

## Gathering for Learning ~ Assessing Your Space Needs

Take a look at the big picture of your facilities and your education and formation ministries. Spend some time with an open mind and open heart. Dream. Plan for the future and what might be. It is important to do everything possible to make all available space conducive for learning for all users and ages.

*Make a list of all the primary users groups of each space. Look at the space and ask:*

- How many children (youth, adults) are there per class / meeting?
- What are their ages?
- What are there developmental needs for space?
- What accessibility needs to they have? (ramps, elevator, signs, bathrooms, exits)
- Are there lots of tables and other furniture in the space that could be moved to allow more room for movement?
- Are there lots of doors? Close some off if this will not be a threat to safety.
- Are there any big or bulky chairs or fixed seats? Move those out and move in smaller, movable chairs. Or move out all the chairs and use the floor, if appropriate for the group.

*Planning the meeting space:*

- Small children need small chairs that do not fold and small tables (coffee tables work!).
- Children also need rooms without fancy rugs so that glitter and paint can be used with abandon.
- Adding lights or using brighter bulbs makes a room more cheerful and cuts down on eyestrain. Clean windows help too!
- Painting rooms white, ivory or a eggshell makes them brighter and friendlier. Bright colors can be over stimulating to young children.
- Rug scraps and big pillows can be arranged to make a cozy story-corner for children. Some carpet distributors will give away discontinued stock samples.
- Collect posters from organizations that focus on the needs of the world and old wall calendars that can be mounted on poster board and 'framed' with a contrasting color of poster board.
- Children prefer large, indoor classrooms that allow social participation.
- Classrooms with older children, youth and adults should avoid seating in rows. A circle of chairs or a grouping around a table encourages two-way communication.
- Floors of rooms used by children shall be clean, unslippery, smooth and free from cracks, splinters and sharp or protruding objects and other safety hazards, and those in direct contact with the ground shall have flooring impenetrable by water.
- All steam and hot water pipes and radiators shall be protected by permanent screen guards, insulations, or any other suitable device which prevents children from coming in contact with them
- Room temperatures shall be maintained at not less than 68 degrees Fahrenheit at zero Fahrenheit outside and not more than the outside temperature when the outside temperature is above 80 degrees Fahrenheit.
- The basic classroom should have at least 72 sq. ft. of windows for natural light.

*Sharing the space / Meeting in the Parish Hall:*

- Hang an old bed sheet on the wall and pin or tape artwork to the sheet to ‘cover’ or ‘hide’ another programs materials or shelves.
- Hang a clothesline along one wall and fasten artwork to the line with spring-type clothespins.
- Look for other locations for some classes – the parish office, library or even kitchen if it is large enough with a table?
- Open up the space by using learning centers, which a few children visit at a time. Each center can simply be a table set up with materials for a specific activity – art activity, bible study area, reading corner, costume area for acting out the story, area to listen to music on a CD player
- Build a loft for storage of needed supplies and equipment, freeing up floor space.
- Add noise-deadening materials to absorb sound in the area (carpet, fabric, acoustic tiles)
- Use dividers to break visibility (but must have doors and viewing window) to create personal group space. These can also be used for bulletin board walls.
- Use small tables or no tables for quieter group conversations.

*Education in the future:*

Traditional academic classrooms may largely disappear in the future, replaced by holistic learning labs and exploratory centers. To support this trend and approach, classrooms must be multi-purpose, allowing a blending of traditional instruction with meaningful and diverse hands-on, lab-type experiences that include everything from multi-media use and dramatic arts. A physical environment that stimulates creativity and fosters a sense of belonging will stand the test of time. Classrooms used during the day (Sunday) may also be occupied by community organizations at night. Educators and parish planners need to keep in mind that children’s needs & populations change, and when they do, spatial requirements change with them. The “one-size-fits-all” classroom model is disappearing, and a quest for more flexible and adaptable classroom configurations should be part of any building planning process.

*Special needs:*

Currently nearly seven million students ages six through 21 have been identified through IDEA as requiring special instruction. That is, approximately 12 out of every 100 students in school must be provided with special services to address their disabling condition in a way that allows them to be socially, emotionally or physically a part of the school as a whole. Most experts agree that the percentage of students identified as disabled will continue to grow in the coming decades.

### *Teacher – Child Ratios*

Age in years	Teacher to Child	Max per room
Infants	1:3	No more than 6 who are not mobile
Up to 2	1:3-4	No more than 9 who are crawling
2 & 3	1:5	12
4 & 5	1:6	12
6 – 8	1:10	15
9 – 12	1:12	15

### *Room Size and Square Feet per Child:*

# Children	Room size	Square Feet per Child
6 or less	Minimum 350 sq. ft.	
6 or more		50 sq. ft. usable space
Kindergarten – 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	750 – 1,350 sq. ft.	35 sq. ft. very minimum – 50 sq. ft. optimal
4 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	660 – 1,000 sq. ft. 960 sq. ft. optimal	
9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> grade	600 sq. ft.	
Special Education	770 sq. ft. (15 max. students)	

### *Recommendations for churches:*

- Parishes that are seeing an increase of the need for nursery care need to plan ahead for growth in preschool classes where more space and staffing is needed for Preschool / Kindergarten
- 12-16 persons is an ideal class size for 1<sup>st</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> grade
- A Church School of 36-50 children should have 4 classes at least

### *Interesting thoughts for consideration:*

- Thirty-five square feet per child is a 5' x 7' space – a little over twice the dimensions of the average playpen
- Minimum standards for prisons require more than 35 square feet per prisoner.
- The average child's room at home is about 120 square feet; allowing 40 sq. ft. for furniture leaves a remaining floor space of 80 sq. ft. for play.
- The typical amount of office space allocated for moderate size offices and circulation is 100 sq. ft. per person
- Since the school is a social system with the cultural environment, consider the social distance as a means for calculating minimum size for classrooms. The lower middle range for social distance in man and woman is 7 feet. Calculations have been made for elementary school students to find 49 sq. ft. per person with larger students needing a social distance of 64 sq. ft. Thus, an elementary school classroom should

by at least 900 square feet for 17 students per teacher and 1024 square feet for 14-15 students on the secondary level.

- Smaller group sizes and lower staff/child ratios have been found to be strong predictors of compliance with indicators of quality such as positive interactions among staff and children and developmentally appropriate curriculum. Variations in group sizes and ratios are acceptable in many cases where the program demonstrates a very high level of compliance with criteria for interactions (A) curriculum (B) staff qualifications (C) health and safety (D) physical environment.

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