

# Designs Th@ Work

Making space for better ways to learn



High Tech Middle School in San Diego cultivates a spirit of independence, encouraging students to think, literally, outside the box. Most learning happens beyond classroom walls: Students participate in internships and engage in group projects that make the most of advanced technology in the school's common spaces. With no class bells to announce when and where to move, students seem to embrace learning without restriction.

The approach is working. The middle school students go on to High Tech High, which sent all its 105 graduating seniors to college in 2004. Across the country, 11 similar schools that emulate the model have either opened or are in the planning stage.



To facilitate interaction among students and staff, each grade is clustered into its own neighborhood, which is situated around a central plaza called a studio. Classrooms surround each studio, and their large doors, which double as writing or projection surfaces, open to encourage team-teaching. Windows in the teachers' offices allow faculty to observe students.



The school's main hallway, known as the spine, connects the grade neighborhoods and functions as gallery space for students' work. Skylights feature glass that minimizes glare and maximizes solar heat. Natural light is augmented by a lighting system that includes dimmers, zones, and occupancy sensors to conserve energy.



Assemblies take place in the multipurpose commons area, which also serves as an alternative space for teaching. Fully outfitted with a Sony LCD projector, IBM Thinkcentre, and Onkyo 5.1 surround system, the sunken amphitheater-type space is ideal for student presentations, movie nights, and poetry readings.

## High Tech Middle San Diego

**Opened:** August 2003

**Size:** 27,554 square feet for a capacity of 400 students in grades 6-8

**Cost:** \$3.3 million

**What it is:** This public charter school combines a technical education with an academic one to prepare students for postsecondary education and leadership in the tech industry.

**Architect:** Carrier Johnson of San Diego and David Stephen as collaborative architect