A future-ready librarian creates inclusive collections that acknowledge and celebrate diverse experiences. He or she also provides instructional opportunities to empower learners as effective users and creators of information and ideas.

**Invests strategically in digital resources:** A future-ready librarian leverages an understanding of school and community needs to identify and invest in digital resources such as e-books and research databases to support student learning.

**Ensures equitable digital access:** A future-ready librarian provides and advocates for equitable access to digital resources, programming, and services in support of the school district’s strategic vision.

**Curates digital resources:** A future-ready librarian leads in the selection, integration, organization, and sharing of digital tools and resources to support transformational teaching and learning. He or she also develops the digital curation skills of others.

**Empowers students as creators:** A future-ready librarian encourages and helps students to become increasingly self-directed as they create digital products of their learning that engage them in critical thinking, collaboration, and authentic real-world problem solving.



**Builds instructional partnerships:** A future-ready librarian partners with educators to design and implement evidence-based curricula and assessments that integrate deeper learning, critical thinking, information literacy, digital citizenship, creativity, innovation, and the active use of technology.

**Facilitates personalized professional learning:** A future-ready librarian leads professional development for teachers and administrators to cultivate a broader understanding of the skills that ensure success in the digital age—such as critical thinking, information literacy, and digital citizenship.

**Advocates for student privacy:** A future-ready librarian teaches and promotes student data privacy through direct instruction and his or her role as an educational leader.

Think about how the role of library media specialist in your own school or district compares with this framework. Are your media specialists fulfilling all of these responsibilities? If not, should they be? Are there any tasks your media specialists are performing that don't appear on this list?

## **DETERMINING HOW YOUR MODERN SCHOOL LIBRARY WILL BE USED**

Once you've reevaluated the role of media specialist in your school or district and the tasks that he or she is responsible for, the next step is to determine how your library will be used to support these tasks.

Here's some advice on how to accomplish this.

**Form a committee or task force.** Involve representatives from all stakeholder groups in the planning process, including the media specialist, teachers, administrators, students, and parents.

**Hold a brainstorming session.** Get everyone together and let the ideas flow freely. At this point in the process, there is no such thing as a "bad" idea; anything is fair game. Frame the conversation by presenting the roles of the media specialist, your library program's mission and goals, and how these fit in with the district's overall mission.



Here are some questions to help guide the discussion:

- What kinds of formal learning activities will take place in our modern school library? What kinds of informal learning opportunities will we offer? How will these advance our mission and goals?
- What do we want students to feel when they walk into the space? What tone should it set for learning?
- How will we encourage teachers to bring their classes to the library? How will we inspire students to drop in during their free time or for independent study? How can we get them to stay?
- Will our library be open for use by the larger community as well? If so, for what purposes?

**Prioritize your ideas.** Once you have a comprehensive list of suggestions for how your modern school library might be used, arrange them into three categories: high priority (uses that are non-negotiable), significant (those that would be nice to try if you can make it work), and low priority (uses that are luxury items or even pipe dreams).

In making out your lists, think about how each idea aligns with the goals for your library program, the roles you envision for your media specialist, and your district's overall mission and learning goals—and give higher priority to those that closely align with these concepts.

**Invite public comment.** Before you move any further, give all stakeholders a chance to comment on your ideas. Invite public feedback through a variety of channels, such as in a school or district newsletter and on social media.

## IDEAS TO INSPIRE YOU

There's no doubt you'll come up with lots of great ideas in your brainstorming session. To get you started, however, here are just a few ideas for how today's modern school library is being used in schools nationwide.

- Media literacy, information literacy, and digital citizenship instruction
- Professional learning for teachers and administrators
- Collaborative lesson planning between teachers and media specialists
- Independent and/or collaborative student research
- Reading and literacy initiatives
- Collaborative group work and project-based learning
- Makerspace activities
- Video production and sound mixing/recording studio
- Innovation incubator
- Student coffeehouse or café
- Literature clubs or book talks
- Public lectures and discussions

## CREATING THE PHYSICAL SPACE FOR YOUR MODERN SCHOOL LIBRARY

Once you have a clear idea for how your library will be used and for what purposes, it's time to reimagine the physical space to support these activities. Here are four key questions to guide you.

***How can we achieve our design goals through some combination of learning zones and movable, agile furniture that can serve multiple purposes?***

It goes without saying that the design of a learning space should seamlessly support the kinds of activities that take place there. One way to design a modern school library that can serve multiple purposes is to create separate zones for accommodating various types of activities.



For instance, you could have separate, distinct areas for creating, presenting, collaborating, and investigating. Each of these zones would be equipped with furniture, tools, and materials that are appropriate for those tasks. The presenting zone might be equipped with an interactive whiteboard and projector, while the creating zone could include makerspace tables with built-in shelving to store materials.

Of course, not every type of activity will have its own learning zone; there simply isn't enough space to create distinct zones for every possible use of your library. This is why you should consider using flexible, agile furniture that can be moved around easily to create various spatial configurations to support your learning goals—such as movable shelving and tables that can be configured in multiple ways.

Using fixed zones to support some activities and flexible, agile spaces to support others will help you design a space that aptly serves multiple purposes. Think about which kinds of activities make the most sense to support with permanent, fixed zones and which you can support with flexible, multiuse spaces—and then design your modern school library around these principles.

***How can we achieve our design goals by using multiple seating styles that give students numerous options?***

In furnishing the space, you'll want to match different seating styles to the types of activities they support most effectively.

For instance, tables that can be pushed together in configurations seating two, three, four, or five students are perfect for supporting small-group collaboration with flexible group sizes. Soft, comfortable chairs are great for students who want to sit and read or work independently. Nook pods are perfect for pairs of students who want some privacy as they work together on projects.

The key is to offer a variety of choices, so students can work where they'll be most comfortable and productive to accomplish the task at hand.

***How will we balance the need for storage and materials with the need for instructional spaces?***

As resources are moving to electronic formats, physical library collections are shrinking in size—and this creates more space for learning to occur. But unless you've gone to an all-digital model, your library is still likely to contain at least some books.

In designing the space, you'll need to consider how much space you should devote to storage and display of physical materials and how much you'll carve out for learning, creating, and collaborating. Also, think about where the circulation desk should go in relation to other activities and where to place high-priority items so they're seen by the most people.

***How will we support digital learning with the proper technology infrastructure?***

If students will be researching, creating, and collaborating using laptops, Chromebooks, or tablets, they'll need electrical outlets for charging these devices. Think about how you can support this need with tables and soft seating that contain built-in power supplies, so students can work comfortably wherever they want to without being disrupted by a dead battery.



**THE FINAL WORD ON MODERN SCHOOL LIBRARIES**

The modern school library is a multi-use space for the entire school community. It's a learning commons that serves as a central hub for digital learning and teaching in a school or district, and the design of this critical space should reflect this new reality.

To learn how School Specialty's Projects By Design division can help you design a modern school library that effectively supports your learning goals, call (800) 305-0174, email [projectsbydesign@schoolspecialty.com](mailto:projectsbydesign@schoolspecialty.com), or go to [www.schoolspecialty.com/projects-by-design](http://www.schoolspecialty.com/projects-by-design) today.