

Prosper ISD Designs for the Future of Learning

Flexible, student-centered spaces support growth, innovation and real-world readiness

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In North Texas, where suburban growth meets a deep-rooted commitment to education, Prosper Independent School District (ISD) is rewriting the rules of what a public school can be. Fueled by explosive population growth and a culture that refuses to accept the status quo, the district has launched a bold initiative to reinvent learning environments, ensuring that every corner of its schools reflects the future its students are walking into.

At the center of this transformation is Dr. Holly Ferguson, superintendent of Prosper ISD, whose 27-year career in education has culminated in a vision as progressive as it is personal. “There’s just something within the presence and the expectations of our community,” says Dr. Ferguson. “We’ve always believed our kids deserve more. That belief in innovation drives every decision we make.”

That belief is now visible in every corner of Prosper’s newest schools, where traditional classrooms have been replaced by dynamic, flexible learning environments that nurture collaboration, creativity and real-world problem-solving. This evolution didn’t happen overnight—it began with a question: What if schools looked less like factories and more like the future?

Pilot program paves the way

In 2018, the district initiated a series of experimental pilots to challenge the limitations of traditional classroom design. Teachers—eager but often working with makeshift solutions—were already attempting to innovate on their own. Some used yoga balls from discount stores as flexible seating. Others sawed the legs off old dining room tables to create low workspaces for students.

“The teachers were ready,” Dr. Ferguson recalls. “They were creating with whatever they could find. That told us: we had to catch up with them.”

And catch up they did—with help from Huckabee, an architecture and design firm that specializes in creating innovative learning environments, and Steelcase Learning. Together, they co-developed what would become the district’s signature approach: spaces that empower both learners and educators to shape their environment to the task at hand.

The pilot programs allowed the district to experiment with different types of furniture and layouts, gathering valuable feedback from teachers and students along the way. One of the key insights was the need for furniture that could support various teaching and learning styles. “A lot of our furniture, a lot of our design was very traditional in nature, and it was because we had grown so quickly,” explains Ferguson. Traditional desks and chairs were often cumbersome and limited in their functionality. In contrast, the new furniture was designed to be more flexible and adaptable, allowing for easy reconfiguration to support different activities and group sizes.

In classrooms, highly flexible Steelcase Verb Tables and Shortcut Chairs replace traditional desks and chairs, which were often cumbersome and limited in their functionality. Classrooms are more flexible and adaptable, which can support different activities and group sizes as needed.

“Flexibility has always been that word we talked about almost to exhaustion,” says Konrad Judd, senior executive director of design at Huckabee. “How easy is it for the learner or the educator to change, flip, and rearrange the space? It’s about finding that sweet spot. Not just where the district is now, but where they’re going—and giving them an environment that lets them stretch toward it.”

What the future of learning looks like

At Rock Hill and Walnut Grove High Schools, students walk into a vision that rivals many universities. The centerpieces are open-concept student unions—sun-drenched, Wi-Fi-enabled, and collaboration zones where students gather before school, during free periods, and long after the final bell. This design not only facilitates academic work but also fosters a sense of community among students.

“Students come early. They stay late,” Judd notes. “These spaces have become their social and academic hubs.”

Gone are the static rows of heavy desks and immovable teacher workstations. Instead, classrooms now boast lightweight, mobile furniture—podiums instead of desks for teachers, bar-height seating, soft chairs and configurable work areas for student groups.

Dr. Ferguson recalls how the transformation went beyond just furniture. “We were redesigning the building itself. Traditional schools didn’t match the innovation we were trying to inject. Now, the spaces inspire learning.”

This open-concept library at Daniel Jones Middle School serves as a student union with numerous collaboration spaces where students can foster a sense of community. Products Shown: Steelcase Shortcut Chairs with Tripod Base, Steelcase Buoy, Steelcase Verb Chevron Table, Steelcase Verb Personal Whiteboard

That inspiration is measurable, in more than test scores. Post-occupancy evaluations and stakeholder listening circles tell a clear story. “Library circulation was at zero,” Dr. Ferguson explains. “Now, the student union library is packed. Kids eat there. Study there. Collaborate there. It’s not quiet—and that’s exactly the point.”

The spaces are also expanding equity. In a district that grew by more than 3,000 students last year alone, Prosper ISD has infused innovation across every grade level. Makerspaces, once a novelty, are now standard. Filled with tools from sewing machines to 3D printers, they’re helping kids build—not just knowledge, but confidence.

And in a move as modern as it is emblematic of Prosper's forward focus, esports labs have become a focal point of student engagement. These aren't basements with bean bags—they're glass-walled, high-visibility hubs where students, including national champions, train for futures in technology, design and team-based strategy.

At Walnut Grove High School, esports labs have become a focal point of student engagement. These programs have provided students with new opportunities to engage in competitive gaming, develop problem-solving skills, and explore potential career paths in the growing field of esports. The success of the esports program has been a testament to the district's ability to identify and respond to emerging trends and student interests. Products shown: Steelcase Gesture Chair, Steelcase FrameOne Bench

For Dr. Ferguson, the esports initiative crystallizes her vision. "One fifth grader grilled me—he wanted to know how he could get into the high school program, what grades he'd need. It wasn't just interest; it was aspiration. That's what we want."

As Prosper prepares to build a new administration building, pilot programs continue. Staff workspaces are being redesigned based on real-time feedback, and assistant principals have been invited to test out new furniture configurations. Every space, every wall, every chair is being reconsidered through the lens of learning.

"What Huckabee and Steelcase have done is more than design," Dr. Ferguson says. "They've partnered with us. They've helped us reimagine who we are—and who we can become."

It's a lesson Prosper ISD now teaches its students daily: Innovation isn't a buzzword. It's a promise.

Flexible products such as the Steelcase Shortcut Chair, Verb Personal Whiteboards and Chevron Tables provide students at Rock Hill High School with the flexibility they need to learn in this interactive healthcare career training environment.

Steelcase Learning partners with K-12 schools and higher education institutions to understand how teaching and learning are evolving — and how more intelligent, more active learning environments can help.

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