



STAFF PHOTOS BY DEB BERKELEY

Although the new construction at Warner isn't quite finished the work areas are marked or barricaded.

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School board member Cathy Webb confirmed that things were far from perfect. She said some classrooms at North were short of desks and that students at several schools were without lockers. But, she emphasized, the fire marshals' approval remains the key to the whole issue.

"The fire marshals have been in there all summer long, working side-by-side with the construction managers," Webb said. "Absolutely, they wouldn't have opened up if they were not safe for kids."

At East, the majority of the visible "mess" is related to construction of a district kitchen/school cafeteria area, which will open in January. It is an area where students were not expected to go anyway, Webb said. The old cafeteria remains open.

"Is it pretty? No. Is it perfect? No. Is it safe? Yes...we're trying to do nine months of work in three months of the summer," she said.

Superintendent Bob Maxfield said he didn't want to "get into quarreling" about whether projects met timelines. He added that he wished the person who wrote the e-mail would have come forward and discussed the concerns with district officials.

There were no grounds to be concerned about breach of performance, other than some jobs not being completed on time, Maxfield said.

One cause for missing deadlines is the construction boom in southeastern Michigan. With too few qualified workers, some unions were forced to bring in workers from other states, one construction site manager in the district said last month.

New furniture for the tech wing hasn't arrived yet, Maxfield said. Until that furniture arrives, students are making do with what they already had.

He conceded that the parking lot at East is in rough shape, but it is functional. A pedestrian path between the school and a nearby subdivision was initially blocked, but walkers were provided with an alternative wood chip path, Maxfield said. The outer area was graded and seeded the weekend before school began.

"Complaints have been dealt with forthrightly," Maxfield said. "But most of the people have been great."

Continuing his response to the e-mail, Maxfield said the comment that FHS was not ready "was someone's observation a week ago, before the gravel and

paving work was done."

By the beginning of last week, a circular bus driveway was installed, and clean-up work was proceeding in other areas. Progress inside the building was lagging, however. Floor tile wasn't down in all areas, and students were using book bags until lockers were installed.

The building and grounds are far from perfect, said assistant principal Catherine Cost.

"All in all, everyone's been real flexible," Cost said. "Obviously, it's not done. But it's been deemed occupiable. We'll make the best of it."

The fire marshal checked to make sure pedestrian were safe both inside and outside of the school, Cost said.

Still, at least two students had their qualms.

"It (construction) doesn't affect the parking (lot) as much, you can always find a spot," said junior Deepe Ranga. "But inside, I don't think it's safe. The hallways are really cluttered."

Junior Jon Pawlak said the campus is "getting better, but it's a mess, big-time."

Pawlak, who said he did see some progress since Monday with the facility, added that the learning environment was "fine," despite the construction.

Safety

Officers keep a close eye

By TIM SATTM
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Inside Warner Middle School students went through the usual opening-day paces. But outside, evidence showed that this year's first day of school wasn't quite the same.

Farmington Hills police Officer Pam Rathgeb sat in an unmarked car, wearing her uniform. Tuesday, Rathgeb, whose regular assignment is as Warner's youth officer, would be back in her street clothes.

"We're just here to be visible," said Rathgeb. "To let kids know we're out here and to avoid any future problems."

Similarly, police liaison officers at Harrison and North high schools also wore blue. But for Pat Sidge and Duane Fox, they'll wear their uniforms indefinitely, as ordered by Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer.

The police chief recently announced a series of security-minded initiatives for the start of the 1999-2000 school year. Those initiatives were spurred by last spring's "Can it Happen Here?" community forum, which took place following the Columbine High

School shootings in Colorado.

On Monday, North's Fox emphasized, security problems weren't an issue.

"Things were great," Fox said, shortly after conclusion of the half-day. "Students were very, very good."

"We just went through the halls and said hi, greeted them for the new school year."

Fox said students weren't intimidated by his uniform. "Ninety percent of the kids here know me. Normally, I wear a suit and a tie."

Rick Jones, the new principal at North, echoed the officer's comments about the smooth opening day.

"Your best security is for the adults in the building to have a great relationship with the kids," Jones said. "We had an increased adult presence in the halls. Kids really cooperated going to the classroom."

Increased police presence also is taking place at Farmington High School. Farmington Public Safety Officer Christine Schutz will be stationed at the school five days a week, instead of two or three.



Opening day: Life was as usual at the start of school as teachers Mary Compton and Rich Marsehead pass out emergency cards and other important papers. But there's a host of security-minded initiatives under way.

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