



# **When Academic Health Is Only the Beginning:**

**Using Space Design to Foster Emotional and Mental Health**

**Dr. Robert Dillon**  
**[rdillon25@gmail.com](mailto:rdillon25@gmail.com)**



Type to search...

PRODUCTS ▾

LEARNING LIBRARY ▾

[Home](#) / [Learning Library](#) / [Learning Conversations](#) / [Wellbeing for Students](#)

A horizontal banner with a blurred background of green foliage and sunlight filtering through leaves.

# WELLBEING FOR STUDENTS

by Dr Robert Dillon

Designing learning environments that focus on student wellness is essential for students to **belong, engage and achieve**. None of this is possible by using a strategy of design by **inertia**. It takes **sustained, intentional** design to truly support the needs of all students.



# Focus on Wellbeing + Wellness

With Gen Alpha, we see a shift toward wellbeing plus wellness. Some of these wellbeing needs include esteem, trust, freedom, sense of belonging, and connection. We continue to focus on wellness and educating the “whole person” through health, security, safety, and physiological and atmosphere needs. Here are several ways we are incorporating wellbeing and wellness into the classroom.

- Mental health resources and overall wellness support
- Flexible learning environments that can adapt to their rapid progression
- The end of the age-old practice of “QUIET!” in the classroom, balanced with intentional spaces

**hord | coplan | macht**



## The Alphas Have Landed



**Tips for Creating Classrooms that Turn Gen A into Gen Awesome**

### **Curious and Empathetic**

Having information at their fingertips has made them curious and empathetic to broader issues, like diversity, justice and sustainability.

### **Social Emotional Smarts**

Gen A is feeling the effects of social isolation. But they're also showing a heightened awareness of mental health issues and a willingness to talk about them – and seek help.

### **Shorter Attention Spans**

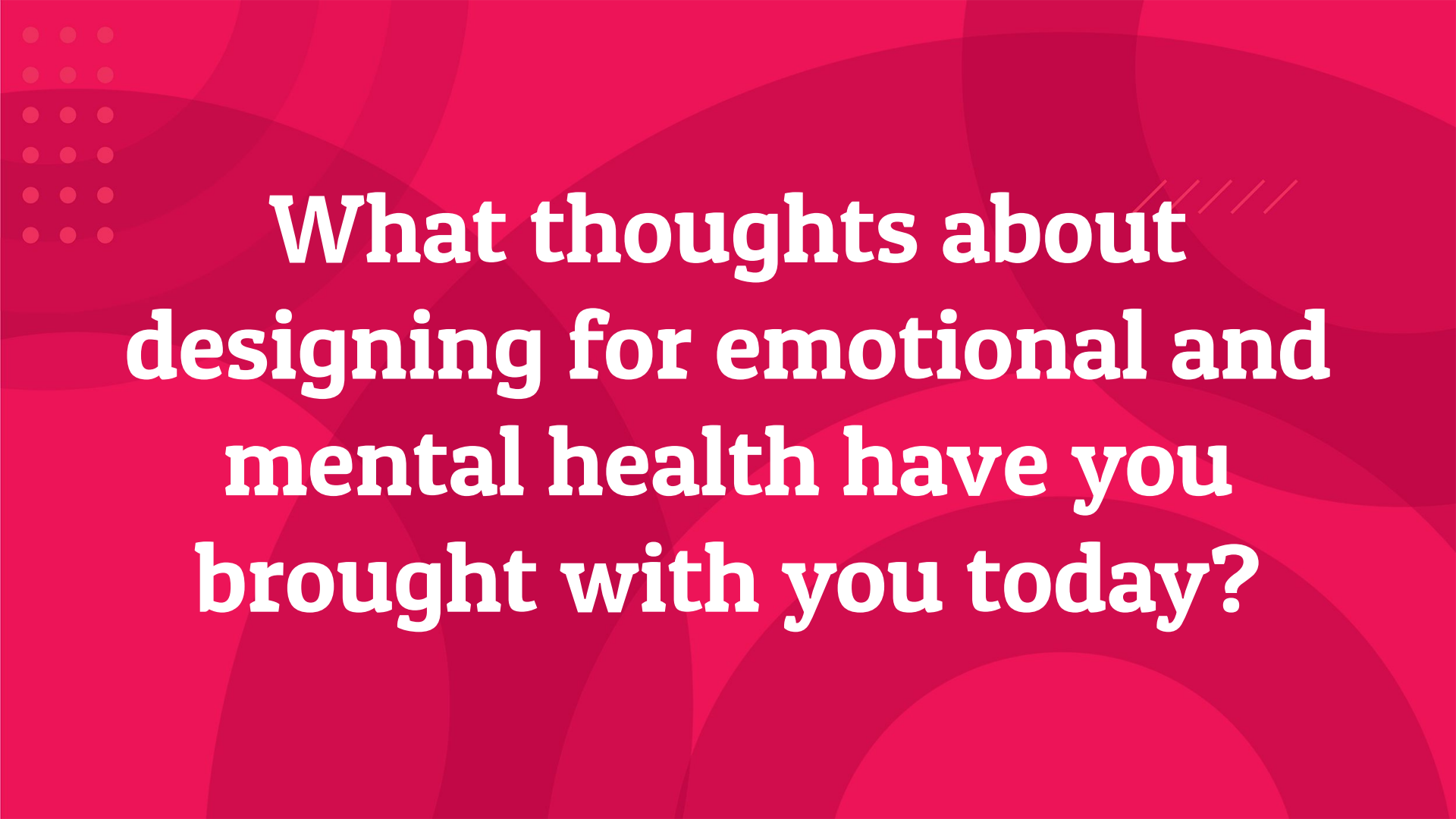
Though hard to measure, most educators agree that today's students (if not most of us) have shorter attention spans and are more distracted – perhaps from screen time overload. The global pandemic made it worse.

## Questioning School's Value

Kato reported that, "Many educators I work with are noticing [students] are no longer engaged in learning at school. Many of these kids (falsely) believe that there is nothing their teacher can teach them that they cannot discover online."

These students crave real-world applications, experiential learning, and meaning behind their learning, rather than traditional rote memorization. They also value individuality and benefit from personalized learning experiences.



The background is a vibrant red color. It features several overlapping, semi-transparent circular shapes in various shades of red, creating a layered effect. In the top-left corner, there is a grid of small white dots. In the top-right corner, there are several short, parallel white diagonal lines. The text is centered and written in a bold, white, sans-serif font.

**What thoughts about  
designing for emotional and  
mental health have you  
brought with you today?**



# The SPACE

A GUIDE FOR LEADERS

Rebecca Louise Hare

Dr. Robert Dillon

# Space for Quiet





# Space That Feels Better Than Bed

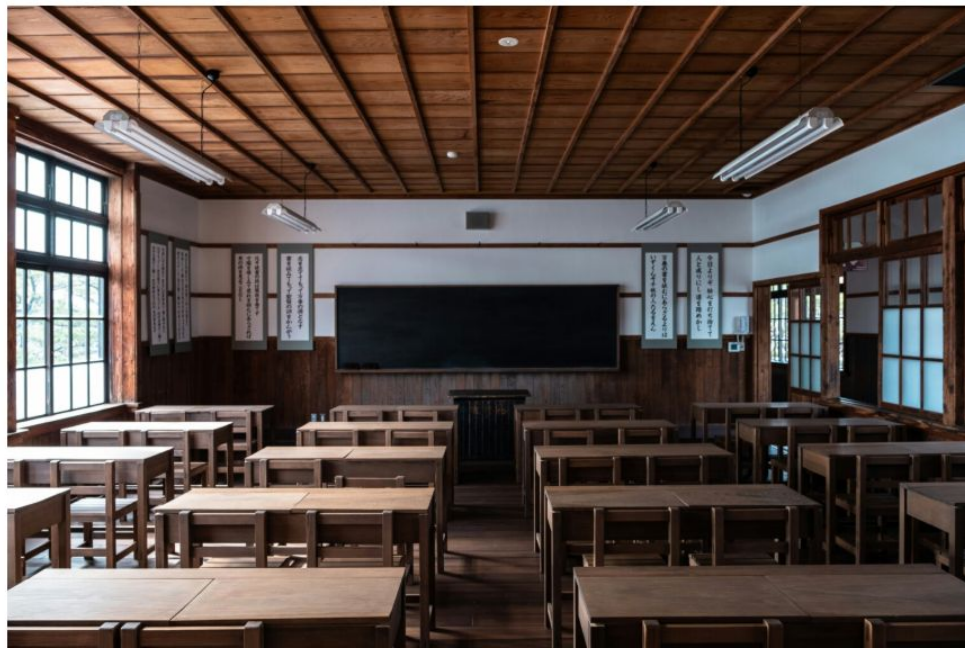
# Students Aren't Coming to School – Here's What We Can Do About It

Leadership

SEL & Mindset

## Key Points

- ▶ **Building authentic relationships with students and families is crucial for understanding and addressing the reasons behind chronic absenteeism.**
- ▶ **Establishing community knowledge networks and engaging families in decision-making processes can lead to effective solutions to improve attendance and achievement.**





# Space for Belonging



# **Does Every Student Have A...**

- 1. space to go in the morning**
- 2. space to go during lunch**
- 3. space to continue after school**

# Space for Care



Which of these concepts do  
you design for with  
intention in your work?



# Foundation Level Design

**a space for design.**



**create. learn. make. do.  
solve. share. collaborate.**




FRISBEE FUN  
TOYS

Electricity and  
Basic Electronics



Anaiah  
Easley





# Catalyst Level Design

# Space to Move





### Draw a Still Life

1. Choose your objects.
2. Arrange them on a surface.
3. Draw the outlines.
4. Add shading and texture.

Copy and take your drawing!

### Light Effects and Shadows

Light Source

Cast Shadow

Reflected Light

Practice Drawing

### Using Basic Shapes

1. Identify basic shapes in the drawing.
2. Draw the basic shapes.
3. Add details and shading.
4. Complete the drawing.

A white storage cabinet with open shelves on top. The shelves are filled with various art supplies, including colorful vases, containers, and finished art projects. Some projects are displayed on clipboards hanging from the wall above the cabinets.

A wooden table with several colorful stools (blue, green, orange) around it. On the table are several water bottles, a green coffee cup, and various art materials like papers and brushes. Two clipboards with blank paper are mounted on the chairs.

A wooden cabinet with a printer and other equipment on top.

An art project sheet on a table, featuring a colorful grid and text. The text includes 'Museum of Modern Art' and 'Artists'.

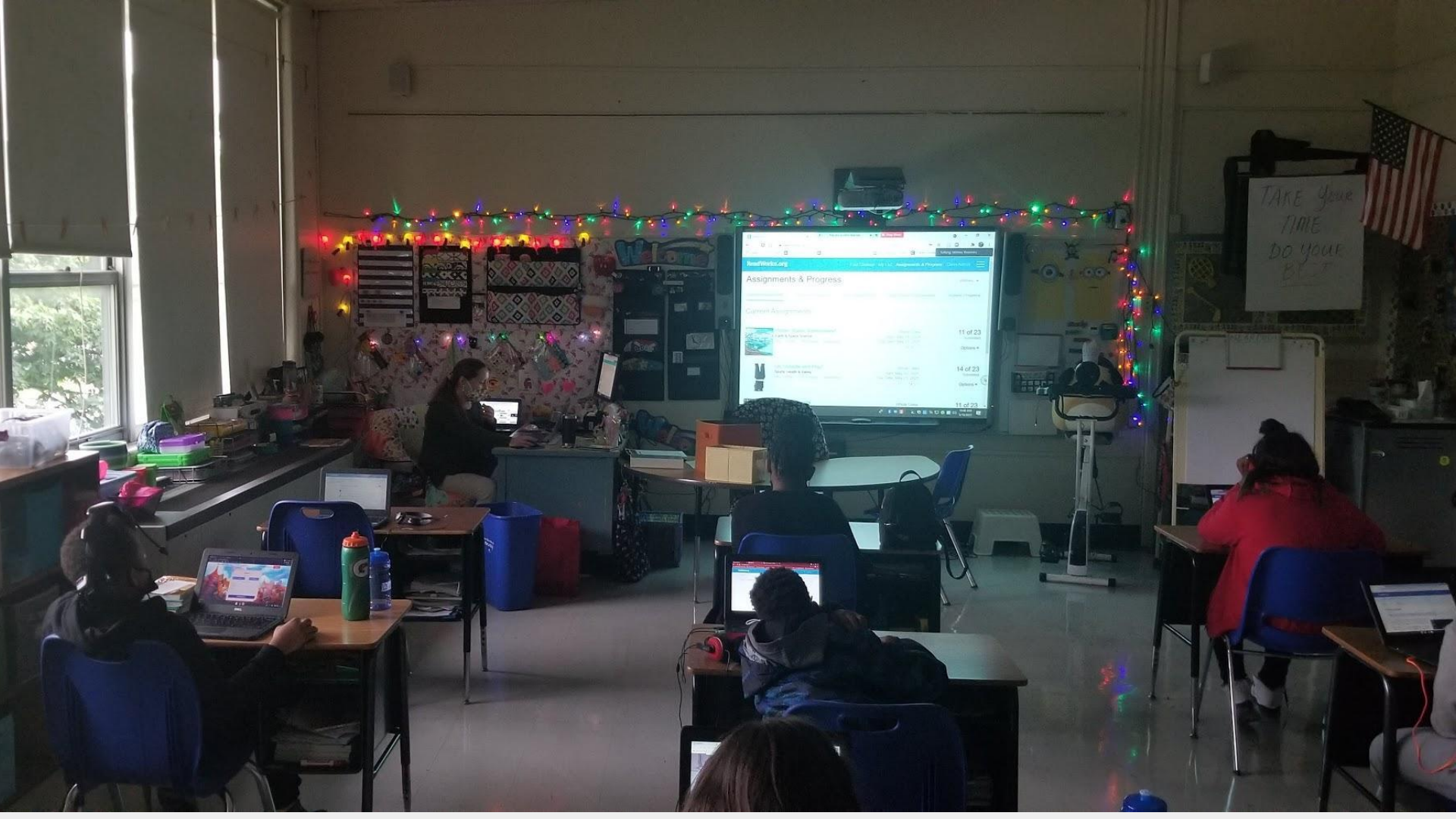
# Space to Communicate





The background features a dark grey base with several overlapping, semi-transparent circles in shades of blue and teal. In the top-left corner, there is a grid of small, light blue dots. In the top-right corner, there are four parallel, light blue diagonal lines.

# Spaces with Energy



TAKE YOUR TIME  
DO YOUR BEST

| Assignments & Progress |  |
|------------------------|--|
| Current Assignments    |  |
| 11 of 23               |  |
| 14 of 23               |  |
| 11 of 23               |  |





# **Rank These Areas As You See Their Impact on Supporting Emotional Health in Schools.**

- 1. Spaces to Move**
- 2. Spaces to Communicate**
- 3. Spaces with Energy**



# Linking Emotion to Learning

# Space With a Personal Learning Path

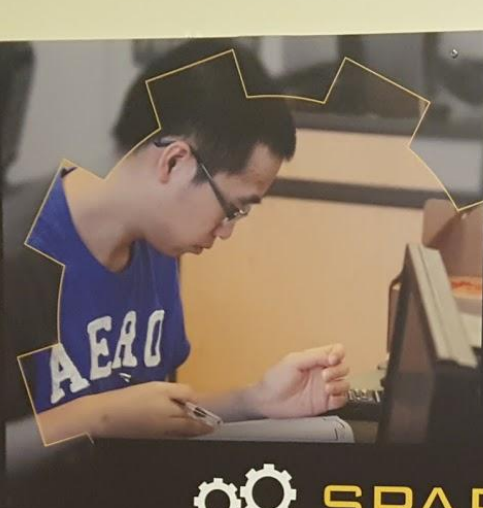
# Space with An Adult Connection or Mentor

# Space for Perspective

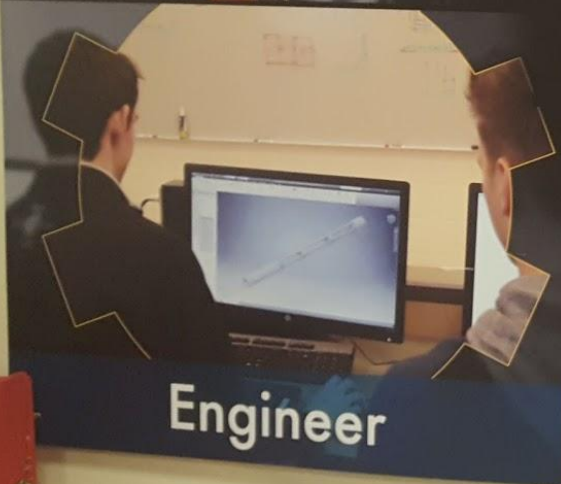


Boo Cat  
SEPTIC SERVICES LLC

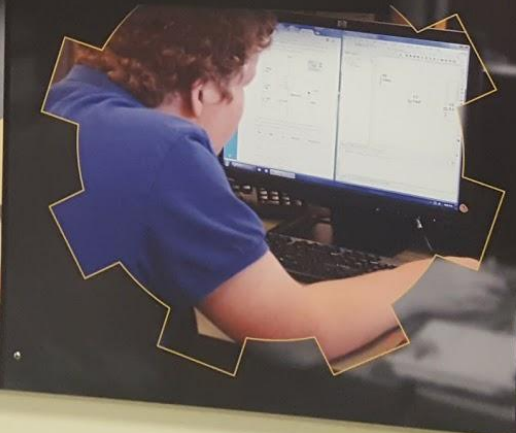




Innovate



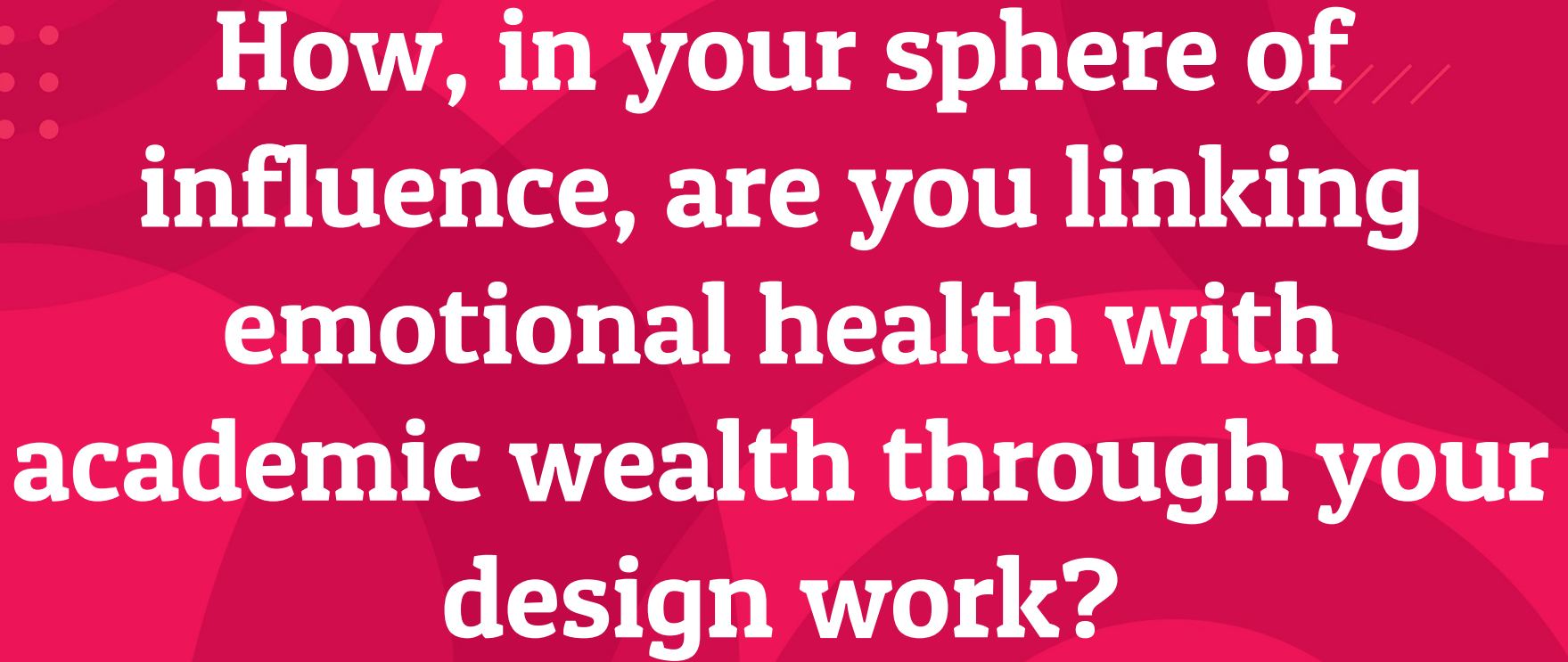
Engineer



Design

 **SPARTAN  
TECH LAB**





**How, in your sphere of  
influence, are you linking  
emotional health with  
academic wealth through your  
design work?**

# Final Thoughts





**Safety**



Support



**Stability**



# **When Academic Health Is Only the Beginning:**

**Using Space Design to Foster Emotional and Mental Health**

**Dr. Robert Dillon  
rdillon25@gmail.com**