

Fremont City Schools staff members tour building

JUNE 2, 2011

Written by
Mark Tower

FREMONT -- About 70 Fremont City Schools staff members were taken on a guided tour of the Fremont Middle School construction project Tuesday evening and were able to see their plans and ideas come to life.

During the planning process for the new building, the school district set up committees for every aspect of the project and filled them with staff members who will soon work at the North Street address.

"It will be a building that the community can be proud of for generations," School Board President Alex Gorobetz said.

Dale Niemeyer, the assistant project manager for Touchstone CPM, walked the staff through the 126,000-square-foot building, pointing out design elements and helping teachers and other staff picture what the finished product will look like. Niemeyer said, despite heavy spring rains slowing the building's progress, crews still plan to hand over the keys to the district in mid-November.

"The mason is pretty much finished on the exterior," he said. "In a week, he will be out of here."

Green design

Staff seemed impressed with design elements like the pod-style classrooms (some with movable walls), the cafeteria/auditorium and green-energy technology like the "roof monitors."

The monitors -- in some classrooms and the school's gymnasium -- are basically windows facing the sun, which allow natural light to enter the room at an angle so as not to blind students or teachers. The windows will have shades that can be shut at the flick of the switch and teachers can choose between natural light, artificial light or a combination.

Mark Gedeon, a math teacher at Fremont Ross High School, looked up at the rays of sunlight as they dispersed into the cavernous gymnasium.

"I love it, the emphasis on green energy," Gedeon said. "I think you are going to see it in all public facilities, eventually."

Gedeon, also assistant athletic director and basketball coach at the high school, said despite a reduction in the number of gyms compared to the current Middle School building, having a regulation court and a curtain to separate the gym will be a huge advantage. Gedeon added that the building's location next to the high school will be good for both schools, allowing more sharing to go on between each building's facilities.

Community support

Fremont Mayor Terry Overmyer, who also toured the building Tuesday, said residents in the district are the ones who should be thanked for the new \$27.6 million school building, which he said will be a great addition to the community.

"We need to thank the community for this thing," Overmyer said. "It just proves that this community supports the children."

City Council has approved the installation of two traffic lights on North Street, at intersections with Franklin Avenue and Fangboner Road. Overmyer said that is an effort to reduce expected congestion from two major school buildings on one street.

Finding classrooms

As the tour moved into the classroom wings, teachers and other staff parted ways to go looking for their own classrooms and areas of the building in which they were particularly interested. The sixth grade classrooms will be on the building's third floor, seventh grade on the second floor and eighth on the first.

Middle school choir teacher Tammy Martin said she is excited to take over her new space and its close proximity to the "cafetorium."

"The stage that we will use is right there," Martin said excitedly. "This way I can take them down and show them how it is going to go before a performance."

Adding sixth

Adam Steinmetz, a sixth grade teacher at Atkinson Elementary School, said he can't wait to move his class into the new middle school building.

"Having sixth-graders in a middle school is a much better environment for them," Steinmetz said. "We are really excited. Especially, being able to know that they took feedback from all the teachers on the design."

Steinmetz pointed out single-person restrooms in each grade's common area, something that research has suggested prompts students to take better care of the bathrooms.

"It is more like their bathrooms at home," he said. "They respect it a lot better."

Pod design

Steinmetz said designing common areas, complete with furniture, in the center of each grade's classrooms allows those teachers and students to take ownership of that portion of the school.

Steinmetz's partner sixth-grade teacher, Beth Cooper, said the movable walls and common areas will be great for activities that bring multiple classrooms together, like speeches in language arts classes.

"These kids are ready for the move," Cooper said. "They need it."

Seventh-grade science teacher Mindy Miller is looking forward to more windows and brand new facilities.

"I think it is going to be wonderful, I think there will be more room to move around and it will be much brighter in here," Miller said as she surveyed what she thinks will be her classroom.

She went to school at the current middle school on Croghan Street, as did many other district staff members.

"It is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a teacher to teach at a new school like this," Miller said.

Classes are set to begin there about two weeks after students return from winter break Jan. 19. A dedication ceremony for the new building is scheduled for 2 p.m. Dec. 4, during which the public will be able to tour the completed building.



Staff of the Fremont City Schools tour the construction site of the new Fremont Middle School on Tuesday. / Jonathon Bird/News-Messenger