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Symmes Maini & McKee's design for \$73 million Grafton High School honored by CEFPI

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Grafton High School and Symmes Maini & McKee Associates/SMMA were honored with a Project of Distinction award by the Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI) at the association's northeast regional conference. Opened last September, the 187,000 s/f Grafton High campus is designed to support a variety of learning styles while fostering essential career skills including collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving.

According to SMMA principal Philip Poinelli FAIA, the design and its integration of technology is part of a far-reaching shift away from traditional teacher-focused models of education towards a more personalized student-centric model. "The design of Grafton High dramatically departs from the familiar school environments most of us picture when we think of high school," he said. "The school uses non-traditional spaces for teaching and learning such as corridors, large and small group instruction environments as well as the outdoor classroom. The classrooms feature four teaching walls and multiple learning zones to offer all kinds of flexibility for learning beyond the traditional stand up and lecture orientation."

As part of this shift, every student received a new iPad tablet last September to provide instant access to the school's digital teaching tools and wireless educational network. This 1:1 technology initiative, named to describe a dedicated mobile device for each student, is a fast-growing trend in secondary and higher education.

During the design phase, students and faculty were heavily involved in the discussion of how technology could be used to improve learning and enhance school wide communication. Teachers were provided laptops and an iPad and completed a year of preparation, curriculum revisions and professional development to ensure success of the program.

Education spaces and classrooms are based on a forward-thinking philosophy with flexible clusters creating small learning communities sharing common spaces for projects and interdisciplinary work. Three primary community spaces - a gymnasium, auditorium/theater and the library are linked to classrooms and common spaces by a central commons at the heart of the school. The Commons also connects to exterior campus destinations including the stadium and outdoor dining and open-air classrooms.

In awarding the School this honor, the CEFPI jury described the program as one that "clearly reinforces student-centric learning." They cited how well "a large school was effectively broken down into distinct learning communities, with opportunities for real-time learning everywhere."

The new \$73 million Grafton High School accommodates 900 students with a flexible design expandable to 1,200 students projected for this growing community by 2030.