

East Central High gets upgrade

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Updated 12:01 a.m., Monday, April 11, 2011



A view of the library from the second floor through a window at the newly rebuilt East Central High School reveals large windows and exposed duct work. (Monday April 4, 2011) JOHN DAVENPORT/jdavenport@express-news.net Photo: John Davenport/Express-News, JOHN DAVENPORT / SAN ANTONIO EXPRESS-NEWS (Photo can be sold to the public)

East Central Independent School District is putting finishing touches on its rebuilt high school — a dramatic metamorphosis from a hodgepodge of decades-old buildings made of cinder blocks and trailers into a gleaming new two-story structure.

“Just having something like enclosed hallways where students don't have to go out in the elements with the rain and heat when they change classes makes us happy on a basic level,” said Gary Patterson, East Central's superintendent. “We're glad the community supported this despite some tough financial times.”

East Central High School's new campus was funded with a \$50 million bond approved in 2008, but the bond ended up costing taxpayers less than expected. The average household was supposed to see an annual tax increase of \$150 to \$185, but the increase ended up at \$116.38 per year.

The old school buildings — some of which were 40 years old and lacked insulation — were demolished and a new campus was built over the past two years on its 50 acres. The campus, about 15 miles southeast of downtown, has 2,700 students and is the district's only high school, so its revamp comes as a big source of pride.

“It's just beautiful and really is just a big change for us,” said Lauri Peters, an East Central High graduate who now teaches at Pecan Valley Elementary. “I wish we had this back when I went to school!”

The revamped campus has some classrooms where every student has a computer to use. Former classrooms had four to six outlets — not enough for the equipment used in class.

Patterson also pointed out that the campus also boasts an outdoor amphitheater that can seat up to 700 people and a culinary arts classroom that resembles a kitchen used in television cooking shows.

“We wanted to set this up like a restaurant so students get the experience of what it's like being a chef and even cater out of this program,” Patterson said. “It's a way we can tap into training people for the local hospitality industry.”

The main two-story building has an expansive library at its entrance, with large windows on all sides and a librarian's desk that emulates the sleek information counters seen in national bookstore chains.

“Considering many of our classrooms had been trailers and had little windows, we wanted to have plenty of natural light and set up spaces where students didn't feel like they were trapped in a box,” Patterson said. “It saves on energy and brings more energy into the school.”

The district opted to renovate and rebuild East Central High instead of building a second high school because it would have been too costly to do both. The district's bonding capacity is \$80 million.

“We can fit the students all in for the next few years, as we're growing about 2 (percent) to 3 percent annually,” Patterson said. “But we had to do this first, as we outgrew the old campus 20 years ago.”

Read more: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/default/article/East-Central-High-gets-upgrade-1331230.php#ixzz1JR1AnDek>