

DESERET PEAK HIGH SCHOOL

# A New Kind of Learning Takes Shape



**LOCATION:** Tooele, Utah

**PARTNERSHIPS:** VCBO Architecture and Workspace Elements

Deseret Peak High School was designed for a community in transition. Serving a rapidly growing and historically rural area west of Salt Lake City, Tooele County School District saw the new school as an opportunity to rethink how learning environments could better support students today and into the future.

Built on what was once a horse pasture, Deseret Peak High School represents a bold investment in future-focused education. Designed to support flexible, project-based learning models, the school reflects the district's progressive approach to teaching while remaining grounded in the realities of a growing student population.



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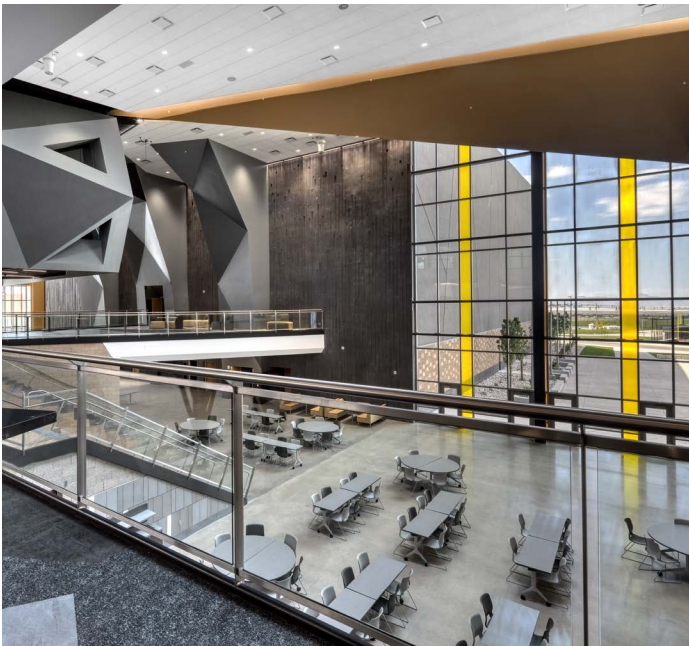
## **Designing for Flexibility from Day One**

From the earliest planning stages, flexibility was the guiding principle. The district needed a school designed to adapt as enrollment grew from 1,100 students to nearly 2,000—and as learning styles continue to evolve in the decades ahead.

VCBO Architecture, Workspace Elements, and HON worked closely with Tooele County School District leaders and educators through live design sessions to ensure the spaces reflected how learning actually happens. Teachers were not just considered end users. They were active participants in shaping how classrooms, collaboration zones, and shared spaces would function.

One pivotal step came even before Deseret Peak was built. The district piloted a full-scale mock classroom at another high school, allowing educators to experience different furniture solutions firsthand. By moving away from traditional combo desks and testing soft seating, mobile tables, and varied postures, the team gathered feedback that led to informed confident decisions for Deseret Peak.







## Classrooms Without a “Front”

At Deseret Peak, no teacher owns a classroom. No classroom has a fixed front. Every space is designed to adapt to the lesson of the day. Tables and chairs on casters allow students to reconfigure the room for group work, discussion, or independent focus. Writable surfaces line the walls, encouraging collaboration from any direction.

For Principal Matthew Parker, the impact is immediately visible. “As you walk down the halls, you can see that learning will be different,” he says. “The furniture has become an educational tool, not just a desk.”

Teachers can move freely through learning settings, engaging with students instead of pacing narrow aisles. Mobile podiums and adjustable seating allow instruction to happen anywhere, reinforcing the idea that learning is active rather than static.



## Supporting the Whole Student

Beyond classrooms, the school’s design reflects a deeper understanding of student well-being. One of the most impactful spaces is the teen center, a welcoming and stigma-free resource where students can access food, clothing, laundry, and quiet rest when needed.

Rather than isolating the space, the teen center is integrated into the heart of the school, reinforcing dignity and inclusion. It is not uncommon for student leaders or athletes to stop by for a snack alongside peers who may need additional support.

“That space removes barriers,” Parker explains. “If a student’s basic needs aren’t met, learning drops to the bottom of the priority list. This helps change that.”

The teen center has also influenced school culture in unexpected ways. Student-led clubs and teams now organize donation drives to support their own classmates, fostering empathy, pride, and a shared sense of responsibility.



## Learning Suites That Encourage Choice

Throughout the building, learning suites extend education beyond the classroom walls. Lounge seating, collaborative tables, and informal gathering areas give students options, recognizing that comfort and posture play a role in how people learn best.

Some students gravitate toward soft seating. Others prefer standing-height tables. The flexibility empowers students to choose the environment that helps them focus, while teachers gain new ways to support collaboration and enrichment.











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#### **A Space That Raises Expectations**

Deseret Peak High School has quickly earned a reputation as something different, often compared to a small college campus. And that distinction matters.

"There's pride in this building," Parker says. "It looks different, it feels different, and that raises expectations. Not just for the space, but for the education happening inside it."

For districts considering a similar approach, Parker offers simple advice. "Start with a clear vision and mission and let every decision support it. Furniture and design can set the stage, but it is how educators use those tools that bring learning to life," he says.

At Deseret Peak High School, the result is a space designed to support today's students while adapting to the needs of future generations.

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