



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEST ISD'S NEW CAMPUS DESIGN UNVEILED

WEST, TEXAS – Since the fatal explosion that destroyed three of its four campuses, forever changing the landscape of this small, close-knit community, there have been many milestones for West ISD on their journey of “rising up.”

Wednesday, February 12 marked one of the more significant milestones.

Just 302 days after the explosion, the West ISD Board of Trustees met in their boardroom to review the design of the new West High School/West Middle School campus.

“Being excited is an understatement,” said Larry Hykel, board president.

The April 17, 2013 fertilizer plant explosion destroyed West’s high school and middle school campuses that were home to about 700 students. Temporarily, it displaced students to the nearby Connally ISD to finish the remainder of the school year.

But, by August 26, the first day of school for the new school year, students were back in West. Since that time, students have been housed in a network of 28 temporary facilities, consisting of classrooms, labs, a fully operational kitchen and cafeteria, locker rooms, band hall and a fabric-structure gymnasium.

After the school bell rang in West that first day, the district quickly shifted its focus to its new permanent school facilities.

A new vision for West ISD

“This tremendous catastrophe presented the district with a tremendous opportunity,” said Josh Brown, Principal at Huckabee, the firm hired to design the new West ISD facilities.

Instead of simply rebuilding what was, West ISD decided they would use this as an opportunity to 'rise up,' better than before.

The planning process began with a multi-day visioning session with planners and architects at Baylor University's research and innovation center. In these sessions, the design team defined the district's educational mission, goals and methods through a unique process designed to model different methods of learning.

The group was lead through individual assignments, small group collaborative assignments and technology-based applications to reinforce the idea that each student learns differently. "The industrial model of rows of desks with a teacher delivering instruction from the front does not recognize the uniqueness of each student's learning style," says Konrad Judd, lead designer for Huckabee.

Moving forward into the planning process, district leaders and designers focused on preparing students for the 22nd century and advancing the educational delivery of the district to meet those needs.

From these initial visioning meetings, an idea emerged to combine the two campuses into one.

"After moving both campuses into the temporary 'portable city' they occupy today and observing its success, the idea of merging the two campuses permanently began to take shape," said Judd. "Discussions during the visioning process about the benefits of peer-to-peer learning reinforced this idea."

Upon the conclusion of the visioning exercises, the design began to take shape through a series of design charettes with district leaders.

Bridging the past and the future of West ISD

"The new campus design honors the tradition, spirit and legacy of the West community, while symbolizing future opportunities for their students," says Brown.

The building's architectural character is a symbol of outreach and unification of the students, staff and community of West, comprised of three separate and distinct entry

points – one for high school students, one for middle school students and one to serve as the main, communal entrance.

It's traditional design elements of classic red brick and a ceremonial main entry tower is contrasted by modern architectural elements like metal panels and large expanses of glass, reflecting the history of this unique Czech community, while highlighting its desire to boldly step into the future.

Learning can happen anywhere

When stepping inside, students and visitors will quickly realize this is not an ordinary or traditional school building. "It's designed so that learning will literally happen anywhere and everywhere," says Judd. "Learning is being advertised and put on display, inviting students into a variety of experiences."

Many spaces are open or behind glass where they would traditionally be enclosed. For example, West's new high/middle school will not have a library. Instead, it features two Learning Resource Centers, or LRCs, at the front of the school. These LRCs are 2-story spaces with full-height glass on the exterior walls and no interior walls; they are completely open to the rest of the facility.

The LRCs are similar to a "student union" in a university setting, providing flexible furniture arrangements for a variety of group sizes and encouraging the use of technology. "This concept breaks down the barriers of a traditional library and the notion that it's a space only used before, during or after school, or individually to access knowledge," says Judd. Instead, it provides a social and collaborative space around the clock that is essential in 22nd century learning styles.

"It's not about checking out books. It's about students finding information with technology and through collaboration with others," says Judd.

Other non-traditional, 22nd century-focused educational spaces include "living rooms" similar to a Starbucks environment where students can break out for small-group study, classrooms with moveable walls to allow for flexibility of use, career and technology labs and teacher "war rooms."

“Teachers will not have a home room at this campus,” says Brown. Instead, they will have a centralized office and planning space for all teachers on each level to share. “This will allow teachers to be more available to students as resources throughout the school day.”

Next steps

The design for the new West High School/West Middle School was approved just two days after receiving notification from Congressman Bill Flores (R – Texas) that FEMA had granted WISD the funds needed to start rebuilding.

“Students have adapted exceptionally well to the temporary middle and high school campus, but everyone is eager to get back to normal,” said Marty Crawford, West ISD Superintendent. “[FEMA’s] announcement gives them a glimmer of hope. It’s the beginning of the end.”

With the board’s approval of the design concept, Huckabee will continue to develop and refine the design and the final set of architectural drawings for bidding. Construction is scheduled to commence this summer, with an estimated completion of late 2015 to early 2016.

WWW.RESTOREWESTISD.COM

Also, find us on Facebook and Twitter.

www.facebook.com/restorewestisd

[@restorewestisd](https://twitter.com/restorewestisd)

Please send design-specific questions to jennifer@huckabee-inc.com.