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TRANSFORMING MORE THAN CLASSROOMS®

Tomball ISD's Experience Proves the Right Furniture Provider Matters for Success

CASE STUDY

"They're not just trying to upsell you. They want long-term partnership, that's when you know you've found a true partner."

Dr. Martha Salazar-Zamora, Tomball ISD Superintendent



Tomball West High School — designed to support the district's vision for the future.

There are many factors that contribute to the success of a large-scale school construction project—and choosing the right partners is among the biggest.

Engaging with knowledgeable and experienced providers helps K-12 leaders identify furniture and equipment that aligns perfectly with their intended outcomes. In School Specialty, Tomball Independent School District in Texas found the ideal partner to furnish and equip its new 545,000-square-foot Tomball West High School.

A new school building not only must look aesthetically pleasing; it also must reflect—and impart—the culture and values that leaders are trying to instill. Its learning spaces must be designed, furnished, and equipped in a way that supports the district's vision for instruction. And everything must come together seamlessly in time for the school's grand opening.

At Tomball West High, School Specialty worked side by side with district leaders, architectural firm Huckabee, and furniture installer G&L Installations to help make this happen.

"They're not just trying to upsell you. They want long-term partnership," said Tomball ISD Superintendent Dr. Martha Salazar-Zamora, referring to School Specialty. "That's when you know you've found a true partner."

SUPPORTING EXPONENTIAL GROWTH

Tomball ISD has become what Dr. Salazar-Zamora calls a "destination district" for local families. Ten years ago, the district had fewer than 10,000 students. Today, its student population exceeds 23,000—and a significant reason for this growth is the broad range of options the district provides.

"We are the only A-rated school district in all of Harris and Montgomery counties," Dr. Salazar-Zamora said. "We are very proud of our high academic performance. But we offer a lot of opportunities for our students and families as well."



A welcoming, flexible library gives students choices for reading, collaboration, independent work, and connection.







Coordinating the delivery and installation of thousands of furniture pieces required careful planning, collaboration, and execution.

For instance, the district offers Advanced Placement and dual credit courses, a very robust bilingual program, programs in the arts, and an extensive array of career and technical education (CTE) choices, including less common options such as aviation, veterinary science, and legal studies.

"We want for every child at Tomball ISD to find a place to belong, a passion to pursue, and a love for learning that serves them well beyond the years they are with us," Dr. Salazar-Zamora said.

To accommodate the district's phenomenal growth, the community passed a $494 million bond referendum in 2021. Part of this money was earmarked for a new comprehensive high school, Tomball West.

After an extensive review process, the district hired Huckabee to design the facility and School Specialty to furnish and equip it. School Specialty brought in G&L to handle the extensive installation, which involved thousands of pieces of furniture.

"Instruction should not be driven by construction. It should be the other way around," Dr. Salazar-Zamora observed. She noted that School Specialty immediately understood the vision district leaders had for how the new learning environments should function.

"This project was very large and complicated. We needed a furniture supplier who could handle these complexities and be a strong, collaborative partner," said Huckabee Furniture Planning Specialist Tami O'Neal.

EMBRACING CHOICE AND FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility is a key aspect of the new school's design. District leaders wanted highly flexible and adaptable spaces that could be configured in different ways to support various types of learning activities.

As a result, the facility features mobile storage units, modular furniture, movable digital displays, and plenty of power outlets in every room.

"We were very cognizant of providing furniture that would take us into the future," Dr. Salazar-Zamora said. "We're preparing students for jobs that don't even exist today."



Flexible furniture configurations allow the classroom to adapt for individual learning, small-group collaboration, and whole-class instruction.

Added O'Neal: "If programs do shift in the future, the building is flexible enough to support those changes."

District leaders also wanted to give students plenty of choices in where they could sit and how they could do their work, including soft seating options. "We're trying to meet students where they are," Dr. Salazar-Zamora said. "We want them to feel comfortable and excited to learn."

Tomball West includes many aspects that are unusual for a high school. For instance, the learning spaces for STEM and career education include a veterinary technology lab with kennels where students will be taking care of live animals; a dentistry office with a working dentist's chair; and forensics, robotics, and gaming labs.

A key advantage of hiring School Specialty was that the company was able to furnish and equip all of the building's spaces, including these highly specialized learning environments.



A flexible cafeteria designed for dining, gathering, and connection.





A purpose-built space brings real-world veterinary learning to life.

A PARTNER, NOT A VENDOR

As Tomball ISD leaders were planning their new building, School Specialty invited representatives to tour a facility in Dallas and try out various furniture options firsthand.

"We had an opportunity to sit in different chairs and look at different fabrics and materials," Dr. Salazar-Zamora said. This experience helped district leaders understand how they wanted to furnish and equip each space.

School Specialty's highly experienced learning environment specialists "listened and gave feedback," she added. "Our conversations were pleasant and insightful, and they were not afraid to push back. I love when somebody tells me, 'No, that's not the best idea.' I know how to run a school district. I don't know anything about furniture."

As a result, furnishing and equipping the district's new high school was a very collaborative process. This give and take has been instrumental in helping the district achieve its goals, including finishing the new school building in time for its grand opening in July 2026.

Dr. Salazar-Zamora likened this collaborative process to a three-legged stool, with each leg—Tomball ISD, Huckabee, and School Specialty—essential for success.

"School Specialty didn't just sell us a product. They became our partners. They were with us for the whole ride," she concluded. "If there was a problem with a chair leg upon delivery or assembly, they were there to make it right. They had the same pride in the project that we had. That means a lot."

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