Students and staff say new building is a winner

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Rehoboth Christian School to hold April 27 open house

After years of planning, fundraising, and construction, the new Rehoboth High School building opened for students in August.

The *Sun* covered the groundbreaking and construction of the new building since the project began in May 2017.

Bob Ippel, executive director for Rehoboth High School, says that the finished building represents the dreams students and staff had for their school.

Members from Rehoboth High School spoke with the *Sun* April 5 about the new building and the improved student morale and performance.

A WALK THROUGH THE SCHOOL

Principal Chris Van Slooten talked about the new high school building, which is connected to the existing sports and fitness center, and how the school went from being separated into five buildings to just one new building.

“We love that, the students are on time [more often] and they’re more comfortable here,” Van Slooten said.

The new Rehoboth High School features wide community spaces, in contrast to several cramped classrooms the old building had, according to Van Slooten. In addition, all of the school’s classrooms have been updated with more modern, accessible equipment and furniture that is more conducive to the students’ learning, he added.

“The feel of the building is great,” he said. “There’s more smiles now. The kids like coming to this school.”

At the heart of the new building is the large open space dubbed Lynx Central, which connects to the major areas at the school. Students can quickly reach their classrooms for art, academics, athletics, the computer lab, and participate in worship at the center of the room.

Lynx Central is filled with furniture, including large tables and cushioned chairs that help with building a sense of community and comfort, Van Slooten said. Students also have larger lockers

meaning fewer books and bags are left around.

Van Slooten pointed out the large open windows throughout the building that help natural light flow inside, adding to the feel of a more open environment. Students and staff are now also able to enjoy both heating and air conditioning throughout the year. The old building didn't have air conditioning.

Another new feature is the inside walls, which have been painted in an array of colors, to make the space more inviting.

Now, teachers have access to projectors that can be connected wirelessly with speakers to ensure that every student can hear what is being said. In addition, there is a phone system that permits the front office to call directly into each class.

THE TEACHERS' MORALE

When asked if he can gauge how the teachers feel about the new building, Van Slooten said that they feel a lot like the students.

"You wouldn't find a teacher that would want to go back to the old building," he said. "They have a new space that is their own now."

Illustrating his point, teacher Kellie Wright responded, "Heck no!" when he asked her if she wanted to go back to the old building.

Van Slooten said that being in the new school building has led to an increase in the students' morale and performance, which has extended to the teachers.

He talked about how an increased sense of safety has developed with all the classes located in a single building. Buses are more efficient at dropping off students at one spot, and staff members have key cards to unlock and enter the building.

Another safety feature is the large windows that allow the front desk staff to see who is outside, before letting them into the school.

TIMELINE OF THE PROJECT

Ippel said that ground broke on the new building in May 2017, and the construction remained on schedule for 18 months.

But, he said that planning for the new building first began nine years ago with brainstorming and conjuring ideas.

Then, about five years ago the school began its fundraising campaign, not just for the building, but to improve the infrastructure and pay off old debts.

In all, the new high school building cost about $7 million. Ippel and Van Slooten said funding came from across the United States.

They said there were thousands of donors from across the country who contributed both small and large amounts to Rehoboth, with one of the largest donors being the Richard and Helen DeVos Foundation, based in Grand Rapids, Mich., which focuses on supporting the work of religious agencies, churches, and schools in ministry, outreach, and education.

“[Raising the money] was a community effort,” Ippel said. “We’ve been blessed to get here.”

Ippel said that the school has raised about $1.8 million a year in tuition assistance, and that it wants to do everything it can to make education accessible to people.

ENROLLING IN THE SCHOOL

In addition to following up on a previous story the *Sun* published, admissions director Verlena Livingston said that Rehoboth wants parents to know that the school is in the middle of enrollment season and is open to new applications for the next school year.

The application to enroll a student is available online at the Rehoboth High School website. Parents can visit the site and learn what is offered at the school, from academics to classroom activities, to being able to meet with the principal about enrollment.

New students are given a test to determine their educational standing, Livingston said. The parents, as well as the middle and high school students, are then interviewed as part of the admissions process.

Tuition at Rehoboth High School is based on the family's income, and Livingston said that programs like tuition assistance and scholarships are available for students, with a special rate for new students from Arizona.

"As an alum, I would have loved to have been in this building," Livingston said.

The high school will be holding an open house on April 27, where visitors can learn about the school and enjoy free activities and food.

For more information, including how to enroll a student, visit http://www.rcsnm.org/ .

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