

A modern interior space, likely a library or study area, featuring large windows on the left and right, providing a view of a green landscape. The room is furnished with colorful, patterned armchairs and a low, curved sofa in shades of purple, green, and blue. A small, round, light-colored table is visible in the foreground. The ceiling is white with recessed lighting. A yellow graphic overlay is present in the lower half of the image.

Design, education and collaboration intersect to create innovative learning environment

Case Study | Del Lago Academy Project

Project Specs:

Location: Escondido, California

Space: 143,000 sq. ft.

Buildings: 3

Students: 800

Design firm: BakerNowicki Design Studio



With plenty of open space and modular furniture, Del Lago Academy is designed to support the concept of learning as a social process.

Del Lago Academy is not your typical high school. A nod to nearby San Diego's biotechnology industry, the Escondido, California school's curriculum focuses on biotech and health sciences. As the first school of its type in the district, Del Lago Academy needed a dynamic environment to inspire its 800 students to prepare for careers in in-demand industries.

After a thorough bidding process, Del Lago Academy chose ODP Business Solutions™ Workspace Interiors to provide creative furniture solutions for classrooms, lounge/transitional areas and administrative offices of this exciting new magnet school. Workspace Interiors was able to meet the school's budget and contract requirements through its America Saves® general purchasing contract.





Creating innovative learning environments.

The project was unlike anything the school district had undertaken. Principal Keith Nuthall had a clear vision of a school that supported the concept of learning as a social process.

“People learn best in situations where they can do productive group work, as well as work independently from that group,” Nuthall said. “Del Lago Academy is built around how a corporate job in biotechnology or health might be — where problems are solved collectively.”

Collaboration and interactive work between students and teachers is encouraged and accommodated through the design of the three-building campus. Workspace Interiors worked with school administration, as well as San Diego-based architecture and design firm BakerNowicki Design Studio, to select durable furnishings that featured bold colors and embraced flexibility, mobility and collaboration.

SitOnIt® custom task chairs offer comfortable seating for students and teachers, as well as provide consistency in all three campus buildings.





Seating can easily be reconfigured to fit the need — from conversations to study sessions. Move ottomans or rearrange chairs for easier collaboration.



The academic commons in Building M served as the jumping-off point for the campus design and is an open, inviting space. Workspace Interiors recommended La Palma, California, manufacturer Arcadia for the majority of the furniture in this space, as well as transitional areas throughout campus. Arcadia is known for its quality, durability and value. Fabric options with Arcadia were nearly limitless, and bold prints were repeated throughout the academic commons and transitional areas, with different color schemes.

Workspace Interiors also recommended a portion of the lounge furniture in Building M to be highly adjustable. Bolsters could be easily adjusted or removed, and the seating could be quickly reconfigured, allowing students to create the learning environment they wanted at that moment.



Nontraditional seating features bolsters that can be easily removed to create study areas or seating arrangements similar to those found in a progressive library or workplace setting.

For the classrooms in Building C, Workspace Interiors recommended lightweight teachers' desks to enhance the flexible classroom environment. Each classroom is designed to morph from standard to group layouts. The custom-made tables support the technology teachers use during lessons, and the height can be adjusted higher for lecturing or lower for one-on-one meetings with students.

"The varied seating, study arrangements and nontraditional school furnishings are more what you would find in a progressive public library or in a collaborative smart workplace setting," said Richard Nowicki, AIA, partner with BakerNowicki Design Studio. "Workspace Interiors did a great job making students feel comfortable interacting in this flexible environment."





The modular style of lounge furniture helped create the division of space and allowed more people to occupy the space.



The interactive spirit is reinforced in the private administrative offices of Building A. For example, Principal Nuthall's office has an atypical layout, creating an inviting environment for faculty and students. The workspace is an L-shaped workstation placed against the wall. The rest of the office is casual seating.

Task chairs from SitOnIt® provide consistency throughout all three campus buildings but change slightly depending on their purpose. Teacher and student chairs are the same, but the teacher chair is a fabric-covered stool. The same chair transitions into Building A's administrative offices with casters and upholstery to reflect that environment.



Solving problems individually or collaboratively.

The reception area features contemporary style seating in durable fabric. Light and dark woods were combined for a casual, yet professional look.

Workspace Interiors was encouraged by Nuthall to “go bold or go home” when it came to color. The challenge was to keep fabric choices young and fun but durable and easy to keep clean. Bold fabrics matching school colors and building colors were mixed and matched in task chairs — solid vinyl colors on seats with complementary patterned backs. Wood laminate was chosen over wood for durability, with light and dark mixed throughout. Darker wood was chosen for Building A to give a more corporate look and feel.

The result was an innovative and exciting environment delivered on-budget in a tight six-month timeline. The project was completed just in time for a grand opening celebration. Mary Ann Kirastoulis, director of purchasing for the Escondido Union High School District, credits the teamwork of Del Lago Academy, BakerNowicki Design Studio and Workspace Interiors for the project’s success.





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Mary Ann Kirastoulis
Director of Purchasing Escondido Union
High School District

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