

Case Study:

Mercersburg Academy



Blending the old with the new in an equitable and inclusive manner.



THE BRIEF

Walking onto the Mercersburg Academy campus is like walking into another world. With a beautiful blend of Hogwarts and a college campus, Mercersburg Academy is a private boarding school nestled in the quaint town of Mercersburg, Pennsylvania. After doing a search for innovative school furniture, Maria, Associate Head of School for Finance and Operations, reached out to NorvaNivel for some ideas on how to create functional and innovated spaces for their high school in multipurpose rooms. Through live design sessions with the Mercersburg team, truly stunning and inclusive spaces were created.



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THE RESULT

Mercersburg received their new spaces before the start of the 2022-23 Academic year. In the spring of 2023, our director of education had a chance to visit the campus and meet with the educators teaching in the space. The same educators who helped to design the space have had a positive experience teaching in the space. JD Bennett, math educator, highlighted the fact that, “the kids like the furniture. Sometimes, I’ll go in and rearrange the space to see what will happen, and it never lasts in that configuration for more than even twelve hours”. The ability for learners to own their environment has been a great benefit. Mr. Bennett also provided a survey to the learners, and that has been a great help to the school for future phases. It has also been great feedback for NorvaNivel on product development and enhancements. The Scofa.01 and Scofa.02 were the biggest hits in the Edwa Room. Learners also loved the writable surfaces. From the survey, one learner wrote, “I really like how each of the furniture has their own use and they each contribute to learning in their own ways. The whiteboard tables, for example, are good for taking notes in small groups or drawing an illustration to prove a point. The booths we have set up are good for having a more private conversation. And the half-circle set up is good for large group meetings or presentations”.

The Associate Head of School, Dr. Julia Mauer, has also been impressed with the results. “What I love about the space is that it brings the formality way down. When there’s no front [of the room], and we’re engaging together, there’s more comfort in asking questions. I respond to questions on the writable surface”. This year, instead of homework, educators utilizing the space have instead provided problems at the end of the period. The problems are collaborated on in groups, and the learners record their answers on the writable surfaces. This allows for the educators to correct on the spot and advance as necessary.

Mercersburg Academy has also done away with Advanced Placement this year. While learners are still able to sit for the AP exams, it allows the educators more freedom in the curriculum. It also allows educators to combine grades and classes and laterally teach. Our director of education had the privilege of watching a class in the Edwards Room where learners from varying grades collaborated in stations around heroes and The Odyssey. The size of the room, and the ability to move around in varying collaboration styles and sizes, was awesome to observe. Mercersburg is considering more phases in the future, and NorvaNivel would be proud to be a part of them.

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THE PROCESS

Through our website inquiry, our director of education responded to a request for more information about NorvaNivel. During the phone call, they discussed the spaces and what Mercersburg was interested in doing with them. Shortly after, our Director of Education set up a design session with lead architect, Franco, and the Mercersburg team. The team got to work looking at the spaces and designing.

First, a virtual walkthrough was done of the two spaces: the Edwards Room and the Lenfest Room. The Edwards Room was once a dining hall, a library, and currently, an unused space. Boasting vaulted ceilings, a custom fireplace, and stunning Tiffany's glass windows, it was imperative to bring function back into the space instead of serving as a walkthrough between buildings on campus. The Lenfest Room is a multipurpose extra classroom in the library. It has most recently been transformed into the VR room on campus. All educators and learners can use both spaces- regardless of subject.

After learning about the spaces and understanding the breadth of their capacities, it was time to work on designing the spaces. Bringing in the educators using the space, we worked to understand how the educators teach, the type of projects the learners are involved in, and what a typical class period looks like. There needed to be enough variety in the space to meet the needs of all learners in a range of subjects.

With the educator collaboration and the NorvaNivel teams' questions and designs, the spaces were created, and the rooms went into production.

