



Westminster Christian Academy



Jim Marsh, Head of School at Westminster Christian Academy wanted the school's new campus to be a welcoming community for its students, with informal "neighborhoods" that would encourage lots of interaction. He also wanted the space to be flexible and adaptable to meet changing needs. Herman Miller's extensive knowledge about today's learning environments helped his vision become a reality.

**EDUCATION;
TOWN & COUNTRY, MISSOURI**

Topic:

*Collaboration
Performance*

Application:

*Café/Dining
Formal Learning
Open Office
Private Office*

Project Scope:

310,000 square feet

Herman Miller Product:

*Canvas Office Landscape™
Resolve® System
Aside® Chairs
Caper® Chairs
Mirra® Chairs
Eames® Tables
Everywhere™ Tables
Tu® Filing and Storage*

Year Completed:

2011



The ability to easily move tables and chairs around is key to accommodating different classes or teaching styles.

Westminster Christian Academy is a Christian school offering world-class education. After experiencing tremendous growth, they were planning to build a new, larger campus. Jim Marsh, head of the school, had a clear vision for what he wanted that campus to be: A welcoming community for its 7-12 grade students, made up of informal “neighborhoods” that would encourage interaction and support new ways of learning.

At the same time, he wanted the space to be extremely flexible and adaptable to meet changing needs, both on a day-to-day level and in the future. “Who knows what classrooms will look like in five or 10 years?” he asks. “We wanted to design our spaces so that we can make changes down the road if necessary.”

WHAT A SCHOOL SHOULD LOOK LIKE

“To build a 70-acre campus literally from the ground up gave us a wonderful opportunity to create the type of school we wanted,” says Zach Clark, director of advancement for the school, and project team member. “Rather than thinking about what a school is ‘supposed’ to look like, we started with our vision for teacher/student interaction: What should that look like? Herman Miller, with its wealth of knowledge on learning environments and how people work best, made a great partner for us in achieving our goals.”

“Flexibility and adaptability were our key design priorities,” emphasizes Marsh. “We wanted classrooms to be set up so that teachers and students could easily change things around to accommodate different scenarios, say, when they needed to move closer together for collaboration, circle around the teacher, or whatever they needed to do for any particular class.”

BUILT-IN FLEXIBILITY

They also wanted plenty of open spaces nearby where people could move tables and chairs in and out as necessary—to accommodate gatherings large and small—and where virtually nothing was built in to limit their options.

“For example, originally, we were going to have built-in cabinets and storage in the classrooms, but we didn’t want anything to prevent us from using the space differently in the future,” says Marsh. “So everything is on casters and as time goes by and needs become more evident, we can make changes. And that’s all because of the mobile solutions Herman Miller offered us.”



OVERALL VALUE

Although going with built-ins may have been slightly less expensive initially, the team looked at the bigger picture says Charles Waldron, owner's representative for the school, who was involved in purchasing decisions. "I'm a budget guy, so to me, it was about finding the best value, which I define by looking at functionality, warranty, construction, and pricing. We viewed many different options; in fact, we tried a lot of furniture out beforehand to see what the teachers liked, and then went through the selection process based on those criteria."

CHANGEABLE CLASSROOMS

In the classrooms, Resolve tables and Caper chairs on casters give teachers—and students—more control over how they work and interact. "The kids love having rollers on their tables and chairs instead of having to drag a desk around," says Peggy Johnson, director of admissions. "They say it's a very 'freeing' environment, and I think it contributes to their creativity, too."

Jim Foppe, sales representative at Interior Investments, the Herman Miller dealer in St. Louis, points out that tables move up and down as well, "which is good because you're dealing with seventh through twelfth graders, and what fits a big senior football player may not work for a 12-year old."

All the mobility is much easier for maintenance people who can quickly move things around for cleaning, he adds.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

In the offices, a combination of Resolve workstations and Canvas Office Landscape supports the administration; those needing more privacy have screens and all have Mirra chairs. "It's a very collaborative space now, and it's really changed the way we work," says Johnson, noting that at first, people were skeptical that they'd have enough room to store everything. "But it's turned out beautifully. We've reduced clutter; it's more 'minimalist' and people love how everything is coordinated throughout the entire school, no more random brown bookshelf here and a beige file cabinet there."

Tu filing and storage, with its full-frame steel construction was built for long-term performance and has proved ideal in a variety of settings. The Everywhere tables, used in large, open spaces, work well because they set up easily and store efficiently on racks.

[left] Eames tables, paired here with Caper chairs on casters, come in a variety of sizes and shapes to meet different needs.

[right] Aside chairs and Everywhere tables work well in informal gathering spots, shown here adjacent to a Canvas Office Landscape workstation.



The school wanted as much flexibility as possible, so everything is very mobile, such as Tu storage and Everywhere tables, shown here with Resolve workstations, which were used in classrooms and administrative areas.

“Everything is very attractive, contemporary, and durable; you can just tell it has the look and feel of quality,” observes Marsh.

GATHERING IN THE NEIGHBORHOODS

The open community spaces, with a variety of furniture “vignettes,” are proving to be popular with everyone. Students can be seen working together or alone, some lounging with their laptops, some at tables with their friends. Parents, too, use the community spaces—nearly 80 percent of them volunteer in some way—and they enjoy all the options for gathering as much as their offspring do.

“It’s great to have all these places where spontaneous conversations can take place, which are sometimes the most meaningful interactions of all,” says Clark.

“Having these common neighborhoods is way of making the school feel ‘small,’ like it’s their little world, which is what everyone wants,” he adds. “Filling these spaces with furniture and equipment is really what puts the meat on the bones.”

IT’S WORKING

Indeed, says Marsh, “We’ve created a whole campus where kids can study or just hang out wherever they want to. And even though we have a thousand people here, it never feels crowded in any one given space; it has a really great community feel to it, and we’ve received nothing but positive comments on it from our community.”

Perhaps Clark summed it up best by saying, “Every school talks about the importance of the learning experience and how committed they are to providing a good environment for it. It’s easy to say that, but doing it is a lot different. Working with Herman Miller and Interior Investments allowed us to live our commitment and truly empower our teachers and students with the flexibility they need to perform at their best. And it’s neat to see that it’s really working.”

© 2011 Herman Miller, Inc. Zeeland, Michigan
© Herman Miller Aside Caper, Eames, Mirra, Resolve, and Tu are among the registered trademarks of Herman Miller, Inc.

™ Canvas Office Landscape and Everywhere are among trademarks of Herman Miller, Inc.