Youth Space Planning Guide

The early school years are filled with new adventures. Many 5-year-olds are transitioning from days of play to school routines. Seven- to 8-year-olds are becoming more independent and developing personal interests. Overall, school-aged children are learning to be social, the difference between right and wrong, and about winning and losing. This age group is learning to learn, read, write and become problem solvers. At the same time, they are filled with unlimited energy.

Successful library service to young school-aged children means creating programs and spaces that tap into numerous resources that address this age group's needs and engage their developing and curious minds. The following checklist is a guide for evaluating space for this age group so you can begin to develop a place where kids are safe, secure and open to learning.

An Inviting, Friendly and Comfortable Atmosphere Keeps Kids Coming Back

Space

- Having as many inviting "areas" as possible in your children's space will attract a variety of ages and interests. Although the size of your library will dictate the amount of space you can dedicate to each of these spaces, it is important to try to accommodate as many of these as possible to meet the widest variety of needs.
- A popular children's library that features high-interest materials, such as new children's fiction, nonfiction, graphic novels, media/audiovisual materials, magazines, etc. *Note that this will typically be a shared collection with preteens.*
- Easy access to general collections for this age group, including easy readers, upper-level fiction and nonfiction.
- Quiet space for studying and recreational reading. Social space for chatting, general interaction, etc.
- General collaboration space for group work, teaching opportunities, small-group programming and instruction.
- A collaborative computing area where two people can work together at one computer.
- Interactive areas throughout for active gaming, problem-solving activities, art and literature sharing, etc.
- Large-group programming and event space that can serve a variety of purposes and adapt as needed.

This zoned library offers a variety of seating and spaces for all students.

Abraham Lincoln Elementary School, WI

Joshua Hyde Public Library, MA
Kids tend to gather around technology.

Draw kids in with color and artful book covers.

Washington Elementary School, IL
Pops of colorful seating encourage kids to hang out.

Decor

- The decor of the space will set the tone and tell young readers it's not just a space for preschoolers.
- Choose a general color scheme that is attractive and inviting. Create some energy and interest by adding pops of color in strategic places.
- Use carpet tiles and/or area rugs to help define the space and add color and interest.
- Review wall and vertical spaces for places to hang kids' artwork and other visually appealing items.
- Make signage easy to read and follow. Good signage not only enhances the look of the space, but also is a great way to help build confidence.

Furnishings & Fixtures

- Appropriate furnishings help define and enhance the look of the space, but they also contribute to learning and positive interactions.
- Incorporate comfortable seating in both quiet spaces and social spaces.
- Balance "formal" spaces for collaboration and learning with casual spaces for socializing and developing friendships.
- Include ergonomic seating and tables for computing and technology areas.
- Include chairs with 14"H seats paired with 22–25"H tabletops.
- Organize and label your materials in a way that helps kids make appropriate selections.
- Make materials accessible by keeping shelving heights at 48". Perimeter shelving can go up to 66" if needed.
- Incorporate displays and storage systems that will enhance the visibility and accessibility of the collection.
- Keep the overall space flexible with tables, chairs and shelving that are easily movable.
- For public libraries with limited space, as well as school media centers that are often the hub for hosting events, flexibility is a must.

Interactives

- Learning and education come in many shapes and sizes. At this age, activity is a large part of healthy development. Younger children are learning about balance and coordination and, as they get older, they'll start getting more creative and experiment more with toys and ideas. Incorporating hands-on interactives throughout the space and collection serves to develop much-needed skills and connect kids to library materials.
- Include interactive elements throughout the area such as magnetic poetry, whiteboard walls, art gallery space, board games, etc. Remember to incorporate elements such as these on often-empty end panels.
- Include a creativity area where kids can invent and act out stories, sing, etc. This could be an open area that encourages general activity, a puppet theater or a small "stage" with puppets and/or dress-up accessories.

A space and a bit of inspiration for kids to get crafty.

Interactives *(continued)*

- Create a collaborative computing area. The model has moved away from "one person per computer" to the "collaborative computing" model that enables children to work independently, with a friend or with an adult, so be sure to allow for enough workspace and seating.
- Incorporate other technologies beyond traditional computers such as iPads®, listening devices such as iPods®, interactive whiteboards, online resources, software and more.
- Provide access to digital creativity resources, including, but not limited to, audio and video production tools, as the library is the place to pull it all together!

Huegel Elementary School, WI
Renovation plans included space for hands-on, collaborative learning.

Northside Branch Library, Kenosha, WI
Light, color and open space draw kids in.

Approachable and Welcoming Service

- Positive communication is the basis of good relationships and is essential to helping children learn and grow. Good communication to this age group starts with how a library presents itself and interacts with its young users.
- Create a centrally located, friendly service point.
- Include a self-check station for kids to check out their own materials.
- Engage in good merchandising techniques, whether by creating a popular children's library near the main service point, incorporating child-friendly signage and/or incorporating face-out merchandising throughout the area.
- Include digital signage to highlight programs and events for caregivers and older children that will bring them back for new library experiences.
- Provide a safe atmosphere with nearby amenities such as seating, laptop access, etc. so adults and caregivers can easily keep an eye on their children as they engage with your spaces.

Ideas + INSPIRATION
from Demco

Get INSPIRED! Find programming ideas, professional development resources, community engagement tips, space design concepts and more to help your library transform at **ideas.demco.com.**

MONTHLY PROGRAMMING

Children's Activity Calendar

Get highlights of the month, plus ideas for celebrating important dates at your library in fun ways.

WEBINARS

Zoning in on Children's Spaces

Use best practices in space planning, technology integration and design to create engaging spaces for kids of all ages.
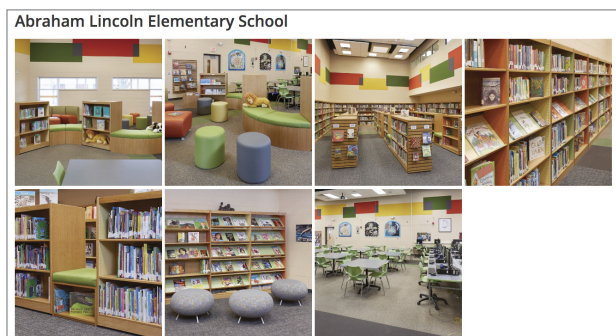
IDEA GALLERIES

Abraham Lincoln Elementary School

See how an elementary school library stuck in the 1960s underwent a dramatic interior design makeover to become a modern and light-filled space.

Huegel Elementary School

See an elementary school library that offers a flexible space that boosts creativity, collaboration and learning.

Kenosha Public Library

This renovated space provides a colorful background for young learners.

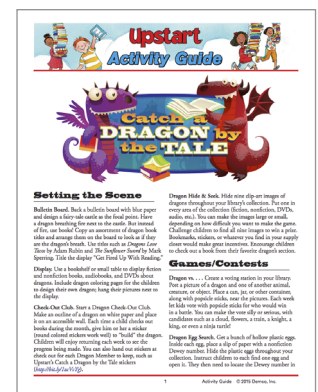Abraham Lincoln Elementary School

ACTIVITY GUIDES

Explore Nonfiction Activity Guide

Snowflakes and sharks. What do they have in common? Glorious nonfiction! From nonfiction books for kids to truth trivia, foster a love of this genre.

Catch a Dragon by the Tale

What has scales, breathes fire and gets kids excited about learning? No, not dragons. Dragon activities! Check out dragon-themed book lists, games and decor.

Create Inspiring Spaces

Demco offers a complete range of interior services and an extensive collection of furniture designed for learning environments. No matter what stage you're at or the size of your project, our interior services experts will collaborate with you and your partners to create spaces that are full of lifelong learning opportunities.

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