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Oak Ridge has whole new look

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All summer, they've heard the racket and seen a steady stream of trucks and construction workers come and go.

Finally, next week, students, staff members and the surrounding community will get to see what's been going on at the fenced-off Oak Ridge High School campus.

When school starts on Monday, the first phase of a \$20 million expansion and modernization of the El Dorado Hills school will be on display.

Most noticeable will be the ongoing construction of a multipurpose building, a two-story classroom building containing science and computer labs and a choir room.

But the entire school is also getting a new coat of paint, student bathrooms and PE lockers are being completely refurbished, and the courtyard area is undergoing a face-lift.

"It's an amazing amount of work they've gotten done over the summer. Everyone knew they'd have to work overtime to make it happen," said Patty McClellan, facilities director of the El Dorado Union High School District.

While the scope of the construction is impressive, what makes the project unique are the steps being taken to mitigate potential exposure to naturally occurring asbestos on the school site.

Early this year, the district worked with the state Department of Toxic Substances Control on an asbestos removal action plan that included fencing off the campus from public access during the summer. Only the administration and counseling offices were open.

As a result, summer school classes were moved to Ponderosa High School in Shingle Springs, and the only student activity scheduled on the campus was the SAT on June 7.

Asbestos mitigation measures included excavation and covering of naturally occurring asbestos soils, installing temporary fencing with wind screens to restrict access and provide dust protection, covering buildings closest to the work areas with plastic, using water trucks to lightly spray soils before and during earth work and outdoor air and dust monitoring. Signs also have been posted around campus saying "No fugitive dust" and "No leaf blowers."

McClellan said that, so far, the construction work has gotten a clean bill of health from state regulators. Last weekend, workers cleaned all the exterior surfaces at the school, including walkways and roofs, she said. This week, the DTSC will perform a final visual walk-through inspection of the campus and classrooms to verify that the cleaning has been thorough. If the school passes muster, students, faculty and staff members will be allowed to reoccupy the campus.

One of those most looking forward to the school's opening is Principal Steve Wehr, who called the new construction and modernization "very exciting."

Wehr said school staff members have had to make some adjustments during the work in progress, but it has mostly gone smoothly.

"The key is our flexibility," he said, adding that modernization work will continue next summer.

Construction costs for the expansion project are estimated at \$9.6 million, with half the funding coming

from the State School Facilities Program made available by passage of Proposition 1D in 2006.

The program requires school districts to contribute a local funding match for the project. El Dorado Union's contribution will be provided by local Mello Roos special tax collections.

The modernization construction cost estimate is \$10.7 million. Permanent school buildings become eligible for state modernization funding after 25 years, portable classroom buildings after 20 years. Oak Ridge has more than 97,000 square feet of permanent building space that became eligible for 60 percent funding last January.

The remaining 40 percent will be funded by Mello Roos special taxes.

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