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Residents weigh in on proposed LISD ninth-grade centers

Written by Paul Foutch

Saturday, 01 December 2012 09:00



Rendering of proposed FMHS 9th grade campus.

Parents, teachers and nearby residents of Marcus and Flower Mound high schools are getting more details about the new ninth-grade centers that are scheduled to open for the 2014-15 school year.

At an informational meeting Thursday evening at LISD's Bolin Administrative Center, drawings were displayed showing the ninth-grade buildings with their own cafeteria, library and classrooms, and attached to the main high school by a hallway. The buildings will be environmentally and technologically friendly, and feature natural lighting and open spaces for collaborative learning.

The new buildings are intended to reduce crowding at the high schools, as well as ease the transition from middle school. Nationwide, research shows there are fewer dropouts and other problems when students transition into a ninth-grade center.

Parents generally reacted favorably to the plans Thursday night.

"It's a good way to ease them into high school instead of just throwing them into the swamp," said Wes Sampson, a current and future Flower Mound High School parent.

Said Connie Smith, another FMHS parent: "I think it's a great idea. I love the idea of an area where they can collaborate, and I like that it's connected to the main building. Otherwise they'd be going back and forth across the street."

However, some had understood a ninth-grade campus to mean an off-site location and were a little disappointed to learn it won't be.

"Now that it's on the same property as the high school, I'm not sure it gives any benefit," said Robin Doak, who has a daughter at Marcus and another who will be a freshman in two years.

Lewisville Independent School District opened its first ninth-grade center in 2005 for Lewisville High School, several blocks north of the main campus. The location means freshmen involved in activities such as band and theater have to be bused back and forth.

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Two years ago Hebron High School opened a standalone ninth-grade building next to the main school.

Quentin Burnett, LISD's chief financial officer, said the plans for Marcus and Flower Mound are the result of a series of meetings among consultants, school officials, board members, administrators, teachers, parents, students and architects, taking into account current and future needs, and LISD's experiences at Lewisville and Hebron.

"It was unanimous to be on-site," Dr. Burnett said. "It was a community decision."

"The biggest reason was busing," School Board member Kathy Duke said. "The ongoing cost to taxpayers, and the time the kids missed riding back and forth on the bus."

The most vocal critics Thursday night were homeowners living near Flower Mound High School, who complained that the bright lights and loud noises they already experience will only get worse as the campus expands its footprint.

Along with the ninth-grade buildings, Marcus and Flower Mound are also each due to get a new gymnasium, an indoor practice facility, and a black box theater. To make room for all the construction, some athletic facilities are being moved across the street.

In the case of Marcus, new tennis courts and a softball and baseball field are under construction on the other side of Dixon Lane, about half a mile west of the main campus.

At Flower Mound, LISD recently bought vacant land from Christ Presbyterian Church directly across Peters Colony Road, where baseball, softball and tennis facilities are to be relocated.

"There will be a 70-foot light pole 25 feet from my back yard," said Steffani McQueen, whose home is one of about a dozen on rural Harris Road, off Old Settlers.

Residents there already complain they can hear screaming fans, announcers and background music when football and baseball games are played half a mile away, even with their doors and windows closed.

The neighbors are questioning whether relocating perfectly good athletic fields is a smart use of taxpayer funds, and they say students would be better served with an off-site ninth-grade building, which presumably would be quieter than a baseball stadium.

"It makes more sense fiscally to leave the sports facilities where they are and build the campus on the new property across the street," Ms. McQueen said. She said the neighbors were never asked for their input, but they have produced drawings showing how the existing athletic facilities can remain in place at a savings of millions of dollars.

Dr. Burnett said the light and noise issues can be addressed.

"From my perspective, it's a technical issue," he said. "We'd rather keep the students close together."

The plans aren't in stone. The school board has to give final approval, and the town of Flower Mound must approve changes to the zoning for the former church land.

Dr. Burnett said any changes to the plans would have to go back through the committee of parents, students, teachers and administrators. There's time to do that, he said, but too many delays could push construction back a year and disappoint the hundreds of parents who are looking forward to their children benefiting from the ninth-grade buildings.


The expansions are being funded with a \$697 million bond package approved by voters in May 2008.

Marcus High School senior Carleigh Foutch contributed to this report.




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Comments  

#3 **Robbie**  2012-12-01 20:39

The plans for each campus appear well thought out. It is impossible to please everyone. The LISD Admin, LISD Board & Town Council have put together a good compromise that will benefit our children & the community for many years.

Quote

#2 **Jim**  2012-12-01 13:35

Very good feedback from Matthew. As a 1st year freshman parent, the concerns of a child starting HS and disappointment that a 9th grade facility wasn't already complete, the concerns vanished in less than the first 2 days of school. It's a non-issue for the most part, it's just different. Most classes aren't mixed grades therefore more teacher to student one on one time isn't valid support.

Quote

#1 **Matthew**  2012-12-01 11:35

I was a freshman at FMHS 10 years ago. I don't know what "problems" they are referring to when transitioning to High School. I understand the crowding issue, but can't they build up instead of out by adding a 3rd floor? They could then keep the existing athletic facilities where they are, and still have more classrooms.

Quote

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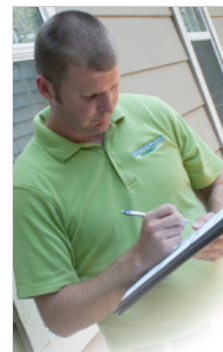
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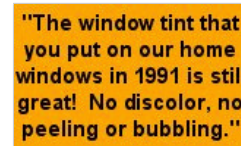
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