

Instilling Pride and Improving Student Outcomes at Sarah A. Reed Children's Center

CASE STUDY



Exterior of Sarah A. Reed Children's Center - Erie, Pennsylvania

Equipping classrooms and other school spaces with comfortable and flexible furnishings not only opens up new possibilities for instruction. It can also boost the engagement and morale of both students and staff.

With the help of grant funding, the St. Ann's School campus of Sarah A. Reed Children's Center (SRCC) in Erie, Pennsylvania, equipped nine classrooms, a faculty lounge, board room, multiple offices and a library space with modern new furniture from School Specialty[®] for the students in its sanctuary-based learning programs, many of whom have experienced some form of trauma in their lives.

"These are kids who are going through some pretty big challenges," says Gary Bukowski, CRFE, associate vice president of development for the center. "They're used to having hand-me-down belongings."

The new furniture includes ergonomically designed and age-appropriate desks and chairs that can be moved around the room easily to support various learning activities, as well as interactive whiteboards, corkboards, and tables with markerboard tops that students can write on.



Sarah A. Reed Children's Center Library

The transformation of the center's learning spaces has enabled teachers to become more creative with their instruction by supporting more active and engaging learning strategies. It has also raised the morale of students by instilling a strong sense of pride.

"Having this furniture has added a dimension of respect among students and has helped them to feel good about themselves," Bukowski says. "The students know we're serious about trying to make a difference in their lives."



Classroom One at Sarah A. Reed Children's Center



TRANSFORMING CLASSROOMS

Sarah Reed Children's Center operates two full-time educational programs for the Erie City School District.

SELF, which stands for Sanctuary Education for Learning Fundamentals, is a program for students in grades 3-8 who struggle in their typical school setting and who benefit from smaller class sizes in a therapeutic, supportive learning environment. SBLP, or Sanctuary Based Learning Program, is for special education students in grades K-12.

Students in these programs learn core curriculum content, as well as social-emotional learning and coping skills—and they have access to therapy services as well. In most cases, students are referred to these programs by the school district, and the duration of their placement varies. In addition to fully certified teachers, the program includes clinical

staff trained in Ukeru and Safe Crisis Management practices.

Prior to the transformation of its learning spaces, the center was using old furnishings recycled from classrooms at the district's other schools. This meant that many students weren't using age-appropriate desks and chairs.

During the 2022-23 school year, the center secured grant funding from various sources—including the Henry A. and Mary J. MacDonald Family Foundation—to refurbish its St. Ann's School campus.

School Specialty provided the new furniture in spring 2023. Bukowski placed the order in March, and the furniture was installed and ready to use by the end of April. "School Specialty has been great to work with," Bukowski notes.

SUPPORTING BETTER LEARNING OUTCOMES

The new furniture makes the center's classrooms more versatile, which helps educators teach much more effectively.

"The classrooms in the Sanctuary Based Learning Program house students of varying grades

and academic abilities," says Clinical Instructor Elizabeth Brown. "Because of this, my classroom needs to be able to flex and change to fit the environment at any given moment."



Classroom Three and Four at Sarah A. Reed Children's Center

With the new furniture, Brown is able to reconfigure her classroom on the fly in ways that make sense for her students. As a result, "I can have my students interact with their learning in ways they weren't able to do (before)," she observes.

Teachers can easily set up their classrooms in different ways to support different types of learning activities, such as whole class instruction or small group work. The tables with writeable surfaces encourage creativity by allowing students to sketch or jot down notes any time.

"When you have the right tools, it makes a big difference," Bukowski says.

Versatility isn't the only benefit. The teachers have noticed that students are more comfortable, better behaved, and more fully engaged in learning. Because they take pride in the new furniture, they want to keep it looking nice.



Classroom Two at Sarah A. Reed Children's Center

"The students often stated that they felt the (old) desks were ugly and inappropriate for their age. Receiving the new desks and chairs has been a game changer in the classroom," Brown says. Adds SBLP Supervisor Ron Rodney: "It made the students feel a sense of pride that someone cares enough to provide them with these new items."

This sense of pride is reflected in the effort that students are giving. Case Manager Julia Briggs describes a conversation she had with a parent shortly after the new furniture was installed.

"She told me that she is so happy her son came to our St. Ann's campus," Briggs says. "She sees a positive change in him at home and in his school reports, and she is very grateful."



Office furnished by School Specialty at Sarah A. Reed Children's Center