
Centering Wellbeing through Learning Spaces

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Wellbeing Research

The Human-Centered Design Research Process

6 months

Global research study

43

Interviews

5

Countries included

3

Student workshops and
focus groups

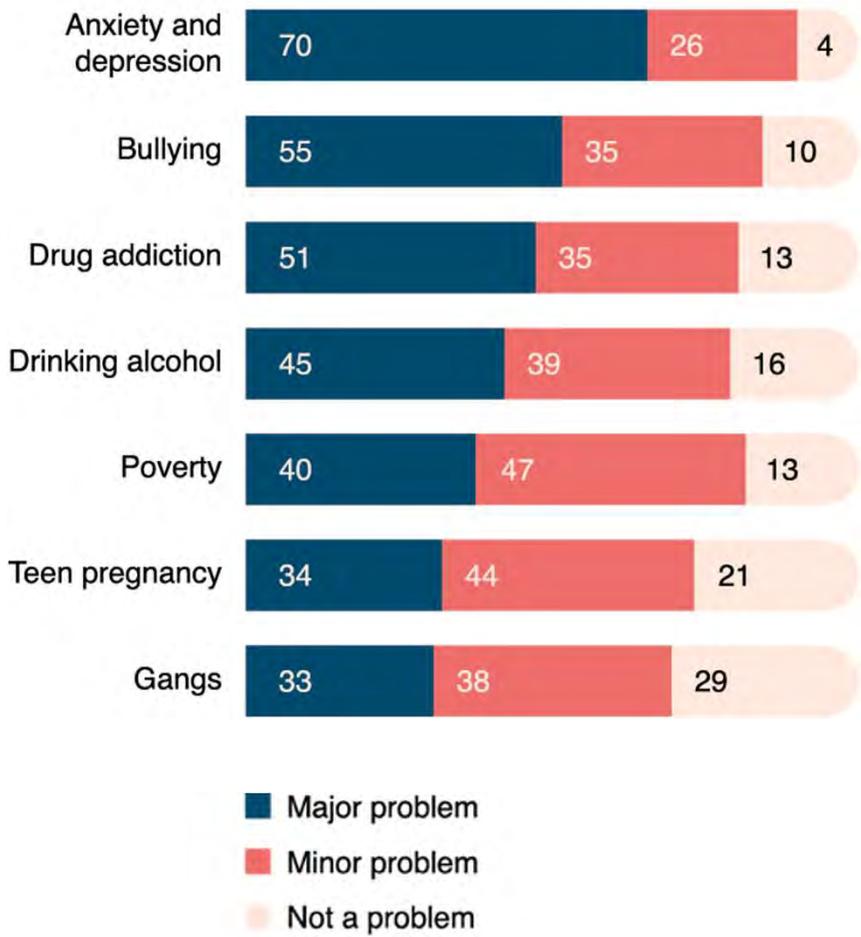
What We're Learning

Students and educators are experiencing “ill-being.”

“I wish parents and educators knew the amount of work I put into my schoolwork and extracurriculars. Sometimes we just need a break.”

High School Student, USA

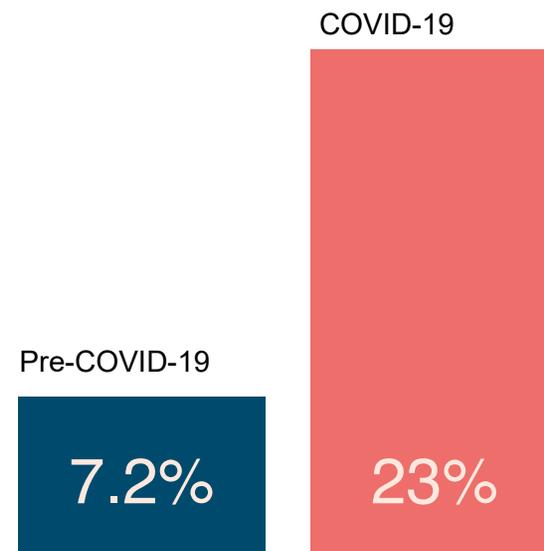
Anxiety, depression top teen problems



Source: Pew Social Trends 2019

Low mental health ratings exacerbated by Covid-19

ACLU youth committee survey, April 2020



Students who rated their mental health a 3 or lower (on a scale 1-10).

“I don't even think I have thought about my own faculty wellbeing until you asked about it. That's sad.”

Assistant Professor of History, USA

40%

of teachers leave
the profession
within five years
in the U.S.

Why?

Burnout

Workload

Unreasonable
expectations

High stress

Lack of support

How are you addressing these issues in your school design?



In The Chat

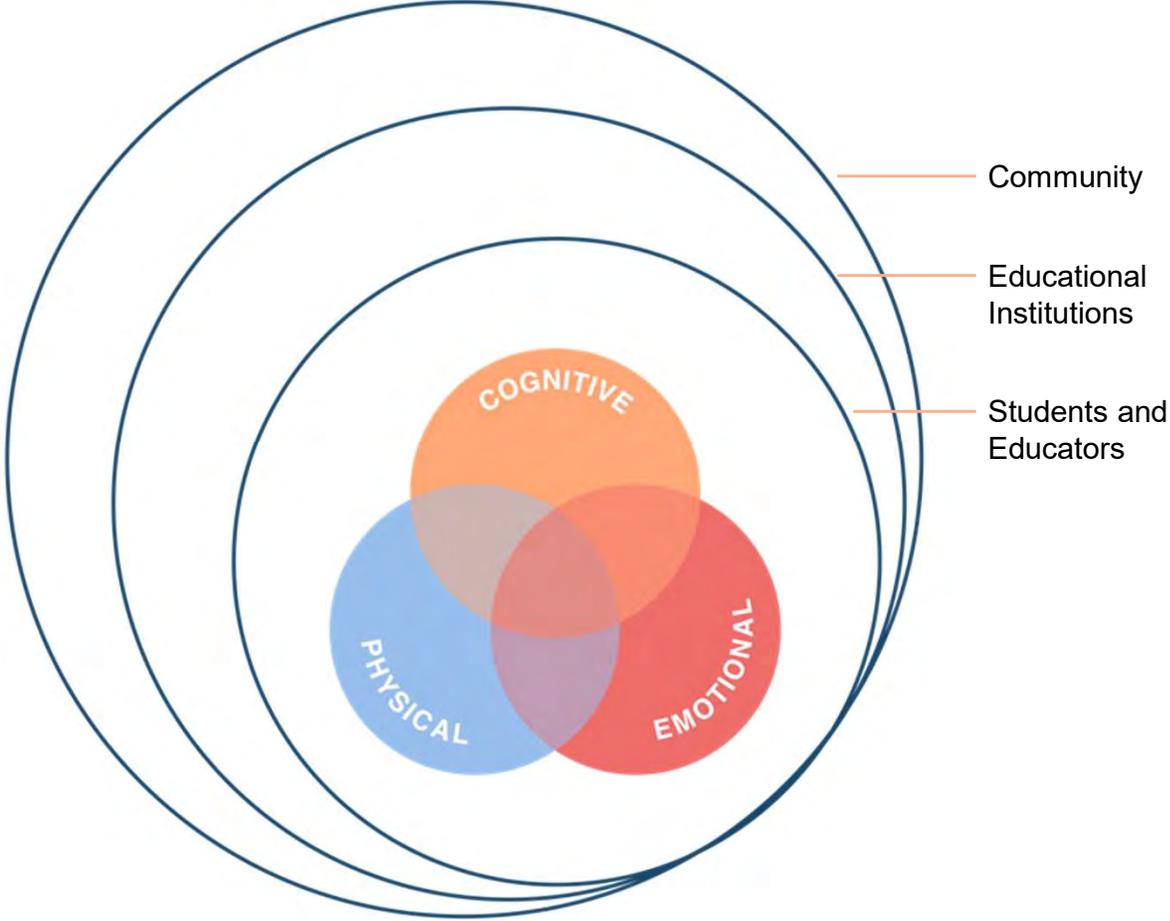
Review and Reflect



An Expanded Wellbeing Definition



Wellbeing Is More than an Individual Assessment



Defining Wellbeing

Six Pillars of Wellbeing

- **MEANING** to create purpose
- **BELONGING** to be part of
- **AUTHENTICITY** to be oneself
- **MINDFULNESS** to be aware and open
- **OPTIMISM** to be positive
- **VITALITY** to be healthy and active



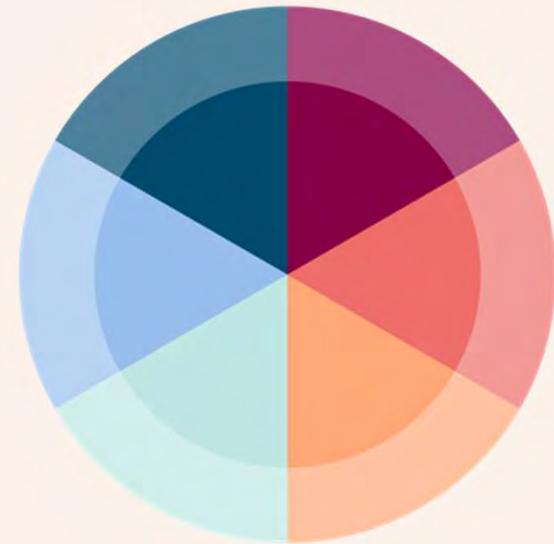
Defining Wellbeing

Wellbeing must be
considered for
**students and
educators**



Defining Wellbeing

Wellbeing must be
considered for
**educational
institutions**

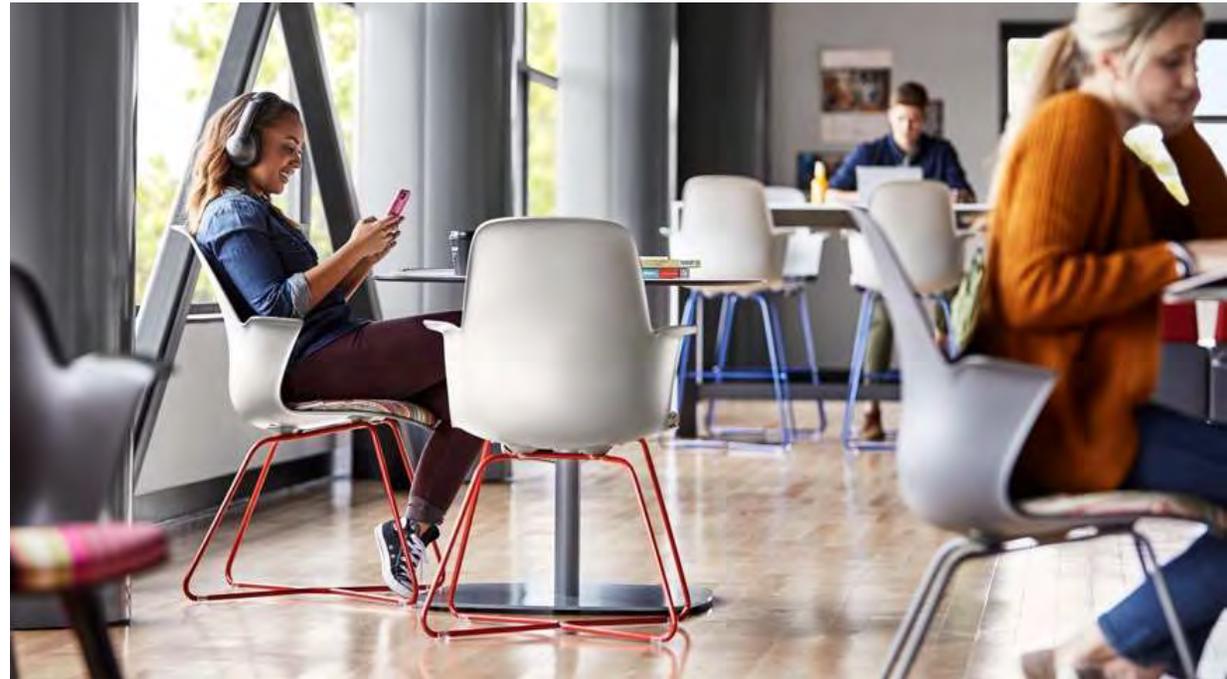


Defining Wellbeing

Wellbeing must be
considered for
the community



How might space promote and nurture wellbeing?



Designing for Wellbeing

Spatial Typologies

Spatial Typologies

Dedicated

Spaces that are specifically designed to foster wellbeing.

Wellbeing Centers

Mindfulness Rooms

Counseling Offices

Fitness Centers

Nap Rooms

Yoga Studios

Student Service Center

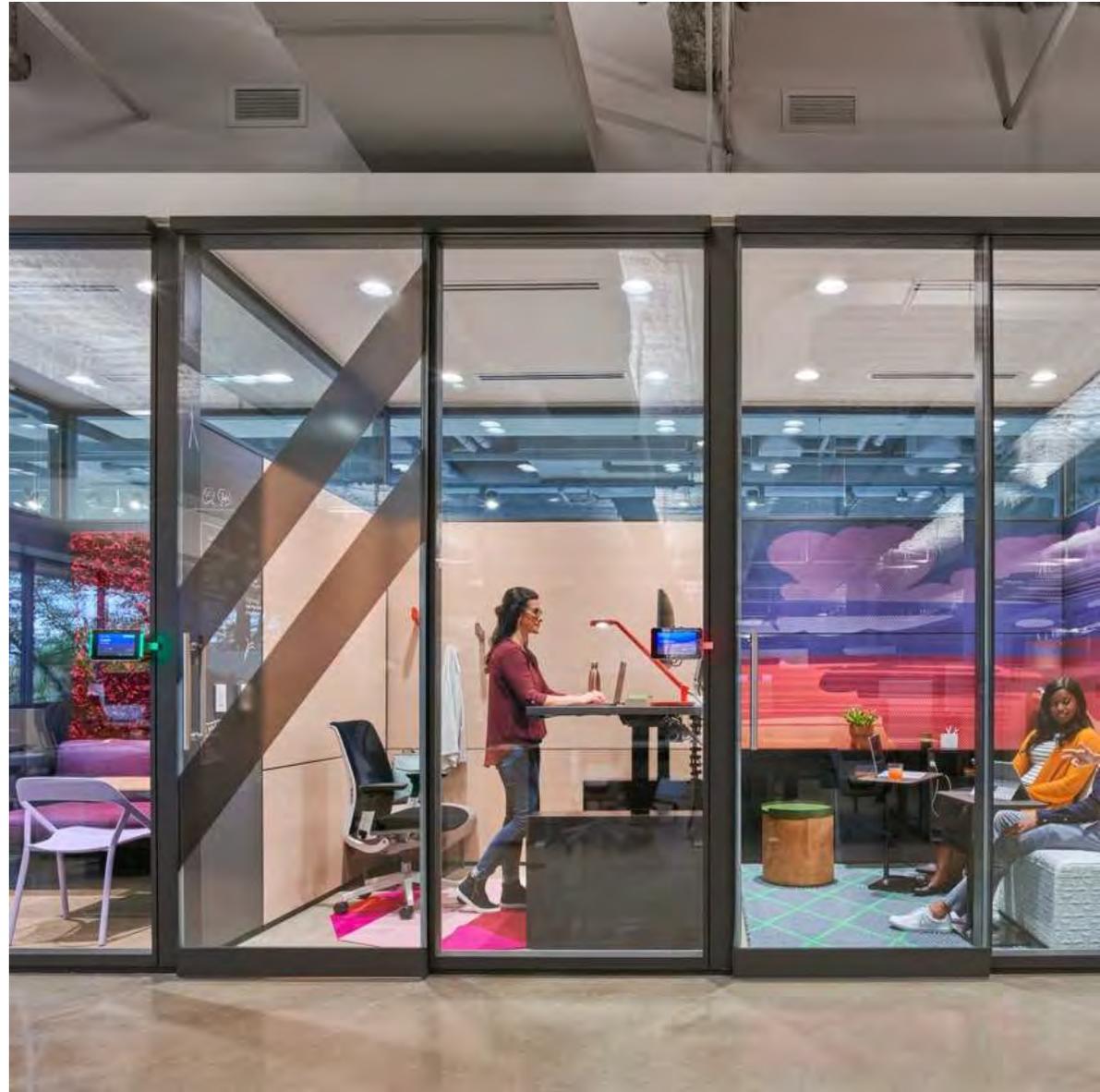
Spirituality Rooms

Anxiety Rooms

Mother Rooms

Sensory Rooms

Winter Gardens



Spatial Typologies

Embedded

Spaces that cultivate wellbeing within the context of the room's primary function.

Learning Spaces

Common Spaces

Transition Spaces

Libraries

Student Unions

Cafes

Outdoor Spaces

Staff Spaces

Teacher Lounges



Designing for Wellbeing

Design Methodologies

Designing for Wellbeing

Design for Inclusivity

Welcoming and Accommodating

Invites everyone to use space safely, easily and with dignity

Responsive and Flexible

Space considers what people need and want, and is useful in different ways



Designing for Wellbeing

Biophilic Design

Environmental Features

Natural Shapes and Forms

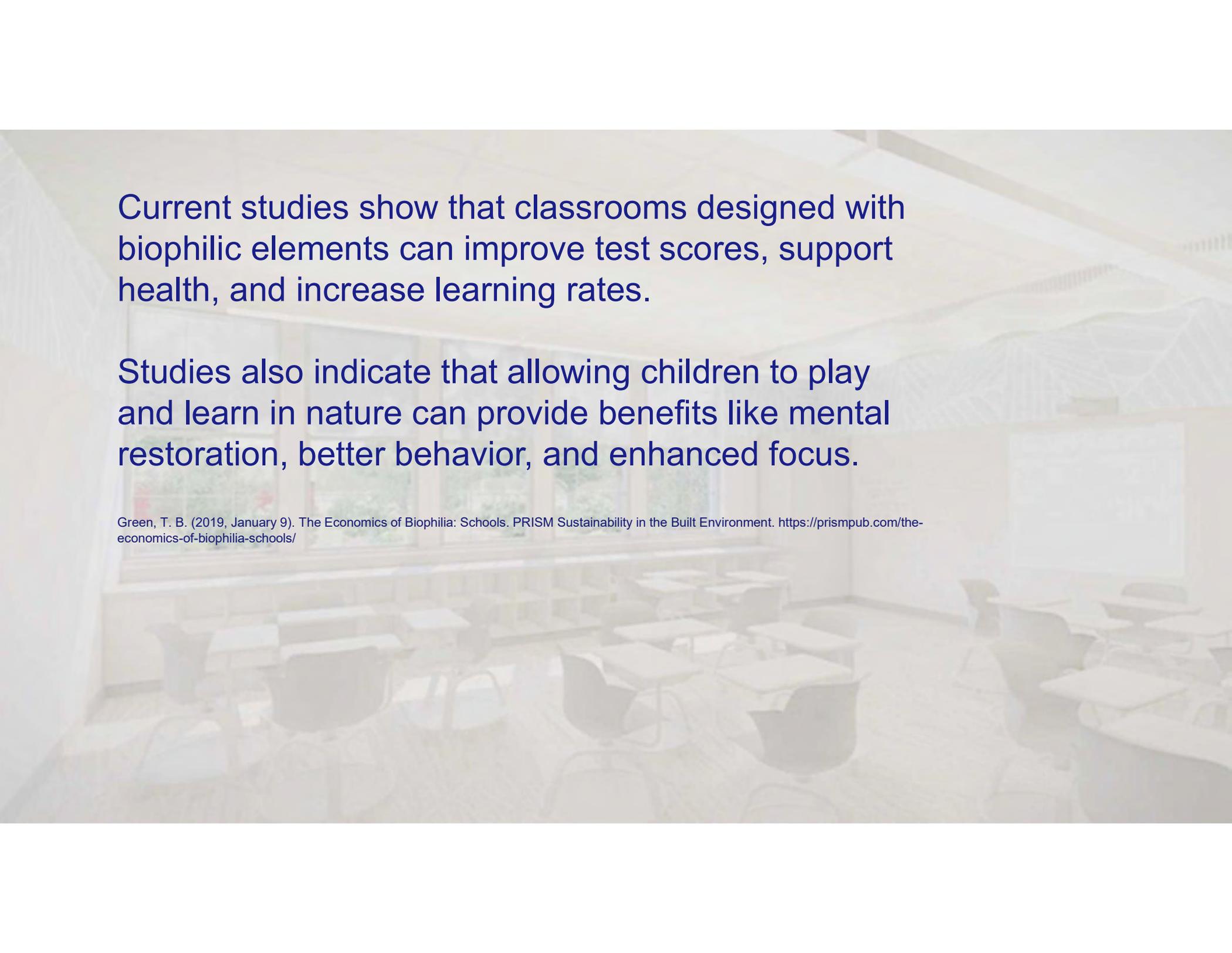
Natural Patterns and Processes

Light and Space

Place-Based Relationships

Evolved Human-Nature Relationships





Current studies show that classrooms designed with biophilic elements can improve test scores, support health, and increase learning rates.

Studies also indicate that allowing children to play and learn in nature can provide benefits like mental restoration, better behavior, and enhanced focus.

Green, T. B. (2019, January 9). The Economics of Biophilia: Schools. PRISM Sustainability in the Built Environment. <https://prismpub.com/the-economics-of-biophilia-schools/>

Designing for Wellbeing

Design Principles

Designing for Wellbeing

Design Principles

The 6 Pillars

- **MEANING** to create purpose
- **BELONGING** to be part of
- **AUTHENTICITY** to be oneself
- **MINDFULNESS** to be aware and open
- **OPTIMISM** to be positive
- **VITALITY** to be healthy and active



Wellbeing Pillars

Meaning

to create purpose

SPACE ATTRIBUTES SUPPORTING MEANING

Connect to the Wider Community

Expand the spaces in which students and educators interact with and create meaning with the wider community

Create Purpose

Spaces that allow students to learn and express purposefulness, value and significance

Inspire Awe

Create spaces that expose students to new ideas, challenging perspectives and elements that invoke wonder

Reflect on the **skills and accomplishments that you would like to/have achieve** in your professional life (Resume Virtues)

Reflect on the **aspects of you that you would like to be recognized for in the later years** of your life (Legacy Virtues).

Place them in the corresponding columns.

Resume Virtues

What skills have you developed?

What successes or accomplishments have you achieved?

What influence have you managed to gain in the world and for what purpose?

Legacy Virtues

What did you stand for?

How did you make people feel?

What did you do for others and society?

What gifts did people feel they received from you?



Belonging

to be part of

SPACE ATTRIBUTES

Create Welcoming and Inclusive Environments

The ability of students to see their identity reflected in their surroundings ensures that all students feel comfortable and welcome in the space

Foster Connection and Community

Create spaces that expose students to new ideas, challenging perspectives and elements that invoke wonder

Be Seen and Be Heard

Spaces that allow all students to be truly seen and heard

FITTING IN

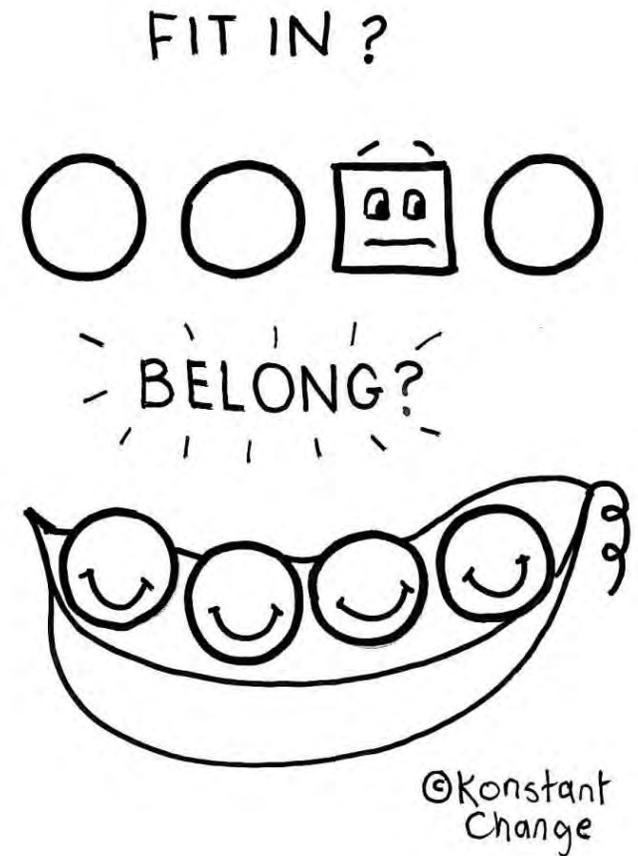
Assessing a situation and becoming who you need to be to be accepted

Being somewhere you really want to be, and they don't much care

BELONGING

Being accepted for who you are

Being somewhere you want to be, and they want you





Authenticity

to be oneself

SPACE ATTRIBUTES

Enable Agency

Spaces that allow students to author their spaces, freely moving and manipulating the elements of environment to construct their own learning, and educators their own teaching

Encourage Discovery and Expression

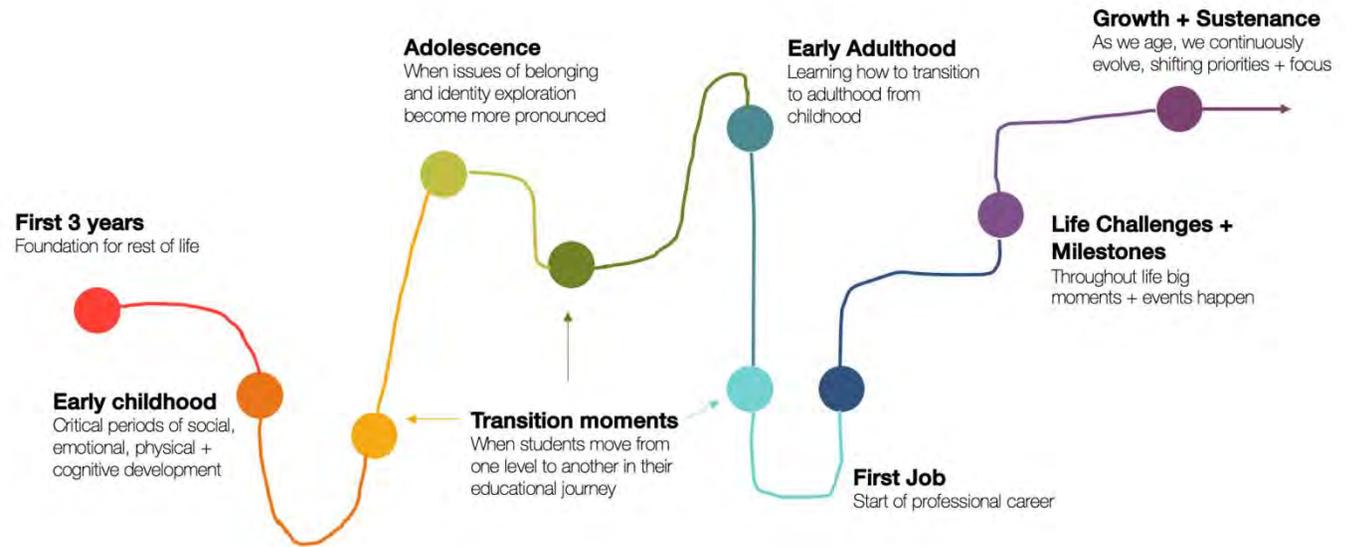
Create safe spaces that allow student to express and explore themselves and their passions and support diverse expression of ideas and learning

Foster a Sense of Value

Create spaces where all students and educators feel like they have something to contribute and can make a difference

In youth, we go through critical periods of development around identity.

Our youth is a time for identity exploration, growth, and creation.



Industrialized Education

**What do you want to be
when you grow up?**



Human-Centered Education

**WHO do you want to be?
What problems do you want to
solve?**



Wellbeing Pillars

Mindfulness

to be aware and open

SPACE ATTRIBUTES

Create Sensory Richness

Spaces that allow students to pay attention using multiple senses

Create Refuge and Renewal

Spaces where students and educators can retreat to calm down, reset and refocus

Exposure to Diversity

Spaces where students and teachers interact with a diverse range of others, practicing empathy, openness and listening

Mindfulness, the miracle skill

A learned skill that changes our brains and has multiple impacts on learning.



attention
self-esteem
compassion for self + others
sleep quality
metacognition
executive cognitive function

increases

decreases

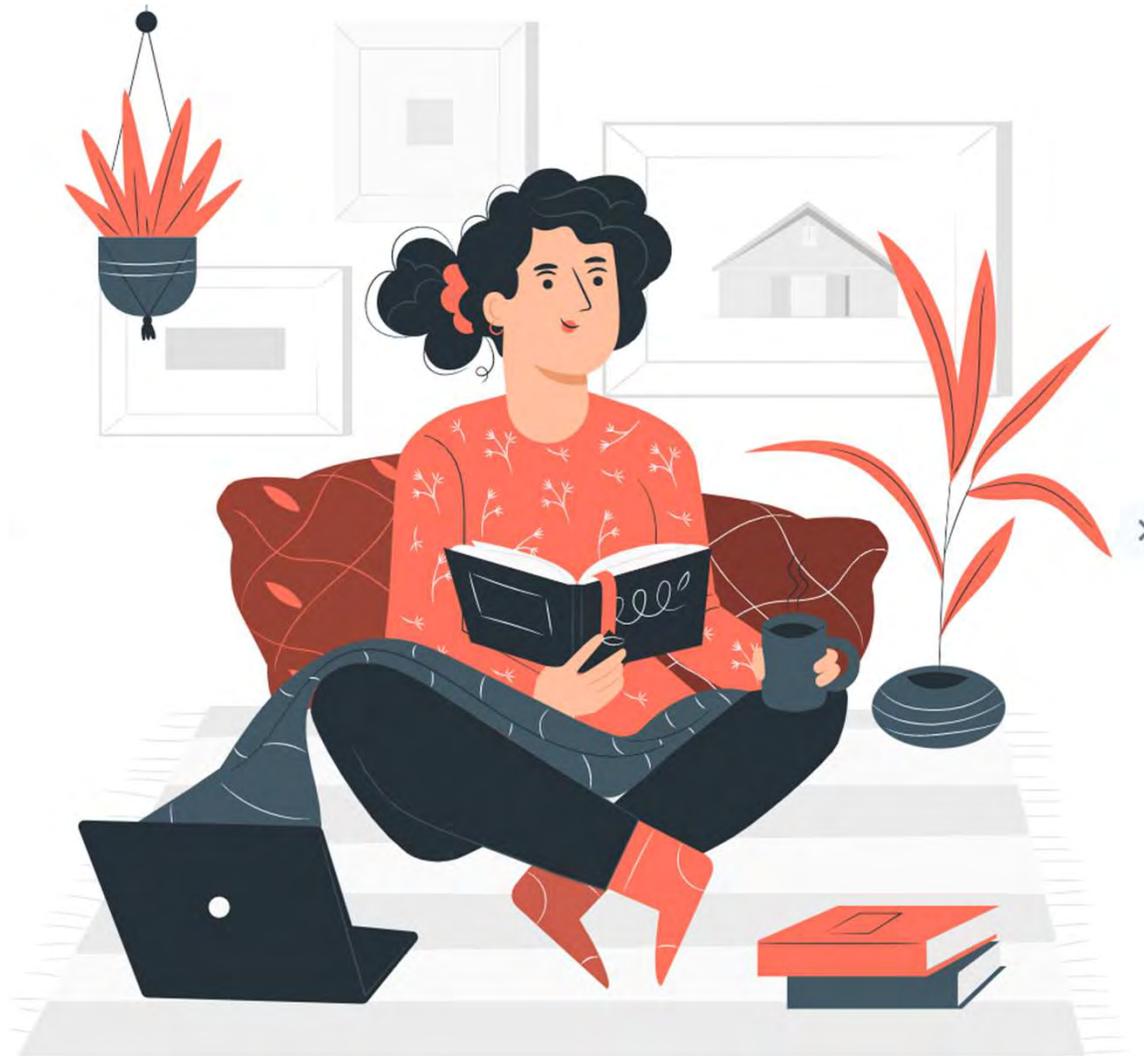


stress
anxiety
depression
physical distress
emotional reactivity

Teacher who completed mindfulness training enjoyed a myriad of personal benefits, including **elevated levels of self-compassion** and a **decrease in psychological ills** such as anxiety, depression, and burnout.

The practice of mindfulness made them **more effective teachers**, possibly by buffering them from the impact of stressful experiences as they were happening.

[Hirshberg, M. J., et al. \(2020\). Integrating mindfulness and connection practices into preservice teacher education improves classroom practices. Learning and Instruction, 66,](#)





Wellbeing Pillars

Optimism

to be positive

SPACE ATTRIBUTES

Encourage Challenge and Effort

Spaces that allow students to fully engage in their learning, working through the challenges and struggle

Show Learning Process

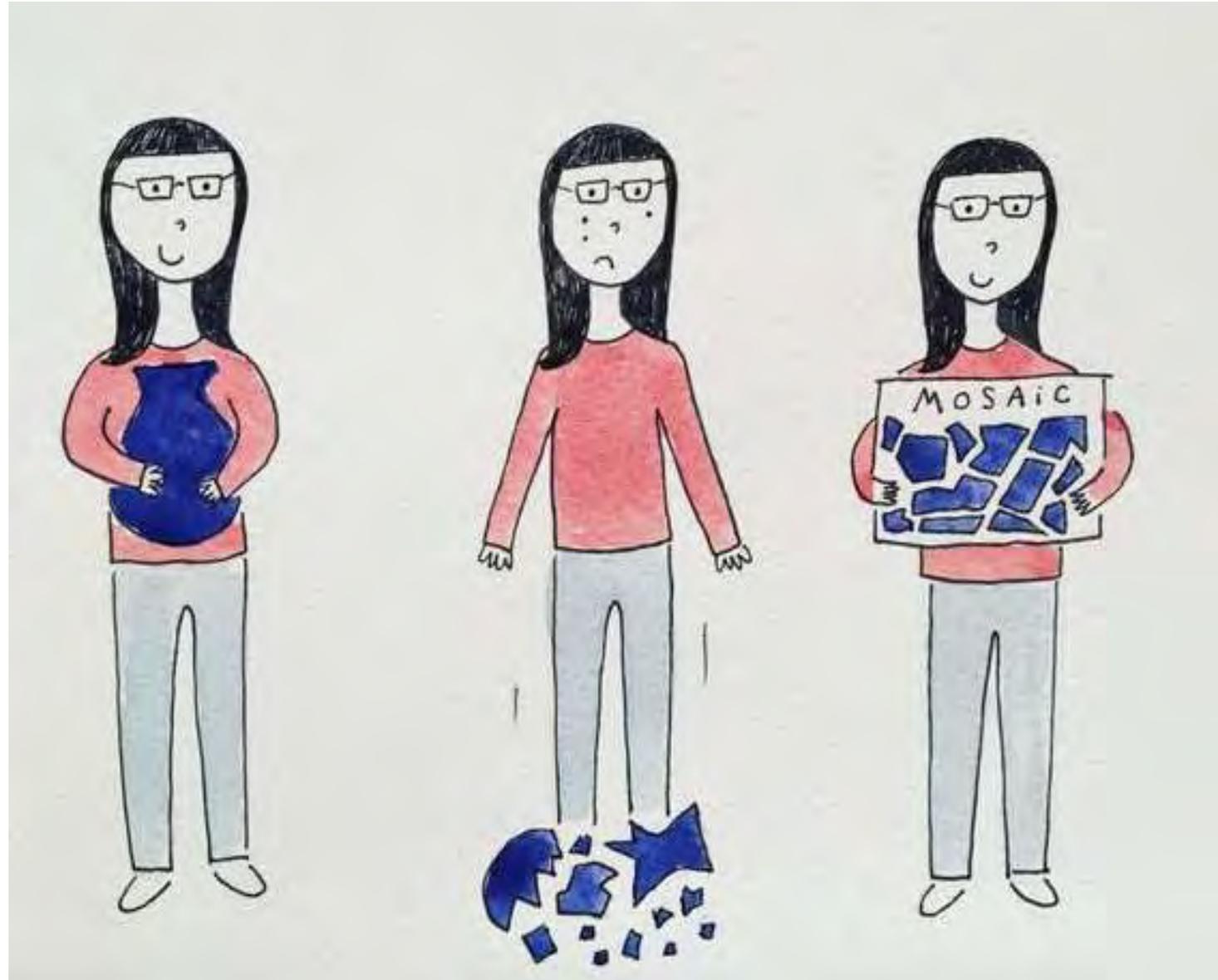
Make the process of learning visible to self and others, to show the effort and failures along the way. Celebrate the effort of learning and teaching

Exhibit Positive Thinking

Demonstrate an attitude of positive thinking which informs our beliefs, which form our values, which inspire actions that create results.

It doesn't mean ignoring life's stressors, it's about approaching hardship in a more productive way.

Kimberly Hershenson, LMSW





Wellbeing Pillars

Vitality

to be active and healthy

SPACE ATTRIBUTES

Encourage Healthy Choices

Spaces that incentivize healthy choices and allow students and educators to more easily engage in healthy behavior

Invite Movement

Spaces that allow for various postures and movement throughout

Create Respite

Spaces that allow students and educators to rest when needed

Multiple studies have found that children who consistently consume omega-3 fatty acids as a part of their diet have *higher intelligence*, *higher cognitive function*, *reading and verbal test scores*, and *less behavioral issues*.



Sleep, learning, and memory are complex phenomena that are not entirely understood. Yet studies suggest that the quantity and quality of sleep have a profound impact on learning and memory.



How have you utilized these principles in your space already?



In The Chat

Share Your Experiences

Applications

Dedicated Spaces

Napping Room

Wellbeing Pillar:
Vitality



Settings support student vitality through multiple postures: they can lay prone, sit in a shielded lounge, face away from others or rest behind a natural boundary

Organic, curved sofas and lounges offer a comfortable respite space to work quietly



31' x 35' = 1,085 ft² | 20 students | 54 ft² per student

A reservation system (not shown) enables students to plan for late-night study sessions

Lounges with integrated screens provide an additional level of privacy and encourage students to make healthy choices and rest

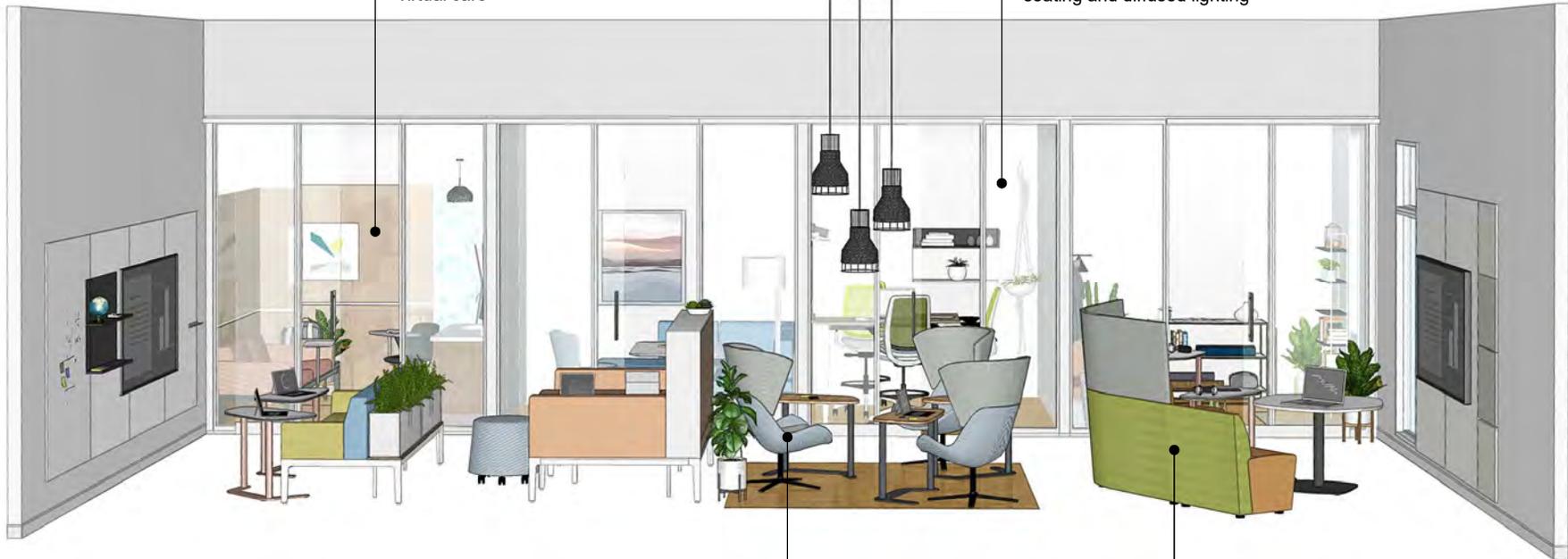
Wellness Hub

Wellbeing Pillar:
Mindfulness



A Nurse's Room offers comfortable, supportive seating, easy access to clinical supplies and an integrated monitor for virtual care

This acoustically private Counseling Room reimagines a traditional therapy room with lounge seating and diffused lighting



Open lounge seating provides options for seating or working; plants offer a biophilic moment

Soothing color palette and comfortable lounge seating foster mindfulness

37' x 26' = 962 ft² | 25 students | 38 ft² per student

Mindfulness Classroom

Wellbeing Pillar:
Authenticity



Lounge settings can be used for a mindfulness moment or a comfortable place to work with peers

Organic table shapes encourage movement and circulation and promote student agency



52' x 25' = 1,300 ft² | 30 students | 43 ft² per student

Positionable markerboards capture knowledge and encourage self-expression

Embedded Spaces

Student Commons

Wellbeing Pillar:
Mindfulness 

An open architectural framework creates a sense of privacy and calm within a larger space; biophilic panels support vitality and optimism

Shielded lounge seats support belonging, allowing students to connect with each other, while leveraging views to nature



A private work/lounge supports individual focus and mindfulness by shielding students from visual distractions

40' x 17' = 680 ft² | 16 students | 42 ft² per student

Corridor in-Between Space

Versatile lounge and worktable settings can be used for study or socialization, fostering belonging and community

Open storage holds student belongings, keeping items easily accessible and establishing a culture of trust and responsibility

Wellbeing Pillar:
Belonging



Movable markerboards and paper-topped tables capture student ideas and showcase meaning creation in action.

55' x 23' = 1,265 ft² | 32 students | 39 ft² per student

Information Hub

Wellbeing Pillar:
Meaning



Digital displays, integrated into modular walls, cultivate connection and community whether sharing critical school information or student work



Movable ottomans and tables can be arranged for small or large group gatherings, emphasizing belonging

Standing-height tables encourage alternate postures while providing space for group projects or socialization between classes

32' x 30' = 960 ft² | 22 students | 44 ft² per student

Faculty Lounge

Markerboards encourage positive thinking and a growth mindset in a sometimes-challenging environment.

Shielded lounge seating provides a sense of privacy in the open space while leveraging views to the outdoors and invigorating effects of natural light.



32' x 42' = 1,344 ft² | 27 educators | 49 ft² per educator

Multiple settings support teacher choice and control of spaces to work, relax, and gather as a community resulting in building meaningful relationships.

Multiple settings support teacher choice and control of spaces to work, relax, and gather as a community. Meaningful relationships are built as a result.

Personalized Learning Classroom

Wellbeing Pillar:
Authenticity



Students can arrange cube ottomans and semi-circular lounges into safe spaces to explore their passions and support diverse expressions of ideas and learning.



Students can choose the type of seating that best meets their needs to support self-directed learning.

Open storage throughout the room keeps materials accessible to all students, empowering them with meaningful choices

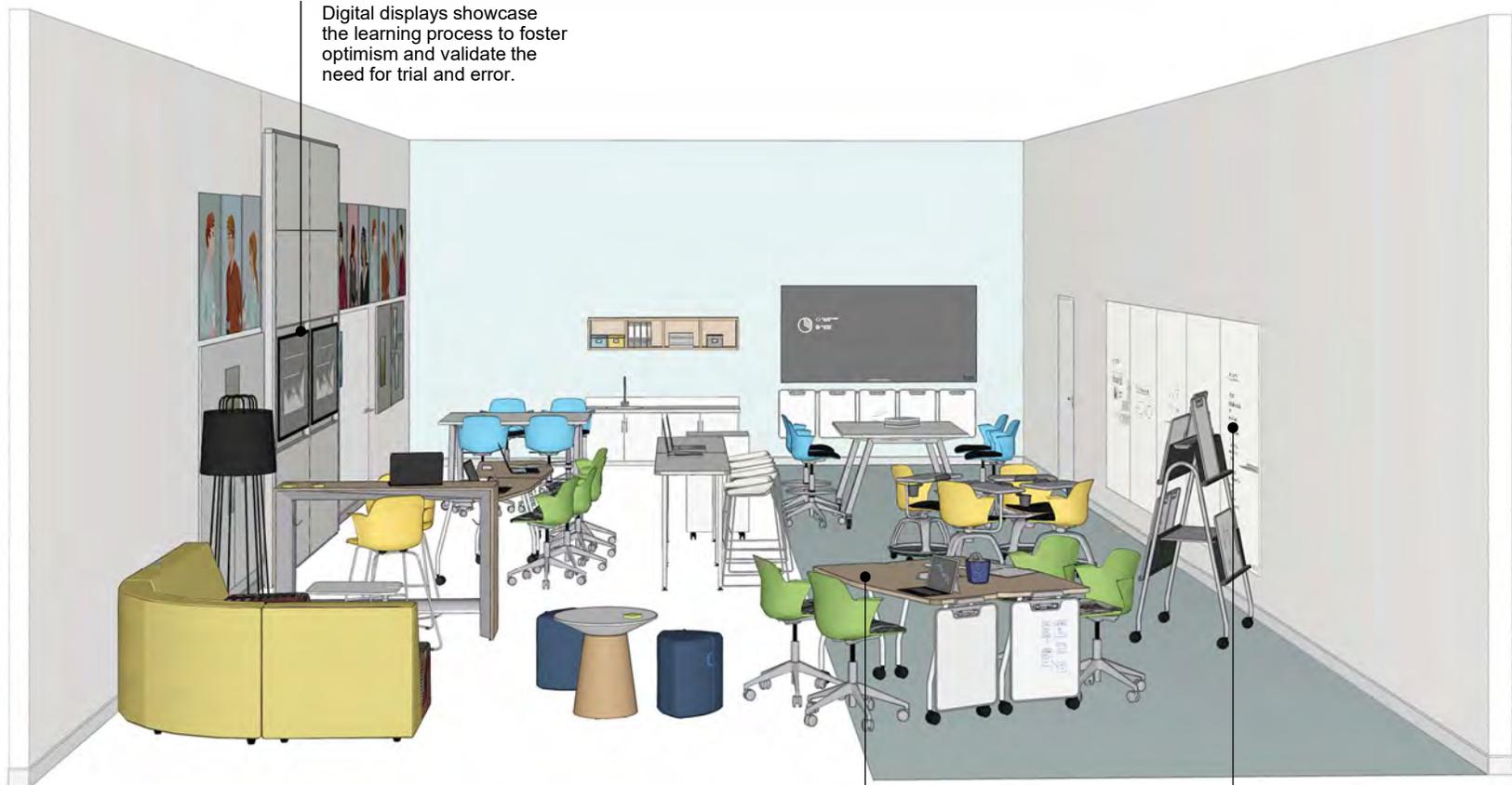
Markerboards promote the sharing of ideas and student work, encouraging self-expression and authenticity

33' x 23' = 759 ft² | 18 students | 42 ft² per student

Makerspace



Digital displays showcase the learning process to foster optimism and validate the need for trial and error.



52' x 25' = 1,300 ft² | 30 students | 43 ft² per student

Movable tables and chairs foster community and connection in small or large group settings

Multiple markerboard surfaces encourage students to share learning with others

Digital Makerspace Lab

Markerboards and digital displays showcase the learning process to foster optimism and validate the need for trial and error.

Wellbeing Pillar: Optimism 



95% of this furniture is movable, encouraging students to fully engage in learning with others.

Height-adjustable work surfaces promote physical wellbeing

26' x 15' = 390 ft² | 25 students | 49 ft² per student

Respite Lounge

Wellbeing Pillar:
Vitality



Mobile power units throughout the space gives students the freedom to work in the place that best suites their needs

Shielded study lounges have views to the outdoors to promote focus and rejuvenation



A lounge setting is supported by large whiteboard surfaces, encouraging meaningful co-creation.

The large, versatile table can be used for communal activities, whether eating or working with peers

28' x 25' = 700 ft² | 12 students | 58 ft² per student

Something you learned.
Something you can use.



In The Chat

Review and Reflect

Steelcase[®]
LEARNING