SCHOOLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

What is an SLC?
Small Learning Communities (SLCs) support the restructuring of large public high schools into smaller units for the purpose of improving academic achievement. These smaller units include:
- freshman academies
- multi-grade academies organized around career interests or other themes
- spaces in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, and
- autonomous schools-within-a-school.
These structural changes are typically complemented by other personalization strategies, such as student advisories, family advocate systems, and mentoring programs.
Assessment
Today, students are learning in different ways than fifty years ago and the spaces they learn in need to reflect that. The transformation into a 21st Century learning environment starts with a visioning process that involves the Department of Education, school administrators, teachers, students, and parents collaborating with architects and engineers.

School-within-a-School
SLCs are highly focused on providing personalized education as well as college and career preparation for students as individuals. Larger schools are reorganized into SLCs to personalize the learning environment with the idea of transforming schools into learner-centered facilities with flexible spaces to accommodate both large and small groups of students. Transparent, open, flexible classrooms are important for small group learning, while informal breakout spaces foster independent learning. Students in smaller schools are more academically successful than those in larger schools, have higher graduation rates, and are more likely to take advanced-level courses and to participate in extracurricular activities.

Collaboration and Flexibility
Two trends in particular are revolutionizing the design of the learning environment:
- the shift from the teacher as a “sole practitioner”, to interactive team teaching that supports a collaborative educational philosophy
- the recognition that students have a variety of learning styles requiring varied and flexible learning situations.

The concept of Small Learning Communities (SLC) moves away from the “cells and bells” schools of the past toward a modern, student-centered environment.

Academies
By redesigning the school’s organizational structure into collegiate-style academies or learning communities, students are supported by influential adult advisors/advocates throughout their school years. At Farrington High School, the specialized Chemistry and Forensic Lab creates a project-based learning environment for students that connect subjects taught in the classroom to future career possibilities.

SLC model realized at FHS
- Courtyard provides opportunities for outdoor learning, open extended-learning areas
- Large windows allow for natural ventilation and cross views
- Shared spaces are centrally located within the SLC
- Double classroom is used for Academy advisory meetings, training video sessions, guest speakers, and study group gatherings
- Relationships with community partners foster offsite projects and internships extending learning beyond the walls of the school
- After school hours, the SLC becomes a venue for community events

The Journey Continues
Successful schools feature highly interactive team teaching as a centerpiece of their respective educational programs. In these schools, the learning environment has been designed to promote transparency, flexibility, and community. Therefore, it is not surprising that teams of progressive administrators, educators, and parents are steadily collaborating with architects and engineers to make holistic reforms that integrate innovative teaching methods with more effective learning environments.