



STAFF PHOTO/KEVIN LEAS

The main entrance to Gates Chili High School is brand-new as part of the district's ongoing construction project.

Construction project on schedule

The Gates Chili school district is showing off its new facilities to students and residents.

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Gates Chili's Phase IX capital improvement project is on track.

"The project is moving along and on budget," said John Brondon, assistant superintendent for operations.

Though all of the district's buildings will benefit from the \$56 million project, the first phase of the project has focused on Gates Chili High School – and it shows. The outer structure of a brand-new gymnasium rises on one side of the building, its 200-foot-long steel trusses arching over the cutout for a swimming pool that crews blasted into the bedrock below last summer.

The students who came to classes last month were the first to pass through the high school's new atrium and to work in its botanical gardens and its six new science classrooms.

"The science teachers and students have actually planted the gardens," said Brondon. "They're gorgeous."

The building's new 6,000-square-foot counseling center opened last February and about 30 cameras have been added to the buildings internal security system – all of them hooked to its new security office.

Parts of the project remain to be finished. Crews will pour the concrete for the gym floor and the pool this week and the district hopes the gym will be finished in February. Brondon said the six 250-gallon aquariums for the aquatic center should be delivered this month and in place by the end of the Thanksgiving holiday. The atrium's terrazzo floor would take three weeks to cure, and can't be poured until next summer. Brondon said that for now, the atrium's floor consists of plain concrete.

The district's new Buffalo Road entrance is nearing completion, according to Brondon. Crews initially laid about one-quarter mile of road from the Gates Chili Middle School almost to Buffalo Road. The road is intended to provide access to the middle and high schools and the district's administrative offices, and relieve pressure on the

Wegman Road entrance that serves them. Within feet of Buffalo Road, the crews stopped, awaiting permission from the state Department of Transportation to install lights of the district's choosing. The state has approved the lights and that the road should be completed in early November, Brondon said.

Brondon admits Phase IX hasn't gone completely as planned. Though the district initially found the high school's water pressure to be adequate for fire sprinklers in its new sections, subsequent tests showed the pressure was too low. Gates Chili has been forced to eliminate the problem, adding over \$100,000 to the cost of the project.

"We're putting in a water pump that will make sure that we have, in an emergency, enough pressure to be able to fight a fire," Brondon said.

The pump and other unforeseen elements, including the need to remove asbestos during the renovation of the high school kitchen, have raised the cost of the project by about \$750,000. Brondon said the district budgeted for such contingencies and that this phase should still come in under budget.