



Upper Merion Area High School

King of Prussia, PA



› CASE STUDY

A Dynamic New Building for Today's Students

As **Upper Merion Area High School** officials set out to design and outfit their newly constructed school building, they kept one philosophy in mind: Learning can happen anywhere, not just in the classroom.



“We were seeing learning happen outside of the traditional classroom, and that’s something we wanted to design for,” shared Jonathan Bauer, principal of Upper Merion Area High School. “We asked ourselves, what kind of furniture would you need inside and outside the classroom that’s going to fit the needs of today’s learners?”

KI helped school administrators create dynamic learning spaces throughout the building that inspire collaboration and creativity, while providing the flexibility necessary to foster a tailored learning experience for each and every student.



Learning Outside of the Classroom

When students enter the new Upper Merion Area High School, they're greeted by the spacious commons. Featuring three-story windows, the stunning, sunny space serves as the school's cafeteria as well as a true gathering place. Students can study, engage with their peers, and hang out -- whether before school, during study hall blocks, or before sports practices begin at the end of the day.

Strive® stack chairs in the school's signature blue and yellow colors surround circular **Pirouette® tables**, encouraging groups of students to sit together in the Commons. Meanwhile, high-seated **Strive® café stools** line elevated, long tabletops where students can study or eat independently or in smaller groups.

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In the old building, students could be found scattered about the hallways and stairwells, working on assignments or collaborating in small groups while sitting on the ground. In science classes, students had to run experiments and collect data but didn't always have the space inside the classroom to do so.

To accommodate students working on science projects, KI installed two sets of **Pillar™ tables** on casters and **Strive® seating** in the halls near the science classroom. Each set of tables and chairs accommodates 28 students to support the previously improvised peer learning. KI also added **All-Terrain® whiteboards** outside of Upper Merion's science labs that can be easily transported in and out of classrooms, depending on what the day's lesson calls for.

These "third spaces" aren't just for science class. Outside math classrooms, mobile **Ruckus® tables** with markerboard work surfaces and chairs allow students to write out equations and collaborate together on problem sets. In the hallways of the English wing, comfortable **MyWay® lounge seating** encourages reading and quiet reflection. Teachers can also use them for brainstorming and group discussion in a relaxed and open space or provide a refreshing change of pace from the usual classroom environment.





Flexible Spaces for Modern-Day Learning

In the old building, heavy, wooden combined desks and chairs made reconfiguring the space for different students' learning needs all but impossible.

“One of the barriers to having flexibility in the classroom was the furniture,” Bauer reflected. “It was difficult to transition into groups or pairs and it would take up considerable class time.”

To solve this challenge, furniture integrator **Corbett Inc.** worked with school officials and KI to select furniture that prioritized versatility and durability. Upper Merion equipped classrooms with **Ruckus® chairs** and **Intellect Wave® desks**, which allow students to sit however they're comfortable and transition to collaborative work at a moment's notice.

The administration noticed that most students hardly used their assigned lockers. Over a decade ago, Upper Merion Area High School became an early leader in providing each student with a laptop. Since then, students have been happy to carry around backpacks with their laptops and assignments from class to class, rather than storing a ton of textbooks in lockers.

The new building has fewer lockers and only about 20% of students have signed up to use one. But more

backpacks and belongings in the classroom also meant that safety became a higher priority, especially in science classes. KI outfitted the school's labs with **Learn2® seating** with racks under the seat, allowing students to keep their belongings stowed away during hands-on lab experiments.



Supporting Spaces That Prepare Students for the Future

Tucked next to the Commons is Upper Merion's counseling center. Inside, students have a choice of café-height seating, table seating, **MyWay® lounge seating**, and popular "egg-style" **Sway® lounge seating**. The area seats up to 28 students while waiting for an appointment or simply hanging out.

It may seem unusual that students want to hang out in a counseling office, but Upper Merion's counseling center was intentionally designed with a glass storefront and prime location to draw students into a supportive environment. The space ensures students feel comfortable popping by during lunch or breaks throughout the day. "We want students to be comfortable in this space -- not just to see their counselor, but to take advantage of college and career resources, presentations, and more," Bauer explained.

Upper Merion is dedicated to supporting students' career exploration. The school's Little Vikings program allows students interested in working with children to receive hands-on experience leading activities and lessons for preschoolers embarking on their learning journey.

The Child Development Lab needed furniture that was comfortable for high school students and little learners. KI installed smaller-scale **Intellect Wave® chairs** and adjustable-height **Intellect™ activity tables** at which preschoolers learn, play, and discover. An adjoining classroom is equipped with standard-size **Ruckus® seating** where high schoolers develop lesson plans for the preschoolers.

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Making the Teachers' Voices Heard

The Upper Merion team knew how important it was to have teachers guide the design process for its new building, including facilitating meetings for teachers to test out different KI furniture and advocate for their favorites.

"We asked our teachers what wasn't working with their current setups and how they thought their students would best use each space," Bauer said. "We used this qualitative data to guide the furniture selection process."

The administration made sure to collaborate with teachers on a space that was uniquely theirs. Upper Merion created instructional planning centers where teachers could keep their professional materials and belongings separate from their classrooms.

The six planning centers each have 14 **Connection Zone® teacher workstations** equipped with privacy screens, storage wardrobes, and filing cabinets. The centers also house conference tables, kitchenettes, bathrooms, and **Unite® panel systems** to integrate power for the computer stations.

"Our teachers wanted some private space, but they're very collaborative," Bauer reflected. "They consult with their colleagues about classes, about their students. We wanted to create a space where they could come together as teachers outside their classrooms."

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A New Building for a New Generation of High School Students

Upper Merion recognized that the design of their old building was at odds with the way their students were actually learning. Now, the school is abuzz with students learning and collaborating everywhere you look, whether in the commons, hallways, or classrooms.

Bauer credits the flexibility of KI's furniture with fostering such a creative, welcoming learning environment.

"KI furniture really fits the needs of today's current learners," said Bauer. "It's designed with modern teaching and learning in mind. That's really what we were looking for."



Products Shown



Strive®
Stack Chair



Strive®
Café Stool



Learn2®
Seating



Ruckus®
Stack Chair



Intellect Wave®
Chair



600 Series
Stool



Oath®
Task Chair



Sway®
Lounge Seating



MyWay®
Lounge Seating



Pirouette®
Table



Pillar™
Table



Ruckus®
Activity Table



Intellect™
Activity Table



Intellect Wave®
Desk



Serenade™
Gathering Table



Connection Zone®
Benching



Unite®
Panel Systems



All Terrain®
Whiteboards

Pirouette and Strive designed by Giancarlo Piretti

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