



RethinkEd

The Well-Designed Classroom

Promote a Sense of Safety and Security for Your Students



Back to school is the essential time for teachers to intentionally create a well-organized and inclusive physical environment tailored to their students.

A well-designed classroom environment promotes a sense of safety and security for students. Therefore, thoughtfully designed physical classroom space is crucial for maximizing student learning outcomes, engagement, and positive behavior.

Research has shown that the physical arrangement of a classroom can impact student performance. Studies show the layout, traffic flow, displays, and organization of a classroom can significantly impact academic achievement and reduce disruptive behaviors.

You will learn to:

- Minimize barriers to learning and engagement
- Maximize instructional opportunities
- Increase positive behaviors that decrease disruptions

Empowering Educators Through RethinkEd's PD Process: Enabling administrators and educators to acquire essential skills through RethinkEd's evidence-based training and professional development initiatives fosters a deep understanding of factors influencing student and adult behavior.



Learn: All students need behavior support to optimize learning and well-being. Fostering positive behaviors, decreasing behaviors that interfere with learning, and maximizing both student and educator success requires a holistic approach.

Through RethinkEd's professional development training activities, administrators and educators will learn to:

- Understand factors that impact student and adult behavior
- Create a positive classroom and school environment
- Teach students behavior skills that promote their success
- Use effective classroom management strategies

Reflect and Connect: It is important that educators reflect and connect what they have learned with activities that foster self-awareness, skill development, and action. Taking time to reflect on, brainstorming with peers, and connecting new information and strategies helps teachers solidify their understanding and think about how to apply classroom layouts in their own classrooms.

Practice: Now it's time to implement activities that support practical application of evidence-based strategies. Setting goals to rearrange classrooms into optimal spaces turns reflection into this action and practice.

Dive Deeper: Learning and practicing continues with activities that enhance implementation and collaboration.

This process of intentional *reflection, connection, practice, and diving deeper* enables continuous improvement in the critical teaching skill of designing an effective physical classroom environment. Regularly reevaluating and tweaking the layout to meet students' evolving needs leads to classrooms that maximize positive behaviors and learning.



Maximizing Positive Behaviors Through Physical Classroom Arrangement

This fact sheet provides tips for seating arrangements, organization systems, wall displays, and more to help teachers set up a classroom that facilitates collaboration, minimizes distractions, and makes the most of available classroom space.

You will:

- Explore various classroom arrangements that encourage interaction, focus, and differentiated instruction
- Learn how classroom arrangement can help increase positive behaviors
- Discover tips to organize the environment for easy access and efficient workflows
- Identify various seating arrangements that support diverse learning needs

Educators can be equipped with the knowledge and strategies to transform their classrooms into spaces optimal for learning, collaboration, and growth.

A well-designed classroom environment promotes a sense of safety and security for students.



Components of Arranging a Physical Environment

Arranging and organizing the physical classroom environment so all students can hear, see, and move freely, maximizes learning.

- Arrange furniture to maximize space
- Provide paths and routines for efficient work-flow
- Provide organizational systems
- Minimize visual and auditory distractions
- Minimize areas of congestion



How to Create an Effective Classroom Arrangement

- Clearly define traffic patterns to allow movement without disrupting others.
- Arrange desks and furniture to support instructional activities.
- Arrange desks and furniture for maximum student and teacher visibility and access.
- Ensure materials are clearly labeled, easily accessible, and organized for ease of use.

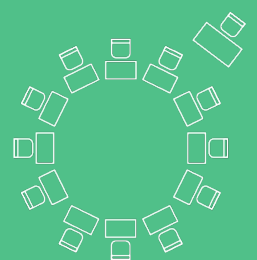


Implementation Strategies

- Keep high-traffic areas free from congestion
 - Group work areas
 - Space around the pencil sharpener
 - Doorways
 - Students' desks and teacher's desk
- Be sure all students can be easily seen, and they can see the teacher
- Make sure that frequently used materials and supplies are clearly labeled and easily accessible
- Display only current or relevant materials

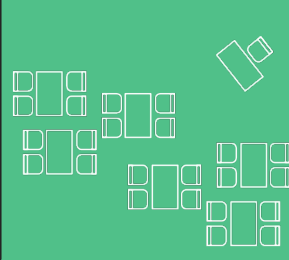
Examples of Physical Classroom Arrangements

There are multiple examples of how to arrange student desks. Here are two of the most common.



Circular Arrangement:

facilitates student discussion and allows the efficient circulation throughout the classroom. It is commonly used in secondary classrooms.



Cluster Arrangement:

allows for small group work and facilitates collaborative learning. It is commonly used in elementary classrooms.



Crafting Solutions Through Reflection and Connection

Reflective exercises like the one outlined helps teachers enhance their ability to create optimal physical learning spaces through increased self-awareness, connection, and purposeful action.

In this Reflect and Connect activity, educators will be guided through thoughtful reflection on what is currently working and not working in a classroom layout, based on observations of student learning and behavior.

1. Consider what is currently working in Ms. Baird's classroom layout based on her observations of students (e.g. aspects of the layout that support learning and positive behavior).
2. **Reflect** on what changes could be made to the physical layout to better address the challenges Ms. Baird has noticed (e.g. students having trouble focusing, congestion during transitions, messiness in sink area).
3. **Connect** what has been learned and brainstorm an ideal new classroom design that aims to improve student learning experiences and behaviors by incorporating changes like:
 - Adjusting desk groupings and seating arrangements to maximize focus and minimize disruptions
 - Reorganizing high-traffic areas like the cubbies and sink to allow better flow
 - Designating spaces conducive to independent work to support students like Sana and Mae
4. **Connect** and collaborate with colleagues to get input on the classroom redesign.
5. Be prepared to explain the new classroom layout design and how it aims to create an optimal learning environment and increase positive behaviors.



Reflect and Connect

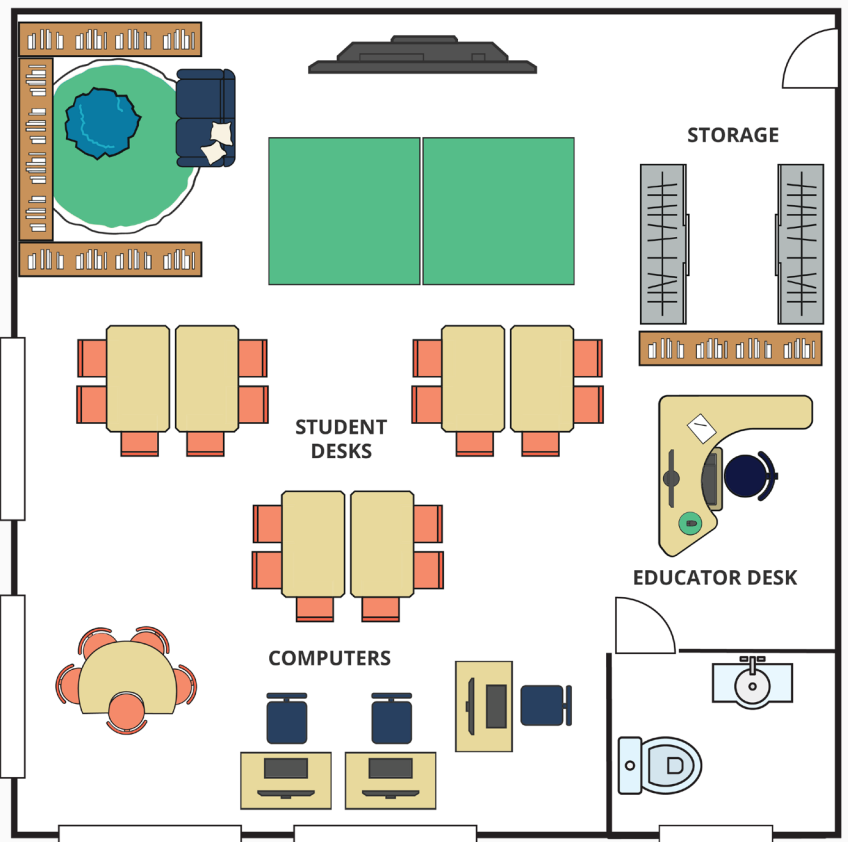
This activity may be completed individually or with a group. If training in a group, allow time for participants to share their thoughts and questions with their peers.

Scenario

Ms. Baird is a first-grade classroom teacher. She has 22 students in her class. It is the end of the first quarter, and she has gotten to know her students pretty well and understands how they navigate the classroom. She has noticed that John cannot sit at his current desk group and finish his work. She has also noticed that when she asks students to put their papers in their cubbies, they constantly bump into each other. When Ms. Baird delivers instruction at the kidney table, she notices students leaving the sink area messy and covered in soap and water. Finally, she sees that Sana and Mae are constantly being reminded to stop talking during independent reading time.

1. Consider Ms. Baird's current physical classroom arrangement. Based on what Ms. Baird has noticed, what aspects of the classroom arrangement might you keep?
 - Why would you consider keeping those aspects of the classroom the same?
2. How would you consider changing the physical layout of the classroom?
 - How would those changes improve the overall students' instructional experience?
3. As an individual or group, draw/design the ideal physical classroom layout for Ms. Baird. Be prepared to share the design with your classroom/content colleagues.

Here is a picture of her current classroom arrangement:





Strategic Seating for Dynamic Learning

Educators hold the key to an optimized classroom environment that sparks academic engagement and fuels learning. It's essential that administrators and educators embrace a dynamic blend of seating arrangements—clusters, rows, pods, horseshoe, and circular—to match and support different instructional approaches, collaboration needs, and learning styles.

There are a variety of recommendations to consider when creating an effective physical classroom seating arrangement. For example, preferential accommodations should be made for students with specific needs. Also, wall space can be used strategically for tools, reminders, and culturally inclusive materials that promote belonging.

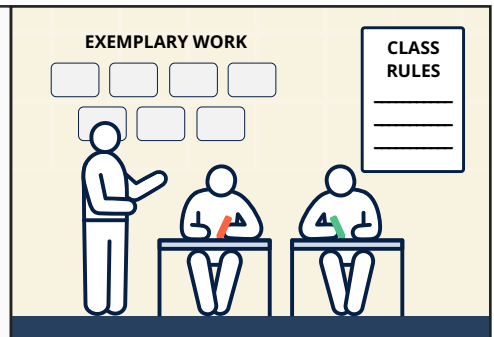
Practice what you preach! The teacher area should model organization with frequently used items accessible. Materials should be readily available to students to minimize disruption. Also, the teacher desk should be positioned for active supervision.

Additionally, expectations can be set for flexible seating use. Also, a seating chart can help strategically organize students, with adjustments as needed.

Lastly, ending each day by tidying desks instills structure. Ultimately, an inclusive, thoughtful layout promotes achievement by enabling focus, discussion, and engagement.

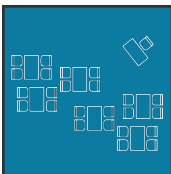
Academic Considerations

The physical classroom space has an impact on both student behavior and academic engagement. Therefore, thinking about how the physical classroom layout will promote collaboration, academic engagement, and deeper learning is essential when arranging your classroom. As resources allow, consider the following when designing your physical classroom arrangement.



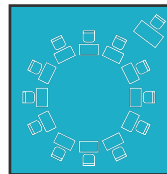
Seating Arrangement: *The physical classroom layout and seating options must meet your instructional needs and the learning needs of your students. There are multiple options for seating arrangements, and below are some common examples.*

Create collaborative work areas or stations. Examples include:



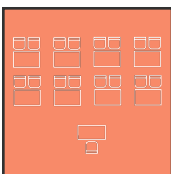
Use cluster desk arrangements to allow students to:

- work together
- discuss ideas
- engage in academic conversations



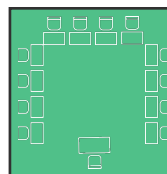
Use circular arrangements to:

- encourage communication between students and teachers
- increase student focus
- limit distractions



Use pod desk arrangements to:

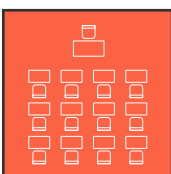
- increase academic conversations
- facilitate academic project-based learning
- support working collaboratively to reach a learning goal



Using horseshoe desk arrangement allows increased:

- interaction between students and teachers
- opportunities for academic discussions
- student attention to a focal point

Create traditional seating arrangements, as needed.



Put students' desks in rows to allow students to:

- work in activities independently
- work with minimal distractions, based on student need
- take assessments

Create options for preferential seating, based on student need.



Preferential seating is an accommodation for students with a specific need related to their ability to see, hear, and participate in classroom discussions and activities similar to their peers. Most commonly, this accommodation is made for students with an educational disability; however, it can be used for any students who may require it.

Develop a seating chart.



There are several options for developing seating arrangements for each of your students. Regardless of how you initially assigned student seating, remember that you can reassign seats as needed. Here are some common ways to develop a seating chart.

- Arrange students in alphabetical order
- Assign students numbers, and seat them in numerical order
- Allow students to choose their own seats

Provide options for flexible seating.



When students can choose their seats, they become more aware of their preferred learning style, which will improve focus, concentration, and engagement in their learning. You may need to set rules or parameters for using flexible seating options. Common seating styles include:

- exercise ball
- wiggle chairs/stools
- allow students to stand instead of remaining seated

Ensure the teacher's desks is positioned so all students can be seen at all times.



This allows the teacher to employ active supervision, which encourages students to increase engagement in learning

Wall Decor/Posters



Ensure that materials like books and posters are linguistically and culturally appropriate.

- Students feel a stronger sense of belonging
- Promotes community, inclusivity, and equity in the classroom

Ensure materials are readily available to students.

- Students are more likely to engage with the materials
- Reduces the need for students to move around the classroom unnecessarily

Tips for Keeping the Teacher's Desk Organized



Model organization skills for your students by keeping your desk neat and organized. Examples of how to do this include:

- Keep frequently used materials, such as pens, sticky notes, and staplers, easily accessible to you
- Store confidential information, such as student assessments, in labeled drawers within your desk
- Planning documents, such as weekly lesson plans and schedules, should be kept on your desk
- Use the wall space around your desk to display daily reminders and upcoming events
- At the end of the day, put away any unnecessary items that appear on your desk throughout the day



Strategic Classroom Arrangement for Learning: A Guided Checklist for Educators

This checklist provides educators with key considerations for strategically arranging their physical classroom environment to facilitate learning and positive student behaviors. Teachers can use it as a guided checklist when setting up their classrooms, ensuring they address factors like furniture arrangement, visibility, materials organization, and visual displays that contribute to an optimal physical learning space.

PHYSICAL CLASSROOM ARRANGEMENT



Creating an orderly physical classroom arrangement may require some practice and planning ahead. Below is a checklist that can be used as a reminder when preparing to create the physical arrangement of your classroom.



Set up the Environment

- Arrange the desks and furniture so students can see you, and you can see them at all times
- Desks will be arranged in a circular, cluster, horseshoe, or pod arrangement
- Post classroom agreements and expectations so that all students can see
- The teacher's desk will be located in an area where they can see students at all times
- Establish work areas for students to participate in small group work and independent activities
- Create clearly defined traffic patterns
- Allow for movement throughout the classroom
- Minimize opportunities for students to distract other students
 - **Example: Limit students' need to be near the doorways, the pencil sharpener, or the bathroom**



Set up Materials

- Clearly label materials
- Organize materials so they are easily accessible to students
- Keep materials for reading centers located near the reading center, etc.
- Minimize clutter by using only the materials required for that unit or learning objective
- Rotate out materials as students progress in a unit or change learning objectives
- Display materials are culturally and linguistically representative of the students in your class



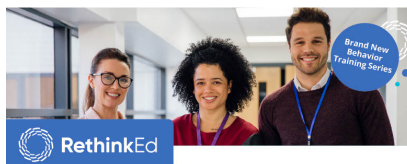
Display Visuals on the Wall

- Post classroom rules, agreements, and expectations
- Label workspaces
 - **Examples: Reading Corner, Calm Corner, Math Center, etc**
- Post visuals students need for learning at their eye level
- Display student work that does not depict a score or grade
 - **Examples: artwork, poems, writing samples**

High-quality universal behavior support optimizes learning and well-being. Fostering positive behaviors, decreasing behaviors that interfere with learning, and maximizing both student and educator success requires a holistic approach.

- Foster sense of safety and well-being.
- Increase time spent on meaningful instruction.
- Improve academic performance.

Professional Development Training



Behavior Training Series

70% of teachers report a recent increase in disruptive behavior in the classroom*, but fewer than 33% of teachers are trained to effectively manage behaviors**.

All students need behavior support to optimize learning and well-being. Fostering positive behaviors, decreasing behaviors that interfere with learning and maximizing both student and educator success requires a holistic approach.

It requires:

- Understanding factors that impact student and adult behavior
- Creating a positive classroom and school environment
- Teaching students behavior skills that promote their success
- Using effective classroom management strategies

[Request a Demo](#)

Comprehensive Behavior Suite



Behavior Suite

High-quality universal behavior support optimizes learning and well-being. Fostering positive behaviors, decreasing behaviors that interfere with learning, and maximizing both student and educator success requires a holistic approach.

- Foster sense of safety and well-being.
- Increase time spent on meaningful instruction.
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[Request a Demo](#)

About Us

RethinkEd combines the power of technology and research to deliver innovative, scalable, and evidence-based instructional materials and supports for all learners and educators, including those with disabilities. The comprehensive suite of tools ensures that every student develops the academic, behavioral, and social/emotional skills they need to succeed in school, at work, and in life. RethinkEd positions educators, students, and families for success.

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