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## Phoenix-Talent School District completes massive summer facelift for elementary school, middle school



Witnessing the bright LEDs fill a fully renovated gym for the first time and watching musty old classrooms being transformed into gorgeous learning spaces was a joy for Jon McCalip. But to him, the real highlight from this summer's Phoenix-Talent SD construction projects came later.

"By far my favorite part at Talent Elementary was when staff came back and they were just blown away," said McCalip, Phoenix-Talent SD's Director of Facilities and Special Projects. "I had several staff members come up to me and thank me for all the hard work and say that they just couldn't believe how much we



*Talent Elementary School classroom during renovation, before and after.*



*Talent Middle School gym update, before and after.*



accomplished in two months. And they were surprised that we were done, that we were going to finish in time.”

While students at Talent Elementary and Talent Middle School enjoyed their summer vacation, McCalip, his facilities staff and a host of contractors and subcontractors were hard at work overhauling the two buildings in a combined \$5.5 million renovation that included necessary seismic upgrades and so much more.

A little more than half of the total cost – \$3.02 million – went into Talent Elementary. There, contractor Outlier Construction Co., in the span of two months, pulled off a full seismic upgrade in the primary wing, the annex wing and cafeteria buildings, replaced most of the school’s roofing and added insulation, LED lighting, and high R-value windows in most of the classrooms. TES also received new flooring and finishes in the primary and annex buildings,

gleaming new polished concrete floors in the cafeteria, plenty of storage in the renovated classrooms, and a large digital sign in front of the school.

The reviews from the TES staff, which arrived only days before the first family engagement events of the school year, were unanimous.

“I first came into my classroom the second day of work and I got to see what it looked like – it’s beautiful,” said second-grade teacher Linnaea Funk

Morales. “I was worried that when they were lowering the ceilings that it would feel really small, but because the windows go all the way up to the ceiling, it does feel really open and light and airy and beautiful.

“I feel like the space is open, it’s really conducive to learning. I have plenty of storage, so kids can access what they need, and I can put things away that we don’t need every day.”

Miguel Gutierrez, a first-grade two-way

immersion teacher who has a classroom across the hall from Morales, agreed.

"All of these cubbies are all new," he said, pointing at the added storage. "It's all new paint. It just looks beautiful. I have significantly more storage. A huge difference. So if I ever plan on getting other stuff or I have more books delivered to me, I can easily find a place to put them instead of just stockpiling all on top of my desk area."

A similar summer transformation occurred across the street at Talent Middle School, where staff returned to a seismically upgraded gym, cafeteria, locker rooms and music room, new finishes throughout, a seven-toilet inclusive compartment restroom, two new gender-neutral family-style restrooms and new lockers in the PE area. The school also received new scoreboards in both its gyms, 16,000 square feet of concrete polishing, fresh paint and flooring in eight classrooms and new paint over 50 doors throughout the building.

The gyms, with their sparkling new floors branded with a freshly painted Bulldog logo at center court, may be the crown jewel of Talent Middle School's \$2.54 million renovation. The main gym also received new bleachers and, like TES, bright new LED lights that enhance the effect of the freshly painted school colors on the walls.

"Casey (Olmstead), the new principal there, said he has never seen a middle school with that nice of a gym," McCalip said.

Both projects were paid for using a combination of funds from the PTS bond, passed in 2017, and Emergency Relief (ESSER III), which was part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan. The ESSER III fund expires on Sept. 30.

McCalip said Outlier went all out to make

sure the buildings would be ready for the first day of school.

"All the subcontractors and the contractors, they're working seven days a week," he said. "Many of the contractors were on 10-hour days."

It was all worth it, though, once he saw first-hand the reactions from TMS students and staff as they walked

through the building for the first time since construction began in mid-June.

"We had so many kids peak in the gym, and they were, 'Oh my gosh, it looks brand new. Is it bigger? It looks bigger.' Things like that," McCalip said. "And we had staff coming up and saying, 'Wow, this is amazing.' It felt really good." ❖

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