

Hursey Montessori School

CASE STUDY



**HURSEY MONTESSORI SCHOOL TRANSFORMS ITS LIBRARY
INTO A CENTER FOR LEARNING AND INNOVATION**



As part of a district-wide initiative to reinvent its libraries, Malcolm C. Hursey Montessori School in Charleston County, South Carolina, has transformed its media center from a place for quiet study to an active hub for creativity and collaboration. Aided by School Specialty, the school's library now supports 21st-century learning much more effectively.

“OUR GOAL IS TO PROVIDE A LIBRARY THAT IS THE CENTER OF THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY: A PLACE FOR STUDENTS TO COLLABORATE WITH OTHERS, PURSUE THEIR INTERESTS, FOSTER A LOVE OF READING AND LEARNING, ATTAIN 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS, STRENGTHEN CRITICAL THINKING, ENGAGE IN MAKING CREATIVE PRODUCTS, AND PARTICIPATE IN NEW LEARNING EXPERIENCES.”

MEDIA SPECIALIST, KAITLIN TORRES

South Carolina's Charleston County School District has been systematically redesigning its school library spaces to meet the needs of today's students more effectively.

“The physical space should match the kinds of learning that students experience in the classroom,” says Christy Wegmann James, library media services specialist for the 50,000-student district. “We want students to be able to communicate and collaborate to solve problems. Our library spaces need to be flexible enough to support a variety of student activities, such as independent reading and research, collaborative learning, and creation.”

To make sure their libraries align with this vision, district leaders visited the library in every one of the county's 74 schools and evaluated the space's ability to support their goals. Based on the results of this internal audit, James and her colleagues came up with a prioritized list of which facilities should be upgraded during each of several phases.

By the end of summer 2019, the district will have overhauled ten school libraries in two years through the first two phases of its initiative. Malcolm C. Hursey Montessori School, serving 350 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade, had its library upgraded as part of phase two, with students being welcomed into the newly redesigned space in February 2019.

CONDUCTIVE TO LEARNING IN MANY WAYS

Before the transformation, Hursey's library looked like the traditional library you'd see in schools everywhere a generation ago. "It had old, blocky tables and no soft seating options," James says. "And the shelving blocked users' lines of sight."

The old space wasn't conducive to rich, dynamic, 21st-century learning and exploration. In contrast, the new design creates distinct areas for multiple kinds of learning to occur: a makerspace, a story time area, and an instructional space.

The instructional space is furnished with Rockford crescent tables from Media Technologies. The tables are on casters, so they can easily be moved around and configured in multiple ways to support student collaboration. "Every time I walk in, they're set up in different ways," James observes. "That's the way it's supposed to work. The space is more functional now, supporting many different types of activities."

In addition, there are now plenty of soft seating options throughout the library, such as contoured Fred seating from Media Technologies for lounging with a book, as well as ottoman-style seating for sitting up straight.

"The space is inviting," James says. "It encourages students to collaborate, and also to relax and read."





A mobile circulation desk features an eagle's nest design, giving Media Specialist Kaitlin Torres a full 360-degree view around the room. "The circulation desk is near the door, providing a friendly face to greet students," James says.

The shelving is on casters as well, so that it can be moved around easily to help define various spaces. What's more, the shelving is only 42 inches high, giving stakeholders a clear line of sight throughout the room. "There are no more blind spots," Torres says. "That's important in an elementary school."

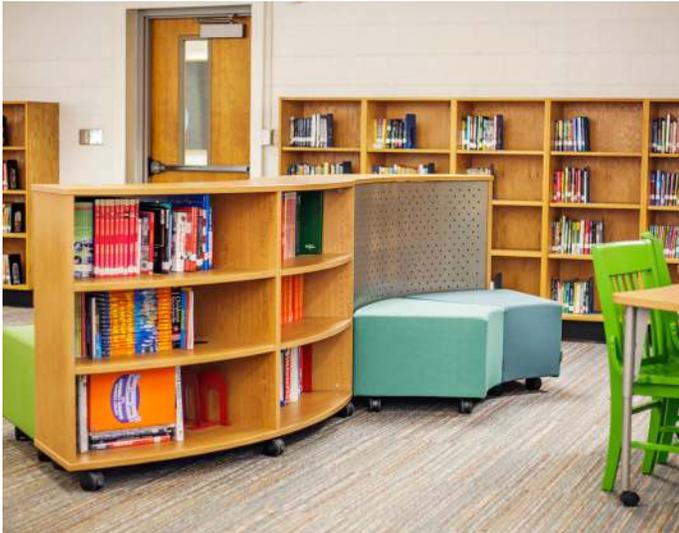
NATURAL FLOW AND MATERIALS

For help in designing Hursey's new library space, Charleston County turned to School Specialty and Senior Learning Environment Specialist Melanie DeMasi, who has more than 15 years of experience in furniture and design.

DeMasi met with Torres and the school district's Montessori specialist, Tamra Setzer, numerous times throughout the process. "That was invaluable," James says. "She asked about our goals for the space and how we planned to use it, and she helped create a design that met our needs."

A key requirement for the design was that it had to create a natural flow to the space that was conducive to learning.

"The environment is very important to the Montessori approach," Setzer explains. "When everything is in order, the children are in order. There should be a logical flow of movement, where everything has a place and is organized. We wanted the library to be an extension of how students are learning in the classroom."



The new makerspace area exemplifies this concept. It features three clover-shaped Work+Box Island tables from Media Technologies that are perfect for use in a makerspace, with built-in storage areas for supplies. This helps keep everything organized and in its place, allowing students to clean up easily when they're done with an activity. "I love that the furniture has built-in storage," Torres notes.



Another important element of the Montessori approach is bringing the outside inside by using materials that mirror the natural world to help calm students. Toward this end, the tables in the new library contain natural wood laminate surfaces. The colors are soft and muted, with lots of simple greens and browns. There are even mushroom-shaped stools for students to sit on in the story time area.

"Melanie has been fantastic to work with," James says. "We really value how hands-on she has been. If we need anything, she has been immediately available."

'LIKE A BARNES AND NOBLE'

With help from School Specialty, Hursey Montessori School has transformed its library into a dynamic space that serves as a hub for all kinds of learning in the school—where students can go and feel comfortable as they are reading, listening, making, sharing, and collaborating.

"I've noticed that kids are reading a lot more in the library, because it's such a comfortable environment," Torres says. "It's like a Barnes and Noble now."