



NEWS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mark Keppel's Learning Festival gives community a firsthand look at new building

An overcast afternoon threatened with potential showers, but Mark Keppel High School and everyone attending its 18th Annual Learning Festival on Thursday, May 27 stayed perfectly dry. This year's festival was a truly special occasion as it also functioned as an open house to introduce families to the brand new science and science classroom building. For a project that was 6 years in the making since the passage of Bond Measure C in 2004, nothing interfered with its official unveiling ceremony to the community.

"What you are looking at is a dream come true," Principal Grace Love announced. "We have some very happy teachers and students here today, and we're thrilled to share this with you."

The 22-room, two story building was introduced with a ribbon-cutting ceremony. Superintendent Donna Perez, Board of Education President Robert L. Gin, Vice President Adele Andrade Stradler, and Board Member Chester Chau were among the dignitaries present for the ceremony.

While Mark Keppel students had been enjoying the state of the art facilities two weeks prior the festival, this was their chance to show their parents around the latest addition to their rapidly modernizing campus. It also gave teachers the chance to show off to students and parents alike the many features available to them in the new classrooms.

"A few years ago I drew a fantasy plan of my dream lab to teach my students. Now in 2010, I am in that lab," announced biology teacher and Science Department Chair Ellen Hake.

From students to teachers the first thing anyone mentions about the new rooms is the extra space they now have. Students will no longer have to cram together in confined labs. The building's seven labs measure 1,540 square feet with full water, electricity, gas, and internet utilities. There are over 30 lab stations among them, including demonstration tables for teachers. Each room also have fume hoods for ventilation as well as eye wash and shower stations.

"The old labs were much smaller and had poor air circulation, so if there was a lab that involved any smoke, you could set off the fire alarm," said junior Stephanie Leon. Her sister, Kimberly, is an incoming freshman.

"My sister will have a lot of fun in her science classes here," she added.

The other 15 classrooms are the standard 960 square feet. Both labs and standard classrooms feature overhead projectors connected to audio, video, microphone, computer, and internet jacks, giving teachers a full gambit of options to make subject matter come alive for students.

Architecturally, the building fits in seamlessly with the rest of the campus. It features a hallway that bridges to the school's original science and social science building, maintaining a physical continuity between older and newer spaces. The new building is also surrounded by plant life, such as flower beds and palm trees, helping to contain it and the students walking through into a singular campus space. Plus it gives students a quiet interior. The windows are double paned and to suppress sound from the nearby 10 freeway.

The building was built by McCarthy Construction and BR&J Associates were the project managers. The new classroom is one of many new structures and modernization projects coming to Mark Keppel because of Measure C, including a refurbished auditorium and a new gymnasium.

Board President Gin joined others in praising the possibilities now open to students with the new building up and running.

"It is wonderful to walk through the new classrooms. They're technologically modern, and give teachers a whole new way to instruct and interact with their students. They all deserve it, and the whole community deserves it as well."

He also added that even with such a great addition to campus, what has always been most important to the school will never change: every student receiving an outstanding education.

"We have always been all about academics in this district, and that's not going to change here or anywhere. Buildings like this are another tool that can only strengthen students' classroom experience."

A new generation is undoubtedly beginning at Mark Keppel, and the school is quickly emerging as a campus for the 21st century. The new building created such a draw at the Learning Festival that some of the students touring its halls are not even attending Mark Keppel yet, but are finishing their eighth grade years.

Mrs. Hake had choice words to sum up the excitement of the building as she met families in her two-week old classroom.

"This is a plant that matches the caliber of our students, and I can't wait to figure out how to best use all this new equipment available to us. It's going to be a busy summer."

