Design Specifications for Learning Environments in the Aurora City Schools

Specification 1: Honoring Identity Through Relationships

Relationships need to include trust, respect, and empathy, such that all people, younger and older, value each other. All people are equal partners in the learning experience with each person having a voice. The moment an environment dictates how or what a learner thinks, is the same moment their opportunity for learning is lost.

Specification 2: Learning is Social

The design of all learning environments should honor the social aspect of our humanity. The environment should provide abundant opportunities for collaboration, social engagement, and for young people to freely reflect and challenge the thinking of others and themselves.

Specification 3: Nurturing Innovation

Our learning environments should be designed so our young people have as much ownership as possible. If young people are not given autonomy and the freedom to fail [take risks, experiment, make mistakes] authentic learning cannot exist. The brain develops according to how it's used and therefore environments should promote active reflection and productive struggle by giving young people meaningful practice in iterating through failure, even at the cost of efficiency. Helping our young people discover their interests and passions are essential for fueling their innovation process.

Specification 4: Process vs. Product

Learning is not an outcome, it is a process. Well-designed learning environments should demonstrate that content within a curricular area is merely a medium, a backdrop. The content within our design is used to explore the process of deep and meaningful learning. Correspondingly, the design of the environment should not optimize on content delivery and coverage. We strive to develop young people who are not merely good at knowing how to be taught, but who actually know how to learn.

Specification 5: Beyond Points and Grades

Extrinsic motivation, as facilitated by grades and points, naturally diminishes the process of learning. It causes the acquisition of knowledge to become superficial and mechanical, and leads to a fear of failure within the learner. Deep, authentic learning is a result of an environment, driven not by grades and points, but designed to promote independent ownership, goal-setting, and self-reflection.

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Balance					
Collaboration					
Critical Thinking					
Empathy					
Innovative					
Resilient					