
11.0 Staffing and Operations

In this chapter we discuss how re-conceptualizing education for young children could impact the spaces and settings that facilitate different arrangements.







STAFFING AND OPERATIONS

William Malloy and the FirstSchool Transitions Committee have provided guidance about how staffing and operations for FirstSchool could vary from traditional schools¹. Reconceptualizing indoor and outdoor learning environments could mean the need for additional staff and/or reconsideration of the roles and responsibilities of individuals. The facility must be able to furnish space and settings that facilitate these different arrangements.

Cunningham & Cardiero² suggest that the team providing support services to children and families consist of the following professionals: counselors, psychologists, social workers, therapists (e.g., speech, occupational, and physical), health care, special educators, and remediation specialists. Each of these professionals will require office and service space. Attention must be given to their accessibility; and proximity to one another, to children, and to family members for optimal engagement and efficient communication. The responsibility for monitoring and coordinating support services for all children in FirstSchool should be assigned to one person. Three and four year old children in an elementary school may require different staffing as well. When staff to child ratios are lower, supervision must be constant and unwavering; coordination with the family and knowledge of services that the family uses or needs are essential. Other teams that require adequate space include a child study/student support team, site advisory team, transition team, and an exceptional education diagnosis/placement team.

In a large school community, the population may be divided into “homes” in an effort to enhance relationships with a more manageable number of children and families. Each home team works toward consistency and a continuum of academic and social development both within and across grades. Options for collaboration at the home level embrace the full spectrum of the interactions ranging from individual child and family consultation to team interactions. The goal of this approach is to promote collaboration that integrates services based on the unique needs of child and family rather than the availability of services.

Particularly for children age three to five, FirstSchool advocates for the implementation of non-graded primary school classrooms. Called variously mixed-age, multi-age, or non-graded, these groupings allow children of various ages (usually a span of one to three years) and abilities to learn together and from each other. Multi-age classrooms allow children to progress according to individual rates of learning, without being compelled to meet normative standards.



Inherent in these collaborative structures is the need for both accessible space and the use of state-of-the-art technology. These teams and staff members will need personal and professional spaces that provide them places to plan, work, and meet in small groups. As well, there must be spaces for professionals who spend some of their time in schools, such as community health professionals, to conduct their work and collaborate. Technology support, within and outside the school community, provides the means for regular communication with multiple disciplines, community stakeholders, university faculty, and family members. Flexibility in design is key to making these various demands on space work effectively for both adults and children living and working in the school environment.

Endnote:

1 2008.

2 2000.