

Case Study

Walden Green Montessori Elementary School



Walden Green Montessori Elementary School

Location Spring Lake, Michigan

Number of People Served 2006/2007 Total Enrollment: 220

Sales Representative Contact Information Mike Kelley, Lauren Applin / izzydesign / 616-847-6534

Architect / Designer Contact Information Kristen Dorais / Integrated / Architecture / 616-574-0220

The need

Parents, teachers and administrators at Walden Green Montessori – one of the area’s first public charter schools – were up to their white boards on how to finish off their new elementary school. Nestled in woodlands and dune grass just a mile from Lake Michigan, the newly constructed school resembled a design studio more than a mid-20th century “progressive” brick building. What types of space, colors and lighting encourage learning for Internet-savvy first graders? Would 1950s-style, all-in-one desks and chairs with tablet arms make the grade for “tweens”, who collaborate constantly through cell phones, IMs and texting? Instructors wanted the ability to form small groups for team lessons – but also needed flexibility for individualized learning. After debating the pros and cons, school leaders chose the cool, affordable attitude of izzydesign. The order of collaborative school tables and mobile seating was a real test for izzy, a company more accustomed to equipping people in The New Workstyles rather than children in grades K-8 – but we studied hard to get the students A+ results!

The izzy+ solution

As they say, everything you need to know, you learned in kindergarten. Fortunately, you also can pick up a few tips from the super-smart Walden Green students, who taught us that what goes up could come down. So izzy scaled down its colorfully edged, 32-inch-high tables to fit the needs of the next generation. Now, kindergarten and first grade students enjoy working at izzy tables measuring only 21 inches high, while growing second, third and fourth graders move up to a personalized 25 to 26-inch-high table. Older students and visiting parents can change table height as needed by simply adjusting the standard pin-set table legs. To cross the t’s and dot the i’s, the izzy design team made sure the result was ergonomically correct.

“We learned so much, too,” says Lauren Applin, izzy’s Design Support Specialist. “It was so much fun to see the younger kids push the Clara diamond tables together to talk to their friends and work on projects – just like their parents would collaborate in an office.” Against the cinder block walls, finished cement floors and natural materials, izzy furniture and seating adds splashes of color. “That includes izzy’s pastel-colored Hannah chairs for the upper level classes, which the students just love,” says Lauren. The waterfall back and seat design looks cool, and encourages students to move around, to sit in several different ways to stay comfortable. Due to their versatility, Hannah chairs are found throughout the school – in common areas, the eighth grade classroom – even the teachers’ lounge! Chairs equipped with casters can move easily. Stacking chairs are lightweight and rise in columns against the wall to create more space. The most important lesson of all – whether in the classroom or the workplace – izzy’s New Workstyles are about all about people, no matter their size – not the furniture.

Thomas Hicks—School Leader, Walden Green Montessori Elementary School

“The design of izzy’s furniture is very conducive to Montessori habits, which reflect the adult work environment – kids working in small groups and individually outside of the classroom. The different shapes of furniture appealed to us – square, round, and other geometric shapes – and how they fit together for team projects. The colors on the chairs and edge bands are important because they give color to the building, which is mostly gray and neutrals. We’ve received such good feedback from the kids on the space. The building is architecturally distinctive and the furniture is cool, too. It’s not your average everyday thing. The chairs are funky, cool, in different colors. The teachers love it, too. We just took a chance on it, knowing how our kids work, and brainstormed with izzy to choose the solution. I’ve never done anything like this before, but I’m very interested in furniture and design. Working with the team at izzy was fun because they’re excited about things and it was new to them. It worked out even better than I expected. The furniture is simple, really functional. It’s easy to put together. All you need is an Allen wrench.”

Kristin Dorais—Senior Interior Designer, Integrated Architecture

“Our objective was to support the school’s mission: to educate each child to his or her full human potential. In doing so, we strove to provide a solution that was innovative, affordable and sustainable. By designing the school to be built right into the wooded site, we saved a lot of trees and kept the environment open and energetic. There is no elevator but a really large, long ramp that not only saved materials, but also creates a large, central open space for students to congregate and move easily between floors. Wood ceilings help keep it warm, to complement the energy of students, while neutral colors provided the relief. We specified ‘learning colors’ – a color palette and shapes that are appropriate for Montessori learning. They ranged from more primary for the younger children as well as more refined colors for the older grades. The izzy colors worked well within the palette we chose, and added more life to the space. The Clara tables and Hannah chairs provided a nice homey, warm feeling. The scale of it works; the color of it works – right down to the circular cutouts in the Hannah chairs. They blend right into the Montessori philosophy of teaching with shapes. Best of all, izzy worked with the administrators and parents on a very affordable price. Otherwise, parents would have had to make the furniture. The students appreciate their new school, and take care of everything just like it was their own home.