



Furniture Purchasing Timeline: A Guide for New Schools

A number of factors are to be considered when furnishing a new school and these should always be based on your school's specific situation. One of those factors, production lead times, is often beyond the control of the school so it needs to be addressed early. In order to have furniture in classrooms by a target date (often August 15), one must provide adequate lead time for multiple manufacturers to produce and ship the products you have chosen, and also include time for an installer to unpack, assemble, and install the items in the proper places within your facility.

While furniture products and manufacturers have different lead times, in most cases involving multiple manufacturers, all of the furnishings for a new school are delivered to the warehouse of the project installer, with a target date of at least a week or two prior to the installation date at the school. During this week or two of time, damage and inventory checks are made and any necessary re-ordering is immediately done to correct possible missing or damaged items.

Although some furniture items may take as long as 12-16 weeks to produce and deliver (such as built-ins, and other customized pieces), most basic school furniture has a lead time of between 6-9 weeks during the busy summer season. On occasion, items may actually ship as quickly as a week or two; however, lead times often increase during this busy time of year for many school furniture manufacturers. A mid-August installation date can be scheduled once all items from all manufacturers have arrived in approved condition at the installer's warehouse. Therefore, it is suggested that final orders on school furniture purchases for a new school should ideally be submitted by the beginning of May for a timely mid-August installation. Note that the sooner a manufacturer has an order, the higher the priority it is given.

You now know the timeline to place an order, but do you know the other necessary steps to enable that order? Your furniture budget needs to be set, the style of furnishings needs to be established, an exact order spec sheet must be developed, and the Board must approve the proposed order.

Once your furnishing budget has been set, determining specific school products typically comes next. When looking to "brand" a school in today's competitive educational marketplace, deciding on furnishings to match your school's educational style becomes more of a factor than

merely providing something for the students to sit or write on. This is where an owner representative or the League's furniture partner, Hertz Furniture, can be of tremendous assistance. These professionals will help you assess your needs and vision, and identify priorities in order to suggest specific furniture for your particular environment. It may seem obvious, but it's important to keep in mind all areas of the school aside from classrooms. Other spaces such as the library, science and computer labs, music and art rooms, cafeteria, offices, and reception areas will all need furniture.

Furniture selections are generally based on a number of factors:

- The type of style or "look" your school is seeking
- The interior space you have available
- Price
- Quality (How long should the furniture last? What materials are preferred?)
- Size (Which grades will use the furniture?)
- Warranty

To prepare for choosing your furniture, you will need to obtain layouts of the interior space in your facility. These layouts can be produced by your design team doing your architectural drawings. If engaged early on, the League's furniture partner, Hertz Furniture, can also provide this floor plan to you free-of-charge. The layout will enable you to better envision which pieces will go where, what the arrangement will be and how the rooms will look "on paper". If your facility has not yet been secured and you cannot obtain layouts, these design professionals can still work with your enrollment estimates to help you plan your space needs in a general fashion.

Prior to placing a final order (hopefully, by the beginning of May), two activities need to be completed: 1) product decisions need to be made and finalized (this includes deciding on exact model numbers, quantities, colors, etc.) and 2) Board approval must be obtained. Depending on your school, these can either move relatively quickly, or be processes which require more time, depending on how many people are involved with one or both processes. One school may take a week to decide and approve pricing, while another school may take many weeks to decide, and still be "tweaking" things for additional weeks while some staff may be on vacation.

While every school is different, assuming you receive your approval in December, below would be an approximated timeline from then for what needs to be addressed regarding furniture being in place prior to a Fall semester:

- December-January:** Hire an owner rep./consultant/furniture vendor for general assistance
Order architectural plans (if building/renovating), or free interior layouts
Decide on a furniture budget, estimated quantities, and educational style
- January-February:** Decide on types and # of specialty rooms, obtain furniture ideas
Attain finished interior floor plans, layouts
- February-April:** Specify product, quantities, and colors, and obtain vendor pricing
- Mid-Late April:** Submit pricing to Board for approval
- Early May:** Submit purchase orders for furniture
- Late July:** Product ships from manufacturers. Inspections are done, and possible damaged or missing product is re-ordered.
- Early-Mid August:** Installation of furniture in new school

Although the above timeline is an ideal scenario, we realize that not everyone's situation will fit this model, as some schools receive approval or funding considerably later, making it difficult or even impossible to fit the above timelines. No worries – the League's furnishing partners will be able to customize a plan for you according to your situation.

This resource was provided by Hertz Furniture, a Group Purchasing Partner for the League. To set up a complimentary consultation, place an order, or for more information regarding Hertz's products please contact Shane Ronay, Client Relationship Manager at (800) 526-4677 ext 1247 or shane@hertzfurniture.com.

Business Interiors by Staples is also a Group Purchasing Partner for the League. To set up a complimentary consultation, place an order, or for more information regarding Staples' furniture, please contact DeAnna Squires, Account Executive, at 303-373-8470 or deanna.squires@staples.com

The Colorado League of Charter Schools is a non-profit organization that serves existing Colorado charter schools and groups or individuals wishing to start and operate a charter school in Colorado. The League provides technical assistance, offers a host of services and engages in advocacy efforts to support member schools. The League does not make purchases on behalf of its members but acts as a resource to connect quality providers with school leaders. Currently, there are over 200 charter schools operating for the 2013-14 school year, serving approximately 97,000 students. www.coloradoleague.org