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Superintendent Bob Maxfield, said Friday. "Which I've been confirming with staff people and parents."

McCracken said the "whole range" of rumors have been flying recently.

"Things like we're starting on Sept. 15, or going to a half-day for four months," said McCracken, commenting on behalf of Maxfield, who was out of town. "But we are on schedule."

According to a support staff employee at Farmington High School, who asked to not be identified, the rumors were assured of as much during a meeting with Maxfield last week.

"He wants the general public to know we will open on time and in a safe environment for students," she said.

Meanwhile, anyone venturing out to several Farmington Public Schools buildings these days aren't being met with teachers or "welcome back" proclamations, even though the new year is slated to begin with a half-day on Monday, Aug. 30.

Instead, greeting visitors are stacks of cinder blocks, dangling wires, piles of dirt, dust and skepticism - and hard-hat wearing construction workers. Oh yes, not to mention cranes, trailers and portable bathrooms.

Major work still needs to be completed at a number of sites, including: Farmington, Harrison and North high schools; East and Dunkle middle schools; and Wooddale Elementary School.

Sitting inside a trailer outside Dunkle, not far from where a worker was hauling a wheelbarrow of bricks into the building, the school's construction site supervisor said things look worse than they really are.

"There'll be four classrooms (in the technology educational wing) about two weeks late in starting," said Tony Rook of McSEV, the district's general contractor for bond issue-funded projects. "So, we're kind of located some available space."

A Dunkle custodian acknowledged that completion of the project and the start of school might arrive almost simultaneously. "It's going to be close."

Rook lamented over one factor as to why projects are being finished behind schedule: the shortage of union-supplied construction workers, partly because of a summer-long building boom all across southeast Michigan. McSEV bids out to various unions for work; but from there it's up to those unions to supply workers in a timely fashion.

"There's just a shortage of manpower," said Rook, noting that some union shops are recruiting workers from other states to fill Michigan jobs.

Despite the appearance that Dunkle is far from finished, Rook said those appearances can be deceiving.

"What you see (being done) now are finishes," Rook explained. "They can put up a whole ceiling (for) a hallway in a day."

For the four tech ed classrooms to open in mid-September, heavy construction will be finished by the time the first day of school arrives.

"Carpet and cabinets will be the only things not ready," Rook said. "The rest will be all set."

He asked for some perspective, noting that Dunkle will have 32 other classrooms ready on time. "And we've renovated them all, which isn't bad."

The lack of progress with construction is unnerving for parents such as Wooddale's Sharon McGladdey. Her son, Jacob, suffers from allergies and colitis. The last thing he



STAFF PHOTO BY DILL GARDNER

Worry: It may look like the schools won't open, but officials say they are on schedule for the first day of school, Aug. 30.

should have to encounter at the start of the year is a dirty, dangerous environment, she said. "A dirty environment wouldn't be good for any kid."

McGladdey said she went up to some construction workers outside Wooddale and tried to get a straight answer. "I asked, 'So, how is it really going?' And they said they didn't know if school would open on time."

Major work being done at Wooddale includes a new multipurpose room. Meanwhile, the school needs to deal with fixing a warped gymnasium floor, caused by a water main break over the summer - a setback unrelated to the construction.

McGladdey considered it a "bad sign" that she saw a load of cinder blocks sitting outside on wood pallets in mid-August. "When you see that ... they should be up."

Another problem facing working parents, McGladdey said, was day care arrangements in the event the school year is delayed.

"They're going to be scrambling," she continued. "People need advance warning."

Farmington High School's media center was turned into a makeshift office during the summer construction period. It literally is the only safe haven inside the two-story building, said one employee.

Around the corner, Shayne Rogers and Dan Sheller of Artisan Tile were laying ceramic in one of the bathrooms.

"We're going to be working here while school is in," predicted Rogers.

There also were openings in corridor walls where lockers used to be.

East Middle School Principal Eugene Seaborn this week said classes will begin on time, but that continuing finishing touches would take place during the afternoon shift.

Teachers are due in on Wednesday, Aug. 25. Seaborn said the major addition to the building, for a districtwide central kitchen and new school cafeteria, is still expected to open in January 2000.

"Our addition won't be finished until January," Seaborn said. "But the rest of the building will be cleared out (of construction debris) and district maintenance crews will be in here starting this week-end."

Video from page A1

Mickam showed the tape to a group of friends after they'd been drinking one night in November, Brian Kemper testified.

"There was a kind of a moment of silence. We reflected on what we just saw," said Kemper, who attended Walled Lake Western High with the defendant. "The main reaction from everyone was it was not a good thing to do ... (He) should get rid of it."

Mickam earlier had shown him a cylinder-shaped camera four-inches in length, Kemper said.

"He (Mickam) thought it was cool," he added.

Another friend, who is a brother of a girl depicted in the 30-second tape, testified Mickam set up a surveillance camera bought at a spy store in an empty video cassette box. The container had a hole cut for the lens and wires leading to a VCR inside a closet, he testified.

The brother, whose name is not being used so not to identify one of the victims, recalled Mickam showing him the tape with the defendant's cousins present.

TESTIMONY

"I wasn't sure what to do at first," the brother said. "I asked him as a friend not to do that again ..."

Mickam's attorneys questioned both friends about discrepancies in their testimony and written statements given to police in May.

A father of one girl reported the incident after rumors of the tape circulated around Walled Lake Western High School.

Attorney Brian Legghio asked Kemper why he didn't mention to authorities in his initial statement that Mickam had shown him the camera and told him about the tape.

"I didn't think to," Kemper testified. "I was told to put down what I saw on the tape. ... I wrote down what I was told to write down."

Kemper said he later gave those details in an interview with Oakland County assistant prosecutor Marsha Kosmatka.

Under cross-examination, both

friends denied having had any role in making the tape.

Two of three girls in the video testified they were unaware they'd been taped. Neither has seen the video.

Both testified they often visited Mickam at his home numerous times to use the hot tub.

They usually changed in a bathroom, but on at least one occasion were directed to use a spare bedroom in a walkout basement.

"Usually we weren't allowed in there (the guest bedroom)," one girl testified. "I believe the boys changed in the bathroom and we changed in the bedroom ... I just remember them saying, 'You can change in the bedroom.'"

If convicted, each eavesdropping count carries two years in jail and/or a \$2,000 fine. Mickam remains free on \$10,000 personal bond.

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prepare for a future lesson in an office or the media center, opening up a classroom for another teacher to hold class.

Myers also said that Farmington, Harrison and North high schools would all have their lockers installed by the opening bell. But students likely won't be able to use them for the first week, primarily so that locker combinations can be assigned.

"Locker manufacturers have had quality problems, they had to reject some lockers," explained Bill McCarthy, senior project manager and vice president for McSEV.

Until those lockers are ready, students will get by using backpacks and book bags. Myers said there will be no changes to rules concerning the use of such bags. It had been discussed whether to go to clear bags, as a safety measure.

"We feel comfortable about our schools," Myers noted.

The various school construction projects were made possible in September 1997, when the public approved a \$93.1 million bond issue.

Official update

The status of construction projects was discussed prior to Tuesday night's school board meeting, by the board's building and site committee.

Afterward, McCarthy and independent educational consultant Don Cowan echoed Myers' assertion that schools will be open and safe, but not in perfect shape.

"A lot of people are assuming they'll be walking into buildings that are completely done and that's not the case," said Cowan, a longtime district administrator.

Cowan added that, before buildings

begin to be occupied, they will be combed over by local fire marshals and air quality checks will be completed.

"When we open the buildings they'll have no safety concerns," Cowan said. "But there will be aesthetic concerns."

He said school principals are being briefed weekly on the progress of construction. Also, the district's web site continues to be updated and school newsletters were sent out to homes.

Aesthetic problems still worry educators such as Barbara Cherem, the district's director of assessment and evaluation. An unsettled environment might impact how well students focus and perform.

"School climate is very much tied to learning," Cherem said. "I wouldn't be at all surprised if it were difficult (for some students) to make gains in such an environment."

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