

Brashier Soars from its Basement Roots

By Michael Sinclair, Principal, Brashier Middle College Charter High School at Greenville Technical College, Greenville, SC

“Brashier Middle College” spent three years in temporary dwellings but landed in a custom designed building that made the transition worth it.”

Beginning in August 2006, only three weeks after receiving access to a building, students arrived in the basement of a downtown community development center. Although this location was not glamorous, and certainly did not fit the model of a typical school, it was a major part of creating the atmosphere Brashier maintains today. The school accepted its situation and used it as a challenge to exceed all expectations.

In years two and three, **Greenville Technical College** invited the school to move to their Brashier campus, its namesake. This transition utilized 13 portable classrooms. Again, these buildings added to the “prove them wrong” attitude. Could students really learn in such a facility? Well, learn they did.

In year four, our first graduating class led the school into a modern facility designed to meet the Middle College concepts. Two large commons areas allowed students to gather formally and informally to build community and work together in study groups. The classroom furniture included long worktables and executive style chairs on casters. These created a college atmosphere as well as providing

tremendous flexibility in classroom design. A teacher could begin class in a lecture design and transition to small groups and then whole group discussions quickly. The classrooms were also designed to utilize the entire space - each of the four walls serves a function. The “front” wall holds the SMART Board or projector screen. The “back” wall holds the whiteboard. The “inside” wall holds the tack board for student work, assignments, or announcements. And the “outside” wall has two floor-to-ceiling windows to provide plenty of natural light.



When we looked at the expense of a building, it was critical that the building worked for us and not the other way around. We knew that incurring this expense would limit our ability to purchase things in other areas, so it needed to provide a lot of support. The building provides 24 classrooms, a dining area, and a media center with 24 desktop workstations, two commons areas, and six small offices. The offices were kept small, approximate 115 square feet, to minimize the amount of time staff spent in their offices.



Meetings should take place in the general areas as much as possible. If the administrative staff becomes stuck in their offices, they are not able to maintain the feel of the school and decisions are made in a vacuum.

The concept of making each square inch count and using it as creatively as possible extends over the entire facility. One could find the soft seating in one commons

area grouped to encourage students to cluster and work together, lined up in long rows to form extended “couches”, or arranged in a broad, “theater” style arrangement for video presentations or guest speakers. All classrooms, hallways, commons, and office areas are carpeted to reduce noise levels, prevent fatigue in students and staff, and provide a more comfortable overall atmosphere. The rear commons area serves as the cafeteria, and also can be quickly reconfigured for large gatherings – everything from simple parent nights and student enrollment events, to talent and fashion shows complete with lighting, sound boards and stages.