

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder Valley working on 25 construction projects this summer

University Hill Elementary renovations on hold as district considers selling building

By Amy Bounds

Staff Writer
Boulder Daily Camera

Posted: Mon Jul 04 12:00:00 MDT 2016

The Boulder Valley School District plans to complete \$55 million worth of work on 25 school renovation and repair projects this summer.

The projects are in the first phase of [2014's \\$576 million bond issue](#), with the 31,000-student district repairing and upgrading all of its 55 schools — including building a new pre-K-8 campus in Erie.

"We're making investments in all our schools," said Boulder Valley bond issue spokeswoman Susan Cousins.

Along with the projects under construction this summer, five schools in the second phase started design work this spring and will likely move into construction early in 2017.

Schools are getting new roofs, restroom improvements and repairs to health and ventilation systems to improve air quality and save energy. Several schools also will get building-wide air conditioning.

The biggest projects — along with the new Erie pre-K-8 campus — are replacements for Creekside, Douglass and Emerald elementary schools. Construction on all four is expected to continue through next school year and be complete by August 2017.

For those schools, the district is working with architectural consulting firm Fielding Nair International and using a learning communities design.

The learning communities group together about 150 students in two grades and include classroom spaces, small-group spaces and flexible studios that could be used for science, maker spaces or other projects.

The learning community design also reflects a trend away from a teacher "owning" a single classroom to teachers working more collaboratively. Each learning community area includes a collaborative teacher work space.

"It's going to be really transformational," said Kiffany Lychock, the district's director of innovation of Innovation. "The idea is that learning is inherently a social process."

Along with using learning communities, the designs in general are more open with more access to the outside. The "heart" of the school is a cafeteria and gathering space, with a "curiosity center" replacing libraries.

"Natural light, lots of windows, views to the outside and air quality are a priority in the designs," Cousins said.

Unlike the much-reviled open concept schools of the '70s where teachers had little control over noise levels, said Fielding Nair International principal Isaac Williams, the key to making the new designs work is creating more flexibility.

"Real flexibility comes from when teachers can choose the right kind of space for the right kind of activity," he said.

Williams said smaller communities also can create stronger relationships — both for students and teachers — in a larger school.

"For many teachers — especially the ones we've met in BVSD — this already feels natural," he said. "They're trying to team teach and lead students in project-based learning, but the space is in the way."

He said he and the other architects also worked extensively with the district on making sure the schools are safe.

New buildings will have a vestibule entry system, where visitors will enter into a lobby area and then must be approved by the front office before gaining access to the locked building.

Students can be locked in the classroom spaces if needed, Williams said, while individual sections of the building can be locked down to isolate a threat. An alarm also will sound if an exterior door is open.

Unlike more traditional school designs, he said, these schools also will have a way out in each area, allowing for quick evacuations.

"There's not one approach that works in every incident," he said.

More openness in the school also can help reduce bullying and create a stronger sense of community, he said.

Amy Bounds: 303-473-1341, boundsa@dailycamera.com or twitter.com/boundsa

Close Window

Send To Printer