



# Morton West Freshman Academy

Berwyn, IL



Strive, Pillar, MyWay

## › CASE STUDY

# A Fresh Take on the Freshman Transition

Starting high school can be tough. For a freshman, navigating the ins and outs of classes, athletics, extracurriculars and friendships can present real challenges.

So, when Morton West High School in Berwyn, Ill., needed to expand its footprint to accommodate a growing student body, its leaders focused on how they could best support students along their transition from middle school to high school.



Ruckus, Intellect Wave

To do that, school leadership designed the Morton West Freshman Academy with student agency and community in mind. Above all, they wanted to create a space where freshmen could feel at home. Today, the Morton West Freshman Academy gives first-year students an inviting, communal place to call their own.

## Stepping into Students' Shoes

During the planning process, school administrators and KI launched a three-classroom pilot program to get as much student input as possible to inform the construction of the Academy. Each classroom featured different types of furniture and layouts to help identify what students gravitated toward.

"Getting feedback from everyone was huge," said Dr. Josh McMahon, former principal at the Freshman Academy and current assistant superintendent for the school district.

The most significant student input was related to the comfort and flexibility of the Ruckus collection. In particular, students enjoyed sitting on Ruckus chairs facing forward, facing backward and using the chair's arm as a writing surface or even perching on the arm as a seat.

*"We're huge fans of the Ruckus collection," McMahon said. "The kids love the chairs because of every way you can sit on them and use them. We definitely have kids sitting on the backs of the chairs and using them like stools."*

The enthusiasm for the flexible nature of the Ruckus collection has administrators expanding its use, with plans to outfit the entire Morton West High School with solutions from the collection.



Intellect Wave, Ruckus

## Creating a Space for Differing Learning Styles

McMahon had a broad vision for the new building. He wanted students to use every space -- whether a classroom, cafeteria or hallway -- in multiple ways. He knew that giving students agency over where and how they learned would be integral to creating a home away from home as they started high school.

“We wanted something that was flexible,” said McMahon, noting that adaptability would serve teachers and staff as well. “You never know how each class is going to be from year to year. We wanted to be able to adjust on the fly.”

As a result, the school’s team opted for design solutions that supported varying instruction and learning styles. They paired mobile Ruckus chairs and Intellect Wave desks with markerboard tops. The desks could be combined to create larger worksurfaces or separated for individual work.



Ruckus, Strive

“Ruckus and other solutions created the opportunity for a collaborative space,” McMahon said. “The trapezoid shape and markerboard tops allowed for a lot of flexibility.”

## Empowering Student-Driven Creativity and Learning

The Morton West team wanted students to be the arbiters of their own learning experience. They knew that encouraging students to pursue their passions would help foster a genuine connection to learning and provide a solid foundation for their transition to high school.

To do so, school leadership designed several hands-on labs and makerspaces. They equipped these ideation-centered spaces with Intellect Wave task stools. The stool's armless design and smaller scale allow students to freely move between workstations, doing some quick research at an InTandem powered computer station and then hopping up to do hands-on work at a maker station. In the photography lab, Intellect Wave chairs are paired with Connection Zone benching for easy transitions between setting up shots in the studio and editing photos at the computer.

The school's team also sought design solutions that would allow teachers to serve as mentors and facilitators to students rather than lecturers. With design assistance from KI, administrators put a variety of different-colored chairs in each classroom, allowing teachers to quickly and easily gather students in groups for collaborative activities.

"Our teachers say, 'Look down at the color of your chair. Everybody in an orange chair is in one group. Everybody in a blue chair is in another group, and so on,'" added McMahon.

Teachers can roam the room and offer guidance from multiple areas using mobile Ruckus or Instruct All Terrain lecterns. They might take a seat next to a student who needs help, instruct from the front or even roll their lectern down to a group of students working in the hallway.





MyPlace, Pirouette, Strive, Lyra

## Extending Learning Outside of the Classroom

Flexible and collaborative environments spill out from the classrooms to the hallways, allowing students to feel like every space within the Freshman Academy is theirs.

Learning can happen everywhere. Classrooms with storefront-style glass windows allow students to work in the hallway while teachers supervise. Hallways and nooks are outfitted with sprocket-shaped Pillar tables, Strive stack chairs and soft MyPlace lounge seating to give students options for focused work or more relaxed study within one space.

Beyond the student nooks in the hallways, the Freshman Academy's career center and library serve as two major student hubs outside of the classroom. When students asked for a career center, the Morton West team once again leveraged KI design services to plan the space. The center includes Strive cafe stools around communal Serenade gathering tables, where students can charge their devices, get some work done or simply chat with one another.

The career center had two main goals. "We wanted it to be functional enough for kids to want to work there," McMahon said. "But we also wanted it to be a place where kids wanted to come and hang out."

Likewise, school leaders focused on making the library a social hub with a variety of zones rather than solely a heads-down study space. Pirouette tables provide touchdown spaces for group work in some areas, while students can nestle into MyWay or Lyra lounge chairs for solo work or a little break. Other areas offer space for an entire class to host presentations or view a film by arranging Strive chairs and Pillar tables in a horseshoe shape around MyPlace and Lyra lounge seating.

“We wanted the library to be a home for students first and books second,” McMahon added.”

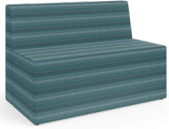
## Fostering a Smooth Transition

During a time of transition, one of the best ways for educators to support students is by giving them a sense of belonging. Together with KI and FGM Architects, administrators at Morton West built a Freshman Academy where every student feels valued as part of their new high school community.

# Products Shown



MyWay®  
Lounge Furniture



MyPlace™  
Lounge Furniture



Lyra®  
Lounge Furniture



Strive®  
Café Stool



Strive®  
Task Stool



Strive®  
Stack Chair



Ruckus®  
Stack Chair



Intellect Wave®  
Task Chair



Intellect Wave®  
Stack Chair



Intellect Wave®  
Student Desk



C-Table™  
Personal Worksurface



Ruckus®  
Work Tables



Pirouette®  
Tables



Pillar™  
Tables



Serenade™  
Gathering Tables



Connection Zone®  
Bench



Uniframe®  
Cafeteria Tables

“It’s all about creating a space that each kid can make their own.”  
- Josh McMahon



Uniframe, Strive, Pillar



Lyra, Strive, Serenade



Pirouette, Strive

View additional images from this case study [here](#) or scan the code below.



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