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Commercial BUILDING PRODUCTS

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Future-Proof Learning Spaces

Geo Works In Small Buildings

Update Vintage Data Centers

The colorful flooring in this science center complements the blue walls and grounds the spheres hanging from the ceiling. Everywhere students look, there's something to stimulate their imaginations.

Vinyl Flooring Steps To The Head Of The Class

Flooring becomes part of a school's curriculum, providing content, comfort, durability, and design.

Great design inspires and stimulates the mind. At the Latin School of Chicago, flooring—a crucial design element in any space—took on a new role in the plans for its Interactive Science Forum. This über-creative project is evidence that building materials can serve dual purposes where function and form meet. Perhaps the best testament about the project's creativity and design came from a student who stated very simply: "This place makes me want to learn!"

The Interactive Science Forum is in an 80,000-sq.-ft. building that also houses the fifth and sixth grade suite, as well as the new upper-school science center. The forum leads into the physics, chemistry, biology, and independent-study laboratories, as well as the lounge for breakout study, tutoring, or small-group problem solving. The space fuses the creative processes of science and art.

Architecture Is Fun Inc., Chicago, specified flooring from Gerflor, Bensenville, IL, in a 2,200-sq.-ft. space in the forum. The design was created in collaboration with students, cross-discipline teachers, facility managers, administration, and representatives of the Latin School. Nagle Hartray Architecture, Chicago, architects of record, were responsible for the master design plan and specified Gerflor's Taralay Compact Premium flooring for 30,000 sq. ft. of laboratory and science offices on the third and fourth floors of the science center.

Hands-on underfoot

Hands-on learning has proven to increase student performance, so using building materials, including the flooring, to enhance the educational experience was paramount. The flooring's bold color range, patterns, and water-jet cut-in designs delineate real-time science elements, making the flooring itself a learning tool.

The design becomes a 4D textbook, supporting the school curriculum in science and math. Embedded grids and scales allow students to record, measure, and test thoughts and hypotheses. Ultramarine welding rods set precisely one meter apart create a base floor grid, reminiscent of graph paper and allow

Water-jet cut-ins simulate subatomic particle trails in a low-maintenance floor custom designed for the space.

budding scientists to experiment with laws of motion and inertia.

In addition, flooring imagery and patterns function as wayfinding elements to draw students into the lounge for quiet study or brainstorming with classmates. Neon particle trails, the curving paths of subatomic particles, were water-jet-cut into the flooring to intentionally collide with the public space, which further creates an environment of innovation, interaction, investigation, and inquiry.

Since the Interactive Science Forum also acts as a public space, durability, sound abatement, stain and chemical resistance, sustainability, and maintenance were considered for the flooring specification. Gerflor's brilliant color palette, combined with the performance characteristics, made it an appropriate choice for the project.

Day-to-day activities in the Interactive Science Forum can best be described as enriching with hands-on experiences. The entire space functions as a curiosity cabinet, and every surface, including the flooring, builds off the others. Just as scientists make many discoveries while in the field, the Interactive Science Forum encourages students to engage beyond the classroom where they can literally touch and feel what they're working on—and walking on—during the day.

Sharon Exley, MAAE and president of Architecture Is Fun, said that the flooring supports school curriculum in an active way by bringing to life information in science and math books. "Children want to live up to the vibrant, interactive space, and thus the design stimulates learning and sharing information."

There is no question the students like the result, with one defining the area as "the best science facility ever."

Today's school design must incorporate form and function to promote learning and discovery. Flooring is perhaps one of the biggest design elements in a space and should provide a proven solution that is durable yet aesthetically pleasing. The Latin School of Chicago made the grade when considering how flooring can become a part of the school's academic environment while providing a great product that will perform well for years to come. cbp

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The square designs in the flooring resemble graph paper, while the pattern leads the way through the area.

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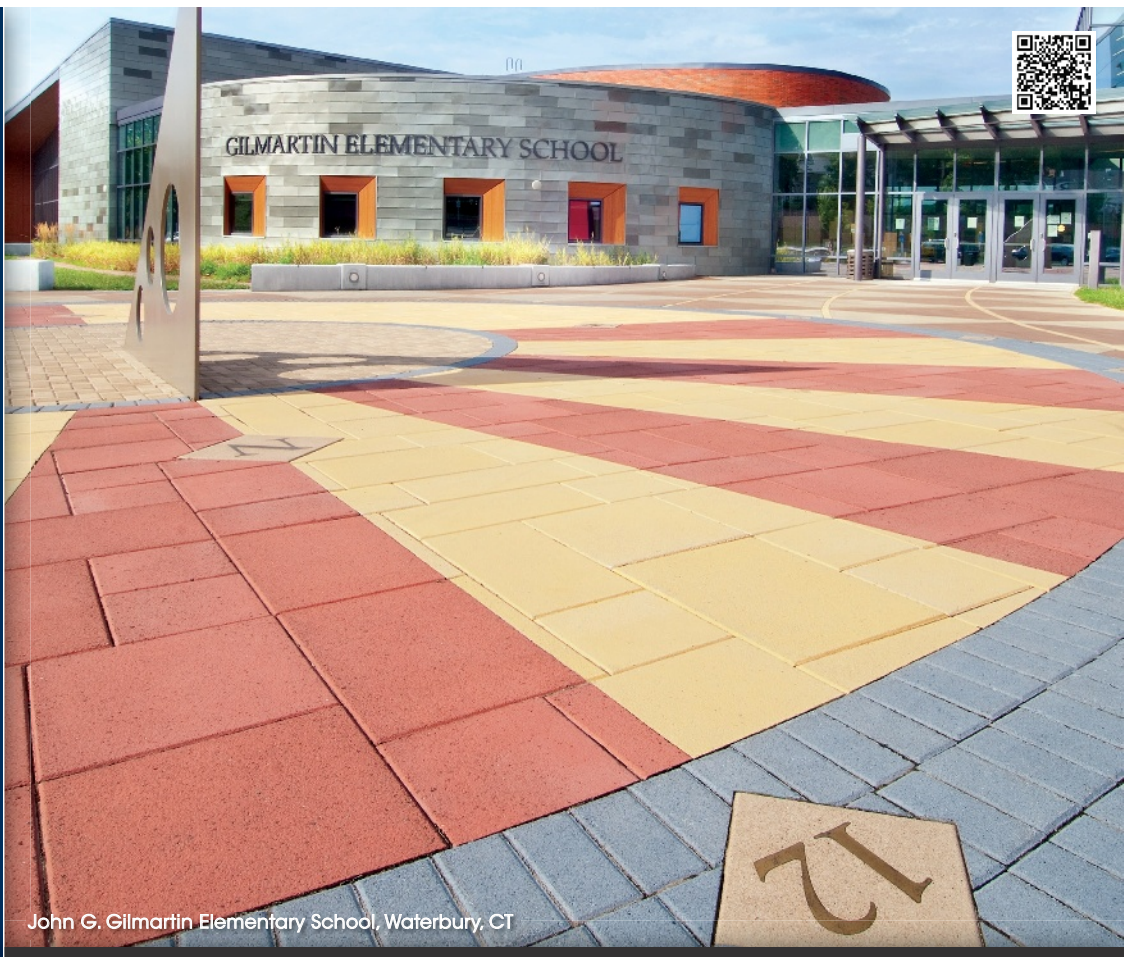

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