Project

A Library Transformation with Purpose

Project Overview

Organization: Heart of America

Location: Eleanor Roosevelt School, Baltimore, MD

Project Type: Library retrofit using Marco

Customer: Tom Helwig, Senior VP of Operations, Heart of America

Marco Team: Angie Zilm (Director of Sales), Elizabeth Dickson (Territory Support Specialist)

Across the United States, Heart of America works to transform under-resourced schools into vibrant environments where students and educators can thrive. Through partnerships with school communities, donors, and industry partners, the organization renovates learning spaces and provides essential resources that help students succeed both academically and personally.

For Eleanor Roosevelt School in Baltimore, the mission was to reimagine the school's library into a welcoming, functional hub for learning and connection. What made this project particularly meaningful was its origin. The transformation was personally funded by an alumnus of the school, bringing an added layer of responsibility to deliver a space that honored the donor's connection and investment.

"This was a project we absolutely had to get right," said Tom Helwig, Sr. Vice President of Operations at Heart of America. *"When someone gives back to their school in such a personal way, we want the result to honor their generosity."*

To help bring the vision to life, Heart of America partnered with Marco, a longtime supporter of the organization's work.

At Marco, we understand the critical role organizations like Heart of America play in communities across the country. Their mission to support students in underfunded schools aligns deeply with our belief that thoughtfully designed environments can help shape better learning outcomes. Whenever possible, Marco proudly supports Heart of America through product donations and partnership on projects that help schools thrive.

Before the transformation: A dated library space ready for a new life.

The Challenge

While the vision for the library was clear, the physical space presented several challenges. Unlike many Heart of America projects, this was not a new construction environment. The team needed to transform the existing space entirely through furniture and design solutions. *"The space was a retrofit, not a blank slate,"* Helwig explained. *"There were a lot of unique conditions we had to work around"*.

The library featured multiple entry points and architectural elements that created blind spots, making it difficult for staff to maintain clear visibility throughout the room. *"In a library, staff need clear sightlines of the entire space,"* Helwig noted. *"That's critical for both supervision and creating an environment that feels safe and welcoming."*

Because the library sits in a central location within the school and is visible from above, the design also needed to look cohesive from multiple vantage points — including top-down views from upper levels.

The environment also needed to feel warmer and more inviting, while maintaining durability and flexibility for daily student use. Most importantly, the finished space had to meet a high standard. *"We wanted the result to feel elevated aesthetically," Helwig said. "It needed to be visually interesting, high quality, and something the school community would feel proud of."*

The Marco Approach

Marco approached the project as a collaborative design partner, working closely with Heart of America to address both the functional challenges and the aesthetic goals of the space. Listening carefully to the needs of the organization and the school staff, Marco's design team developed a solution that used modular furniture elements to organize the space, improve sightlines, and create natural zones for learning and collaboration.

"The Marco team really listened to what we needed," Helwig said. *"They understood the challenges of the space and delivered a solution that worked."* Through detailed renderings and design support, Marco helped the Heart of America team and school staff visualize how the new environment would function and feel. *"The level of design work Marco provided was terrific,"* Helwig shared. *"It helped the Roosevelt staff clearly see what the new space could become."* The result was a design that felt highly customized to the environment — without requiring costly construction.

The library begins to take shape during the installation process.

"Marco made this feel like a completely custom project," Helwig said. *"But it was achieved through thoughtful product selection and design."* Throughout the process, Marco's responsiveness and service stood out. *"Their customer service was exceptional,"* Helwig added. *"They were incredibly responsive and quick to answer questions throughout the project."*

The Outcome

Today, the Eleanor Roosevelt School library has been transformed into a warm, inviting, and visually engaging environment that serves as a central hub within the school. The design improves staff visibility throughout the space while creating flexible areas for reading, collaboration, and informal student gathering. The environment feels cohesive from every angle — whether experienced from within the room or viewed from above. More importantly, the space now supports the broader goals of the school and the community.

Libraries like this often become the heart of a school, providing a place where students can connect, teachers can engage, and meaningful moments of learning can unfold. Projects like this also demonstrate what is possible in underfunded schools when thoughtful design and the right partnerships come together. Even without major construction budgets, spaces can be transformed in ways that strengthen engagement, support educators, and build a stronger sense of belonging for students.

The transformed library at Eleanor Roosevelt School, redesigned with Marco furniture.

Partnership That Matters

For Marco, partnerships with organizations like Heart of America represent something larger than a single project. Heart of America's work is helping reshape educational opportunities in communities across the country — and Marco is proud to support that mission whenever possible. By combining thoughtful design, durable products, and a commitment to partnership, projects like Eleanor Roosevelt School show how powerful a learning environment can become.

Marco. Where Learning Takes Shape.