



Future-Proof Furniture Fills New K-8 Leadership Academy



If modern K–12 education design had a mascot, it'd be a chameleon. Just like those color-morphing lizards, learning

spaces and furniture must functionally adapt over their live span for every grade level and possible pedagogy. It's called future-proofing.

Here's how Valley View Leadership Academy, a newly built K–8 public school in Phoenix, met the challenge using Smith System classroom furniture. Said Principal Larry LaPrise, “It doesn't matter what's next [at Valley View]. The next technology, next teachers, next principal. Our furniture will still work.”

A Future-Proof Fortress

Since opening in 1956, Valley View has proudly served the South Mountain community. In Fall of 2019, the district realized a long-awaited goal by replacing the original 1956 school with a new, 70,000-square-foot building designed and furnished to withstand changing curriculum and teaching methods. In short, the district wanted a future-proof fortress of learning for Valley View's 600 students, teachers and staff.



The first floor includes administrative space and K–2 classrooms. The second floor accommodates grades 3–8, with two science labs and a centralized media center (accessible to the public when school's not in use). Strategically placed throughout each floor are flex areas for collaboration, small groups and individual study. The school is beautiful – and a big deal for the community.

The Long 10-Year Wait

Being “worth the wait” is an understatement for Valley View, located in a traditionally underserved part of the city. A decade prior, the district was poised to complete a three-part construction plan: 1) Build a new gym; 2) Build the classrooms, media center and labs around the old, still-occupied school, and 3) Transfer students to the new school and demolish the old one into a parking lot.

Architectural drawings were completed; the gym went up without a hitch. Then things stalled. For 10 years. New charter schools and private schools in the area were pulling students – and funding – away from Valley View. Its enrollment struggles were compounded by a school built during Dwight E. Eisenhower’s presidency and the rise of Elvis.

Finally, after a decade of waiting, the local school board approved funding to complete the new school and work toward boosting enrollment.

Designer Vince Rieselman was assigned to the on-again/off-again Valley View new-build. He’s a senior associate partner and studio leader for education interiors at [Orcutt-Winslow](#), one of the largest architecture firms in the Southwest. He’s worked in education interiors for over 25 years, with exposure to over 1,000 schools.

Rieselman said Valley View’s construction delay actually had some benefits.



Planner Studio Tables shown with Flavors Fixed Height Stools.

“The philosophy in K-12 has changed to match what’s happening in higher-ed markets. It’s tricked down. Schools now believe in radical flexibility, to the extent of you can have one design for one room

that can change into other pedagogy uses. That really does lend itself to greater design longevity, and schools want to be adaptable.”

In classroom furniture, he says that manifests in pieces that are more mobile, more flexible, and with more adaptive uses for active learners who can’t sit still. “The classroom design itself allows for traditional and more-modern teaching styles, but the furniture can be moved around to work for all.”

Collaboration Process

The district was clear in its directives. It no longer wanted the rigidity of desks with built-in chairs. It wanted active seating for almost every classroom, to provide comfort and the movement some kids need to stay focused. Principal LaPrise also wanted to help 7–8-grade students feel like true teenagers, not tikes.

Rieselman saw the perfect opportunity for Valley View to incorporate a new philosophy in furniture that embraces key future-proof concepts: great design that is functionally flexible, adjustable, mobile and durable. “They were building a new school within a very old district, but the new building would have leading-edge education design – collaborative spaces, flex spaces, universal classrooms, classrooms adaptable to active learning.”

In the summer of 2018, Rieselman and representatives from Smith System and Atmosphere Commercial Interiors (ACI), a long-time furniture dealer in Phoenix, met with the Valley View team. That group included a few key people from the district and school, as well as Principal LaPrise.

As furniture planning progressed, Brittany Hanish, an account manager at dealer ACI, brought the group to ACI’s showroom to see Smith System options.

How the Team Made Future-Proof Selections

According to Hanish, furniture selection was a seamless collaboration.

“We had the same objective. We all wanted the school to be successful. It’s such a big deal for the students, teachers and greater community.” She and Rieselman particularly wanted to bring their knowledge of how to value-engineer future-proofing, knowing classroom furniture and IT had to split the school’s FFE budget. Here were the selections made:

Adjustable Desks and Tables

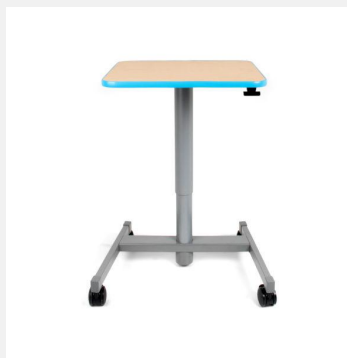
The surfaces had to be functionally flexible and mobile to fit collaborative learning needs. Smith System’s adjustable-height 3-2-1 Planner Tables went in every classroom. All tables have the same color finish for universal use throughout the school. Grades 3–8 also got adjustable-height Sit and Stand Student Desks. Students can easily float the surface from 26 inches to 42 inches with the press of a lever.

Principal LaPrise knew some teachers might be reluctant to embrace furniture designed for a 21st

century, student-oriented learning environment. Hanish create “3-2-1 Table cut-out cards, so teachers could see the multiple formation options and how everything works.”



Interchange® 3-2-1 Table



Silhouette® Sit + Stand Desk



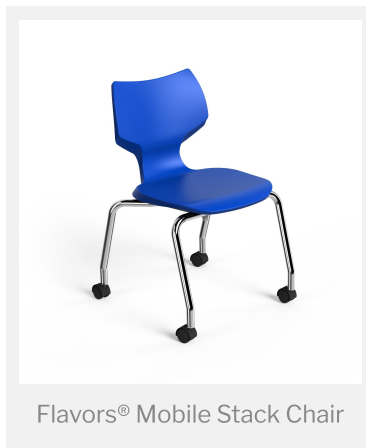
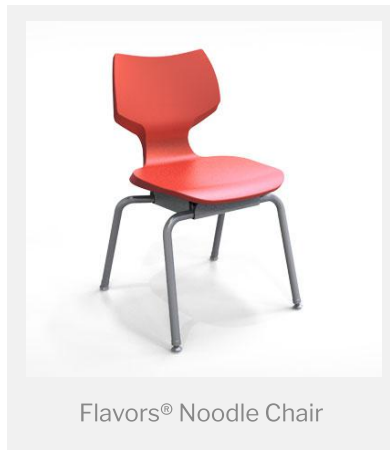
Silhouette® Sit + Stand Desk

Active Seating was “A Must”

Upfront, the school team knew they wanted active seating for almost every classroom to accommodate different learning styles. Smith System Flavors chairs went in all classrooms. Flavors is a four-position school chair with a flexible seat pan and back that allows students to sit

comfortably facing front, either side or rear. The school used universal size standards for K–8, clustering two or three grades to one size (chair color corresponds to chair height). No casters for the younger students.

Four-to-six of Smith’s Oodle stools also appear in each classroom. Oodle has stackable, cylinder-shaped components, each 17 inches in diameter and 6.5 inches high. Students can use one component individually for a low floor-sit or stack components higher into stools. Bonus: Oodle can be adjusted to allow 10 degrees of multidirectional rocking motion.



Teacher Desks and Storage

Every teacher has Smith's Flavors Teacher Chair and mobile Cascade Teacher Desk. Cascade storage units with cubbies were chosen for the younger grades. Cascade units with project drawers went in flex labs and other makerspace-type areas. For older grades, the school wanted to minimize storage, in favor of technology. (Every student has a tablet.)



Cascade® Cubby



Cascade Maker Table



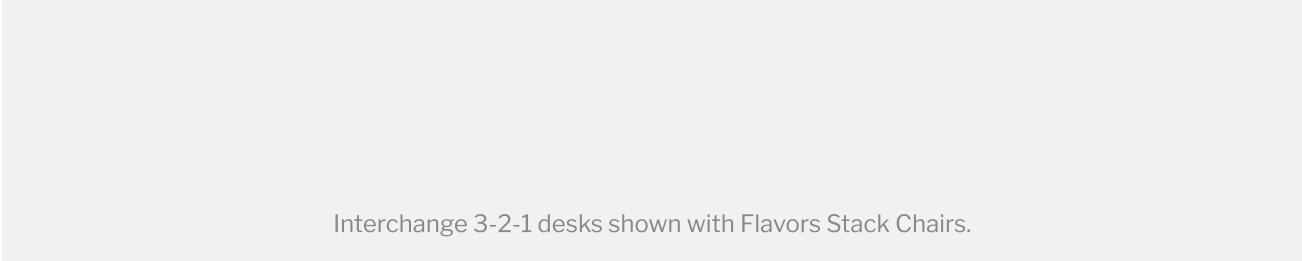
Creating a Mature Space for Tweens

Principal LaPrise had a few special requests for his 7–8-grade students. To create an older-kid space, he chose subtle navy blue finishes, put the 3-2-1 Planner Tables at their 36-inch height, and added Flavors stools. Two tables are left at lower heights for ADA compliance.



Elemental kidney table shown with OODLE Stools.





Interchange 3-2-1 desks shown with Flavors Stack Chairs.

“We’ve come so far since desks in rows. The flexibility of our new chairs and tables make it easy to do structured learning that mimics the business world and better prepares students.”

Future Proof Tips

Rieselman has fully embraced the new philosophy in classroom furniture that minimizes obsolescence.

“Because of what’s now available in the marketplace, there’s no way I’d ever convince a client to go back to the old way. It’s practically unethical. It’s not well-spent tax-payer money.” He gives these insights for selecting future-proof classroom furniture:

For Rieselman, Smith System furniture allows him to checked off a lot of boxes. “There are multiple ways to use a classroom. Manufacturers likes Smith are right on point with it all. Their furniture is timeless, affordable, durable, good warranty, lots of options, and it seems like a fun product that needs to be in the education market.”

Did the Decade Wait Create the Desired Result?

Principal LaPrise didn’t hesitate to answer, “Absolutely.” Rieselman agreed. “This was a great project, and this school is a haven for these kids.”