

# 7 steps to planning K12 spaces in your church

For many, early memories of Sunday school involve dimly lit gymnasiums or small rooms crammed into corners of a church. These often-drab spaces do little to stimulate creativity or interaction, yet they still create a place to gather and learn about God's love.

Today, children's spaces are often what draw families through your doors and keep them coming back. Through proper planning, you can create fun, warm, and welcoming Christian education areas that help build growth potential and solidify your church's long-term relevance. Here's how to get started:

- » **YOUR FUTURE STARTS NOW.** A good way to plan for your future is by spending time with your data. Attendance records can reveal your average growth percentage and predict what your church family will look like in 5 years and beyond. And don't forget to look to your community for informative data. Are housing developments under way? Are more families moving to the area? This information can help you estimate the amount of educational space you'll need.
- » **GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE INVOLVED.** Talk to everyone who will use the future PK-12 education spaces and find out their vision and objectives. How (and what) will volunteers teach in the space? How much will technology be used, now and in the future? What are the security team's biggest concerns about the space? How do children want to spend their time? How will parents interact with the spaces.
- » **AVOID "OVER MULTI-PURPOSING."** During the early stages of planning, it can be difficult to envision how spaces will be used. As a result, many churches default to planning a few multi-purpose rooms in hopes that they'll "make it work" when the time comes. This approach can be tricky to truly meet the needs of your congregation. Be intentional with your planning by determining the specific types of spaces you'll need and how they'll be used.
- » **DON'T FORGET FUTURE CHURCHGOERS.** Think about your future PK-12 education areas through the eyes of a first-time worshipper. Envisioning the space from this perspective can help with planning and decision-making. Will they be able to get from the parking lot to wherever you want them to go first? Will there be signs that make it simple to navigate? Is the drop-off/check-in process clear? Is safety prioritized?
- » **CONSIDER HOW CHILDREN LEARN.** As outside factors such as technology and teaching pedagogies change the way children learn and interact, church spaces that support children's education need to shift, too. Modern Christian education formats bring kids of all ages together for worship, videos, music, dancing, and storytelling before gathering in smaller groups for age-appropriate discussions, Bible studies, and activities.  
  
Think about the format of your programming (or the format you wish you had) and plan accordingly.
- » **KEEP ALL AGES AND NEEDS IN MIND.** Plan for kids at every stage of development, from toddlers to high schoolers. Each group will have different expectations for their learning environments. While ninth graders may be listening to music and discussing how Psalms serves as inspiration for some of today's secular music, second-grade students might be busy drawing animals in sets of two as they study the story of Noah's Ark. Think about the activities and lessons appropriate for different ages and build that into your plan.  
  
In addition to accommodating different ages, it's also important to plan for children with special needs—even if they're not currently part of your congregation. Creating accessible and accommodating spaces for this population will ensure comfort and confidence as they engage with other children.
- » **CALL ON EXPERTS.** When you reach children, you reach their parents, too. PK-12 education spaces are often the difference-maker and the deciding factor families use to determine where they'll worship.  
  
As you plan your next PK-12 space, seek counsel from creative experts who can think outside the box and consider the big picture. Your trusted advisors can help align your ministry's vision with what your spaces have to offer.