



Web Posted: 08/26/2008 12:58 CDT

New \$45 million high-school campus opens

Zeke MacCormack- Express-News

BOERNE — By the time classes officially started Monday at Boerne-Samuel V. Champion High School, Principal David Stelmazewski had logged nearly two months of preparation work, and the inaugural team victory by The Chargers.

The advance planning paid off as 1,600 students and 145 staffers got to work at the new \$45 million campus with only a few minor glitches.

“Everybody is excited to be here,” said Stelmazewski who, until June, was principal at McCollum High School in Harlandale. “We have a wonderful opportunity here with this facility to be an excellent school.”

Annual enrollment increases of 7 percent or more in Boerne schools over the past decade led to the 2004 bond package of \$99 million — more than three times the previous record local school bond proposal. It provided \$72.7 million to build a new high school and upgrade the existing one, \$14 million for a new elementary school that’s now open, \$9.23 million for upgrades completed on other campuses, \$2 million for technology and equipment, and \$2 million to buy land for future campus sites.

Students and staff who have shifted to the campus off Texas 46, while the old Boerne High School undergoes renovations slated to wrap up next fall, shared the principal’s positive view.

“It’s just pretty darned awesome,” said librarian Jeanne Pippin as she unboxed books and placed them on shelves.

In the wide hallway corridors marked by lots of metal and glass surrounding concrete floors, senior Lara Seigler paused from a physics class assignment in to provide this upbeat assessment of the campus — “It’s the bombdiggety!”

“That’s good,” interpreted her teacher, Sean “Doc” Moore, whose students were using clues and compasses to find vector coordinates in the 214,000 square-foot main building.

Custodian Al Sangorska applauded the “green” features of the facility, which include a rainwater recapture system that could channel more than 10 million gallons into an underground pipe, which serves as a reservoir for irrigation water.

On the technology side, each classroom is equipped with an LCD projector to display images from a computer screen, and a scanner in the main office transfers driver license photos into sticky labels for visitors.

“It’s awesome, when it works, said Shirley Santee, school receptionist, of the device.

She’s watched visitor after visitor — parents and students alike — revel in the dimensions, architecture and newness of the school. “They can’t believe it. It’s phenomenal,” she said.

Victorious last week over MacArthur High School, the varsity girls' Chargers volleyball team will play its first game on its home court tonight.

Eighty new students arrived at the school last week, but School Superintendent John Kelly said district growth is less than 2 percent annually because of the national housing downturn.

That's pushed tentative plans for a bond election — for a sixth elementary school and renovations to older campuses — back one year, to 2010, he said.

"Developers are perched all around Boerne, ready to jump in when the market rebounds," Kelly said.

It's a similar scenario in nearby Comfort as well. In 2006, voters approved \$10.5 million in bonds for new construction, plus \$1.8 million more to create career training programs in health science, building trades and computer skills.

On Monday new digs also awaited Comfort High School students, thanks to the addition of eight classrooms, a buildings trade facility, a new field house and an extension on the agriculture barn, said Principal J.D. Matthew.

He spent the weekend helping move furniture and prepare for the 392 students.

"It was nip and tuck whether we'd be in or not," he said.

Chemistry teacher Nathanael Slater was buoyed by the new lab devices at his disposal, even if some were as yet incomplete.

"It's great," he said.

Senior Emilio Avila, 17, was uneasy upon venturing into the new high school wing.

"It's scary," he said. "It looks like a different school."

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