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LEEDING THE WAY FOR SUSTAINABILITY IN ALASKA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Throughout Alaska, especially in rural and suburban areas, schools often play a much bigger role than simply places to learn. They also serve as gathering places for plays, sporting and political events and other activities, generating a deep sense of pride throughout the community.



That's been the case for Fred and Sara Machetanz Elementary School, Su-Valley Jr./Sr. High School, and Clark Middle School. All three have achieved distinguished status as beacons of sustainability and beauty in their communities, thanks to a commitment to multi-purpose functionality and serious design flexibility.

A green leader for education in Alaska

The Fred and Sara Machetanz Elementary School in Wasilla was the first school in Alaska to receive the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Certification, earning silver. Backed by that honor, the school, located in a former gravel pit and named after a prominent Alaskan painter and his wife, has emerged as a pioneer for sustainability in the Matanuska Susitna Borough.



Brought in by Anchorage based architectural firm McCool Carlson Green, Interior Designer Cathy Kerr made sure Interface was a component in the journey. High recycled content products contributed to the more than 30% total recycled content needed for the building to achieve its LEED certification. Plus, Interface products help maintain an increased indoor air quality in the school since tiles install with no glue and meet the highest standards for indoor air quality.

And then there's the aesthetics. Kerr carefully selected bold color combinations to contrast against Alaska's monochromatic winter landscape while creating a stimulating learning environment. According to Kerr, there's some science behind the color scheme at this award winning elementary school. "I designed the interior of the school so that we used colors from all the segments of the color wheel," she says. "We know that people respond better in a full color spectrum environment. Students learn more with color in their environment as opposed to white everywhere. So with that in mind I went searching for the perfect carpet tile to do that, and I found Interface."

The result was an all around win, says Mat-Su Borough facilities manager Don Carney. "We liked the design so much that we're going to build two more using that as a prototype." McCool Carlson Green Principal John Weir adds, "There are many different teaching styles and learning modalities. So we try to create spaces that encourage teachers to take advantage of those differences. The buildings incorporate and accommodate that flexibility in teaching and learning."

Rising from the ashes

After Susitna Valley High School burned to the ground in 2007, McCool Carson Green's planning team faced a unique challenge: build a new facility that would not only unify the school after the crisis, but serve as a multi-use community space while reflecting the area's independent, artistic spirit and rugged landscapes at the base of iconic Mt. McKinley.

From an architectural perspective, the school needed a flooring solution to help create adaptable, flexible spaces suited for different learning styles, as well as varied usage by the community. Interface carpet tiles were chosen for several reasons: They're easily and quickly replaced (which also reduces maintenance costs) and they stand up to heavy foot traffic.

Interface provided the ideal aesthetic, too. Kerr orchestrated a seamless integration of the surrounding environment into the school by incorporating nature-inspired and locally sourced elements: lighting

structures as an abstract representation of the many swans' nests in the area, for example, and curved seating areas that evoke mountain streams and rivers.

The result was not only a beautiful, multi-functional space but a learning experience for John Weir. He says, "It really opened my eyes to the business case for sustainability, and also the community case for doing the right thing for our clients. It's been awesome."

Diverse benefits for a diverse school

Although Clark Middle School didn't have to contend with a fire, it did face another serious obstacle: a 50-year-old building that was in dire need of renovation to accommodate its growth and enhance its commitment to excellence in learning while reflecting its diverse student population. A year's worth of meetings and focus groups helped ensure the school would not only meet the needs of the students and staff, but also those of the community in the surrounding area. A color scheme of greens, reds and oranges was selected, and Interface's extensive selection of styles and patterns provided the perfect palette for Kerr. Using the carpet tile as an anchor, she created warm, modern interiors with clean lines and accents throughout. "I needed a carpet that had those colors in it so that it could migrate from floor to floor," she says. "I later heard through the grapevine that the principal said, 'Isn't it amazing how this carpet just pulls everything together?" The new color scheme also helps enhance the progressive design of the building: a multi-story layout, with classrooms positioned to maximize sunlight throughout the interior.

Clark's renewed sense of school spirit has expanded into strong community pride – a milestone that Interface played a significant role in, notes Kerr. "The carpet really helped us pull those community wishes together," she says. "It turned out really well. We're really pleased with the carpet and how it played into the success of the whole project."

PROJECT DETAILS

Facilities Fred and Sara Machetanz Elementary School, Su-Valley Jr./Sr. High School, and Clark Middle School Locations Wasilla, Talkeetna and Anchorage, Alaska Interface Products Shown Entropy® in custom color / Bioscapes™ Collection - Pure™ in custom color / Great Lengths™ II Collection - Junction™ II in Value Architect McCool Carlson Green Interior Design Spiral Design Photography Credits Kevin G. Smith

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"We developed a color palette on a standard carpet for the school, and it was very successful and very well-received. I heard through the grapevine that the principal said, 'Isn't it amazing how this carpet just pulls everything together?" Cathy Kerr, Spiral Design



"There are many different teaching styles and learning modalities. So we try to create spaces that encourage teachers to take advantage of those differences. The buildings incorporate and accommodate that flexibility in teaching and learning." John Weir, Principal, MCG Architects





THE SHORT STORY – WHY INTERFACE?

- Design flexibility of tile enables multi-function spaces for all types of learning styles and community use
- ² Numerous environmental benefits, including glue-free installation, high recycled content and LEED credit
- Easily customized products fit each school's identity
- Nature inspired patterns and styles reflect the natural beauty of Alaska's landscapes
- Solution dyed nylon and quality construction stand up to sunlight and snow

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Mission Zero:

our promise to eliminate any negative impact our company may have on the environment by the year 2020.

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