K-12 studio
2017 Design Review
Welcome

DLR Group’s K-12 Studio celebrated another successful year in 2017. We added K-12 design, planning, and research expertise to the team, and expanded our geographic reach with the acquisitions of Kwan Henmi in San Francisco and Staffelbach in Dallas. We also continued our focus on R&D to help us better understand the true impact of the buildings we design.

In 2017, we launched the Student Engagement Index (SEI©), a survey that tackles the question: “Can we demonstrate a connection between the design of the physical environment of a school building and student academic engagement?” Our ultimate goal is to generate empirical evidence we can embed into future design solutions and provide school district clients with the proof they want—evidence that innovative design solutions work to advance learning places and student achievement.

Initial findings of the SEI© suggest that more hands-on activities and mobility in learning are key to high levels of student and educator engagement. Through this work, DLR Group is gaining a deeper understanding of the impact our designs have on the success of both students and teachers. Our library of empirical data continues to grow, helping us shape the next generation of advanced learning spaces.

The bottom line is, when working to achieve a deep level of student engagement, the design of space matters.

Take a look inside, where you will find Insights from DLR Group education experts and examples of our most innovative designs across the country. To our clients, partners, and friends, and on behalf of the DLR Group’s K-12 Studio, thank you for another memorable year.

Jim French, FAIA
Global K-12 Education Leader
K-12 Leadership
Insights in Education

DLR Group experts regularly share their points of view on timely topics in the education industry. Browse through the next few pages to read what our experts are saying about the state of education, and how design impacts the learning experience for both students and staff.
To state the obvious challenges, how can educators manage this many young learners in one place? How do we maintain the sanity of the adults teaching all these little ones? We had a unique opportunity to design a facility for a single age group. What does a school look like if it is designed specifically for them? We knew that a successful facility for these learners required us to "forget" what we thought we knew about traditional elementary school design. We needed to fundamentally challenge everything.

As an educational designer, I have worked on many schools throughout my career. I encourage my teams to look at each project with a fresh set of eyes, finding that, sometimes, too much experience can be a hindrance to finding innovative solutions for students today. A few years ago, when the Mukilteo School District hired DLR Group to design a new, 600-student kindergarten center, I was excited and—honestly—a little terrified. Recognizing the growing needs for early learners, Mukilteo School District and I sat through two, half-day sessions of kindergarten to see what else would strike us about the daily activities of this unique age of learners. First and foremost, we recognized that although necessary, transitions take valuable time away from learning. As you can imagine, moving a large group of kindergarten students can be both difficult and time consuming. In particular, shuttling students to work with specialists consumes a large amount of time during the school day. I watched as students were gathered from a variety of classes, dressed in outer gear for the trek, and were guided to a small portable classroom across the campus where multiple specialists worked with small groups. After the sessions, students re-dressed in their outer gear and traveled single file back to their respective classrooms.

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Lesson Learned: Empathy is a critical element in the process of solving complex challenges.

Using DLR Group's intranet platform, I surveyed our entire firm of approximately 1,200 people to share their first memories of kindergarten. We then categorized their responses. A high percentage of responses reflected on play and creativity, but surprisingly, equally as many were related to fear, anxiety, and rules. By asking this simple question, the team began to really consider how we could alleviate some of this childhood anxiety.

Lesson Learned: Ask the question, even if you think you know the answer.

To expand upon those reflections of childhood, I decided that it had been way too long since I had been in kindergarten. As a result, the Director of Facilities for Mukilteo School District and I sat through two, half-day sessions of kindergarten to see what else would strike us about the daily activities of this unique age of learners.

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Knowing that this specific group of students could gain the most from uninterrupted learning time, I asked myself, "How does this situation help students?" I knew immediately that design could mitigate this scenario. To reduce transition time, we introduced two concepts for the new Pathfinder Kindergarten Center in Everett, Washington. Push-in specialists and decentralization of services. This child-centric approach would reduce daily transition time for students up to 30 minutes in a six-hour day. When extrapolated across a full school year, that results in 90 hours, or 15 full days of learning recaptured. And a lot of learning can take place over 15 days.

Push-in Specialists

This concept revolves around a specialist traveling to the student to work inside the classroom or in an immediately adjacent space. Our design provides this break-out space in, or directly outside, every classroom. The time to transfer materials and supplies needed for each lesson is limited through use of cubbies in the classroom and cupboards in the shared areas. Using windows and intentional views, supervision of groups is easier for all teachers working with or around a group of children. Additionally, acoustic considerations given to shared areas through a perforated dropped ceiling bring down the scale and provide a sense of intimacy for these young learners.

Decentralization of Services

Pathfinder Kindergarten Center is designed as four learning houses. Functionally, each learning house includes an eating zone to minimize travel time for meals and snacks. An indoor and outdoor play space shared by two houses is located immediately adjacent to each house. This gives students easy access to play areas and the outdoors. Each house also features a lending library that provides parents with materials to take home and continue reading with their child. Every aspect of the school day—education, nutrition, and play—is within reach.

In addition to push-in specialists and decentralization of services, we focused on variety of scale and size-appropriate solutions to best serve these young students full of potential, awe, and excitement. Reflecting on how this project has affected my view of educational design, and its unique design shaped by the synergy of age-specific students brings me pride. We must remember not to overlook the smallest of users, as they have the most to gain from our design solutions.
Top Five Flexible Learning Spaces

These environments increase engagement, and foster active teaching and learning to elevate the education experience.

by Andrew Van Leeuwen, AIA, LEED AP
Based in Des Moines, Andrew is an award-winning designer who specializes in K-12 education facilities.

Flexible learning spaces provide students and educators the freedom to adapt to their needs at any given moment. These types of spaces allow users to modify their environment to fit a variety of learning styles and activities, from individual to small group to large group exercises. When designed correctly, adjustable spaces can increase engagement, and foster active teaching and learning to elevate the educational experience. As an educational designer, I believe flexible areas are some of the most challenging, yet rewarding spaces to design. Starting with a blank canvas, I envision how the space could function day to day, week to week, and how it could be transformed to meet the needs of every student over time. Ultimately, my goal is to create a space that enhances the learning environment rather than hinders it. I’m amazed when I return to a school I’ve designed to see first-hand how students embrace the opportunity to change their learning space on an hourly, daily, or weekly basis.

Here are five of my favorite DLR Group-designed schools that incorporate flexibility into the design.

Dickinson Middle School in Dickinson, North Dakota is one of the most flexible schools to open in 2017. DLR Group incorporated operable glass walls and sliding doors to give students and teachers the ability to customize their learning space on a whim. Users can create various configurations of space ranging from 400 to 1,200 SF, depending on the needs of the moment.

Students in Joplin, Missouri, expressed their desire for a variety of courtyards and outdoor learning spaces in their new high school. As a result, the Performing Arts Center at Joplin High School provides 1,200 seats that serves the needs of the district and community, as well as a black box theater that opens up to a courtyard amphitheater. By opening a bi-folding hangar door, students can utilize the amphitheater for smaller, more intimate productions in fresh air. This indoor/outdoor connection gives students a choice between an indoor show or an outdoor performance.

Lee High School in East Baton Rouge, Louisiana, is designed as a campus consisting of three separate academies. A “social commons” component in each academy provides a venue for dining and informal student gathering to help establish a positive and unifying culture; support positive and nurturing relationships; and aid in the social and intellectual development of students and staff. Adjacent to the social commons, the Specialized Learning Lab is strategically located to allow public access for greater connection to the community. Two large folding glass walls afford the flexibility for these spaces to quickly connect and host various events and functions.

With assistance from Louisiana State University, these labs provide students with learning environments that relate to a progression of either higher education or the workplace, and are designed with infrastructure and utilities in place to support future programs.

Legacy High School Legacy High School in Bismarck, North Dakota, approached flexibility in two key areas: shared spaces adjacent to core classrooms and exploratory labs. Large, collaborative spaces are connected through overhead doors and can house large or small group gatherings. Classrooms regularly spill into these areas for group work, creating synergy between classes, educators, and students.

Exploratory labs are incorporated into the new high school as a way to introduce students to career and technical educational (CTE) opportunities. These labs are highly visible along main student circulation paths to display hands-on learning and to get students excited for potential CTE careers. Furnishings are moveable to fit the pedagogy of preference.

Meadow Park Elementary School in North Little Rock, Arkansas, as existing elementary school buildings in the city weren’t able to accommodate the collaboration young learners desire. DLR Group embraced this opportunity to organize the new school’s grade levels around Discovery Zones, spaces that are furnished with flexible furniture and allow staff to team or vary the environment for different student activities. Discovery Zones are filled with technology and storage, and have access to the exterior, providing opportunities for students to enjoy nature walks and outdoor gardens just steps from their indoor learning environment. Beyond the traditional school day, Discovery Zones can transform into community spaces or pre-function areas for extracurricular activities at the school.

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The Traditional Classroom: Not Dead, but No Longer in Charge

Teacher mind frames are proven indicators of successful learning.

After traveling to Australia as a Fulbright Scholar, I’m excited to share this latest update on the research variables in my study of innovative learning environments. The Innovative Learning Environments and Teacher Change project, along with space design itself, is focusing on teacher mind frames and student deep learning.

“It Only Takes One”

John Hattie, one of the Chief Investigators on the project, presented on the importance of teacher mind frames. The core emphasis of his message was simple: “It only takes one.” A single educator misaligned with an overall vision can throw the entire trajectory off track. For example, hiring an educator to work in an open plan school who doesn’t believe in the value of an open plan school would be a critical misstep on the part of the hiring staff or principal.

This discord isn’t isolated to educators—it can be true of any person within any environment or organization—and it gets to the heart of my work with LEaRN and why I believe professional development and organizational alignment are the next frontiers in learning environment research and design. Throughout my experiences, I’ve seen beautifully photographed educational environments that appear to hit all the right marks, yet when you walk the halls of the building, you see only lecture instruction taking place, break-out rooms being used as storage, and an overall sense of disengagement. On the flip side, there are similarly designed schools that seem to foster excitement, and in which the buzz of learning is visceral. So what’s the difference? That’s what I’m here to find out.

Teacher mind frames are proven indicators of successful learning. John Hattie argues that out of ten identified mind frames, the first is the most important: “I am the evaluator of my impact on student learning.” When an ownership mind frame is realized, other mind frames will follow. Educators will begin to see themselves as change agents, paving the way for student engagement that is equal parts dialogue and monologue, and building relationships around trust and collaboration.

Redefining Our Measures of Success

Through our research, we seek to understand how the use of space impacts teacher mind frames and student engagement. Success for learners is more so a result not of how an educator teaches, but of how an educator thinks. The same is true for the use of space.

Policy makers and school leaders often look to student test scores to measure success. I contend, however, that using this metric is flawed. Exams often only reflect surface learning—isolated facts, or temporary knowledge usually achieved through lecture instruction and worksheets. Surface learning, while a crucial first step to achieving deeper learning, does little to contribute to the ultimate goal: a student’s ability to transfer knowledge.

If a district is only interested in students memorizing dates or passing an exam, the traditional classroom with one teaching wall and immobile furniture will work just fine. If, on the other hand, a district wants students to think critically, learn to collaborate, and be creative, they should be looking not at test scores, but the learning space as a pathway to achieving this deeper learning. Schools reaping the greatest benefit from space are those with a variety of environments that support all steps in an academic journey: space for educators to gather and facilitate conversations, and areas for learners to work together and brainstorm, to retreat and reflect, create or present.

The traditional classroom is not dead, but it is certainly no longer in charge.

I have had many conversations with many school representatives, and we all agree, the skills needed to thrive in the workforce today are vast and evolved, yet often absent in the young people who populate that workforce. We must think critically about how we measure “success,” considering not the numbers on a test page, but the ability of our students to go out into the real world more prepared, more confident, and ready to take on the many challenges they will surely face.

by Raechel French

Based in Austin, Raechel is an educational planner with a focus on K-12 learning environments.
We look into the future with STEMConnector’s Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer.

by Sarah Woodhead, AIA, NCARB

Based in Washington, D.C., Sarah leads the K-12 Studio for DLR Group on the East Coast.

if you read an article on what’s popular in education today, you’ll most likely find reference to the STEM curriculum, the interdisciplinary approach to teaching science, technology, engineering, and math. I’ve seen countless applications of STEM in schools around the world, and I’ve heard many success stories from districts that have implemented STEM programs into their schools. With STEM education becoming a household term, I ask what’s next?

To answer that question, I interviewed Ted Wells, Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer with STEMConnector. STEMConnector is a consortium of companies, nonprofit associations and professional societies, STEM-related research & policy organizations, government entities, universities and academic institutions concerned with STEM education and the future of human capital in the United States. We discussed the state of STEM and what we can expect in the future. Below are seven insights Ted shared.

STEM has been around for quite a while and gained in popularity since the 1990s. Why do you think it has had such staying power for so long?

STEM emerged as a national priority following the release of the National Academies report, Rising Above the Gathering Storm in 2007. The report identified several alarming trends that helped galvanize a broad base of stakeholders to support STEM education initiatives. When President Obama made STEM the focal point of his innovation policy, I think that along with the policy case helped create sufficient momentum to make STEM an ongoing concern for years to come. As long as STEM skills continue to drive innovation and command a premium in the labor market, the same group of stakeholders will continue to remain interested.

In gross generalities, science turned into STEM, STEM turned into STEAM, what’s next? Is there something “right around the corner” that is going to replace STEM?

I don’t think there is anything wrong with adding letters to STEM, but we can’t lose sight of the core. Additional elements to the acronym can be quite useful. For example, in the case of STEAM - A for Art – creative environments are extremely good mediums for exploring STEM fields and for developing resiliency and problem solving skills. This summer, I visited the Boy Scout Jamboree where they had built an enormous maker space for scouts to tinker and build with technology in an unstructured environment. Other modifications like adding an R for reading or an H for health, are similarly valuable for reinforcing key foundational skills or career applications. The big picture is important with this movement and I think as we keep focus on employer/educator collaboration, equity across demographic divides, and innovation, we will stay on track.

Why is there such a strong achievement gap in this country, especially in urban areas, and how can STEM programming help solve the problem?

I would also add the growing achievement gap in rural America to this list as well. In most cases, structural patterns of intergenerational poverty are very difficult to break and quite adept at self-preservation. One of the main areas of focus for the STEM movement is increasing access to resources that seem to make an impact in improving STEM outcomes. These resources include, but are not limited to, high quality teachers, technology, mentors, enrichment programs, and work exposures. The focus on STEM for these communities is based on the fact that STEM careers—particularly for entry level work—pay better than most other jobs. Lending a career in the knowledge economy is essentially a good step in breaking out of poverty cycles.

Is Higher Education shaping STEM in high school? Is STEM in high school affecting Higher Education?

Definitely. There are lots of examples of connections to influence from higher education to K-12 and vice versa. First, through innovative dual enrollment programs, high school students are able to enroll in community colleges and earn STEM credits. This enables high school students to pursue post-secondary resources like last year’s manufacturing equipment etc. Earlier. These experiences can help inform students’ career understanding and aspirations and develop critical foundation skills. Additionally, students can develop skills that would enable them to acquire employment that may be more lucrative than they could otherwise obtain as a student.

STEM in Higher Education is also influencing K-12 through teacher preparation programs for both in-service and pre-service teachers that focus on teaching STEM in new ways that are student-centered and inquiry-based. Teachers are encouraged to be both proficient in pedagogy as well as content.

What are some of the top STEM schools in the country where the design of the program really explored connectivity to the work environment?

There are lots of great STEM schools popping up all over the country. A couple models that have scaled well are the Metro Early College High School run by Battelle and the P-Tech Schools started by IBM. Both schools take innovative approaches to instruction and focus on career exposure so that students can make informed choices about their education and employment futures. Another school that I really admire is the Chicago High School for Agricultural Sciences which provides students a very unique opportunity to work on a farm in an urban environment. A compelling research study led by Dr. Sharon Lynch at The George Washington University called Opportunity Structures for Preparation and Inspiration (OSPI) in STEM has given schools the ability to assess how effectively they create these experiences.

I’ve read several headlines recently that coding is the next language (like Mandarin or Spanish) that we need to be teaching our children. Do you agree and how does this impact STEM? No. I think that we have created a false analogy around computer languages and foreign languages. They are fundamentally different skills and should not be conflated. Moreover, sacrificing foreign language exposure for computer science only creates a new disadvantage for students who will be working in an increasingly globalized workforce. We do need for more students to have access to computational thinking opportunities. Coding fits under this umbrella but is a tool not an end destination.

What’s next for STEM?

Big question. I think that we will continue to see an emphasis on STEM as technology becomes an increasingly indispensable proficiency in the workforce. Also, here in the U.S. and in many developed countries, we are up against some challenging demographics as the Baby Boom generation exits the workforce. I would like to see more fluidity between healthcare professions and the STEM movement, as they currently seem very siloed. We have seen some engagement from nearly every group in the healthcare community (drug makers, medical device manufacturers, insurers, suppliers) with the notable exception of providers. I would love to see that change and I think it will.

In STEM, STEAM, and the Education in Between
More than 32,000 students began classes in a new school designed by DLR Group as the 2017/2018 school year began. On the following pages you will find a sampling of our most innovative designs that opened in 2017.
A progressive partnership between Lee’s Summit R-7 School District, Metropolitan Community College, and the University of Central Missouri (UCM) is reshaping the way students experience education at the new Missouri Innovation Campus (MIC). DLR Group and partner firm Gould Evans designed a space that focuses on learner outcomes in an immersive and rich real-life workplace experience. MIC is a unique high school program that prepares students for careers in areas such as engineering, computer science, health care, and creative sciences. In approximately the same time it takes students to complete their high school curriculum, they will have earned an associate’s degree from Metropolitan Community College, and can finish their four-year bachelor’s degree from UCM two years later.
In a world filled with technology, the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo Education Building offers a space for students to connect with the natural world, providing opportunities for "adventure education" that enhances their understanding of, and relationship with, the animals and ecosystems around them. Offering full-time high school, preschool, and kindergarten classes for up to 220 students, the Education Building exemplifies the zoo's education mission to enhance the public knowledge in all areas relating to the natural world. Distractions are encouraged and come not from smart phones, but from the sounds and movements of nearby animals.

**Adventure Education**

Students connect with the natural world at the Omaha Henry Doorly Zoo Education Building.
DLR Group’s design for the new Dickinson Middle School creates a flexible, agile learning environment that can be modified daily. Moveable, innovative wall systems create a new generation of learning spaces, allowing teachers and students to adjust their environment to support more active pedagogies in this 200,000 SF facility.

Students are organized in clusters, with each cluster consisting of three primary learning environments flanked by lab space and common discovery areas. Walls within each cluster open and slide, providing maximum flexibility to reshape and resize the core cluster learning environment for a variety of activities such as small group instruction or large group presentations.

Design Reimagined
Dickinson Middle School is a student-centered, transparent, and active environment.
The new Maywood Center for Enriched Studies relieves overcrowding and enables all Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) high schools to return to a two-semester calendar year for the first time in more than 30 years. The facility is the last of 131 schools to be completed under the $9 billion construction program LAUSD launched in 2000. A specialized magnet school, Maywood Center offers a rigorous instructional program that encourages cooperative learning, integrates project-based assignments, and emphasizes creative and critical thinking in all disciplines. In addition to academic spaces, the design also celebrates the school’s culture with a Zocalo, an amphitheater outside the library building where students gather daily to socialize and perform.

Maywood, Calif.

The Maywood Center for Enriched Studies encourages students to set their sights on higher education.

Creative & Critical Thinking
What’s next?

Canyon View High School
Maricopa County, Ariz.

The new Canyon View High School includes a first-of-its-kind Accelerator—an open source incubator that will allow teachers to advance their professional skills and explore new methods of pedagogy, while students can collaborate with local and global peers.

Round Rock High School
Round Rock, Texas

Expansive growth in the community north of Austin necessitated Round Rock School District’s sixth high school, a facility designed to be flexible, serve a multitude of learning styles, and promote both choice and individuality for students.

Cherry Creek Career & Innovation Academy
Greenwood Village, Colo.

The new Career & Innovation Academy will provide enhanced career-based programs for students to explore, experiment, and celebrate pathways of learning in preparation for college and careers.

BOLD
Bridging, Operations, Learning & Design
Expanding our K12 Services

Ever wonder what would happen if pedagogy and facilities were aligned? What if the learning organization and its operations were designed to hire, train, and support stakeholders to achieve new, desired behaviors? DLR Group is developing new services to Bridge Organization, Learning, and Design (BOLD) to enhance client engagement, and help project teams elevate the human experience through design.
Challenge of the Century
One of the most pressing challenges of this century is to mitigate climate change caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human activities. The DLR Group Sustainability Report for 2017 reflects our progress toward meeting the 2030 Challenge. We extract this information from the estimated operational energy consumption, energy production, and energy optimization of DLR Group designs in 2017. Beyond these typical metrics of achievement, we are further beginning to consider the “water-energy nexus,” calculating not only how much water is used to create the energy we use but how to reclaim or conserve it.

Validate Performance
DLR Group continues to complete data research to verify actual performance of our designs. We are excited to have submitted three additional buildings into the process of recognition by the New Buildings Institute in 2017 for exemplary energy performance. Once finalized, it will bring our total NBI-recognized buildings to a total of 1.5 million square feet of emerging zero energy and ultra-low performing buildings.

Raise the Bar
DLR Group’s average reduction targets of predicted energy use for our high performance designs have consistently exceeded the national peer group average. We set an aggressive goal of 10 percent improvement from where we were the previous year. In 2017, our reduction target came in at 40 percent compared to the average building. A 10 percent improvement set our goal at 44 percent for this past year. DLR Group is thrilled to report that we exceeded that goal and reached a 48 percent reduction in 2017. Additionally, in 2016 we reported that 16 percent of our entire portfolio by gross square footage met the 2030 Challenge goal. This past year we achieved 36 percent of our portfolio meeting this milestone.

However, as a global design leader, we aim for continuous improvement in meeting 2030 Challenge reduction targets. The trend in our AIA 2030 Commitment reporting shows tangible progress in achieving these goals through broader participation across all DLR Group studios. Both renewable energy and building optimization projects are significantly contributing toward our efforts to achieve the benchmarks of Architect 2030.

Through our performance design practice, DLR Group is poised to meet 2030 Challenge goals on every new project by 2020.
Awards

Legacy High School
Bismarck, N.D.
Citation of Excellence
Learning by Design

Lee High School
East Baton Rouge, La.
LE Solutions Planning and Design Awards
Renovation/Addition
Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)
Baton Rouge Rose Award
AIA Baton Rouge

Jordan Middle School
Jordan, Minn.
Grand Prize
Education Design Showcase,
School Planning & Management
LE Solutions, Renovation/Addition
Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)

McCarver Elementary School
Tacoma, Wash.
People’s Choice
Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)
Washington Chapter,
Polished Apple Design Awards

Missouri Innovation Campus
Lee’s Summit, Mo.
Design Concept Award
Association for Learning Environments (A4LE)
2017 was an exciting and very eventful year for DLR Group. We launched the year with 810 design professionals in 24 offices and with demonstrated expertise in 11 building types.

During the year, Westlake Reed Leskosky, Momenta, Studio Hive, Kwan Henmi, and Staffelbach joined DLR Group.

We closed the year with 1,150 design professionals in 29 offices with demonstrated expertise in 15 building types, and added an array of new specialized design services and experts.

In many ways, this acquisition blitz was serendipitous. DLR Group is always looking to add design talent and access to new geographies, and during the year a multitude of factors aligned to enable DLR Group to substantially grow via acquisition. While adding new geographies and expertise is the aim, ensuring a cultural fit is always the strategic imperative. Each of the firms joining DLR Group share beliefs that align with our core values; a commitment to integrated design, sustainability, and design excellence.

The depth of design resources, experience, and expertise that have joined our 100 percent employee-owned firm is remarkable. Specialized engineering, theatrical design experts, and internationally recognized interiors, preservation, and planning practices. New Culture+Performing Arts, Multi-Family Housing, Museum, and Transportation studios; and enhanced expertise in Education, Justice, Workplace, and sustainable design.

The vision is to be a global design leader with resources, reach, and the wherewithal to serve clients wherever, however, and whenever our design services are needed.

Our goal is not to be a big firm. It’s to be a great firm. A highly differentiated, deeply integrated, global design leader. All our recent acquisitions—WRL, Momenta, Studio Hive, Kwan Henmi, and Staffelbach—further the design ambitions of our employee-owners and our ability to elevate the human experience through design.

Griff Davenport, AIA
CEO, DLR Group