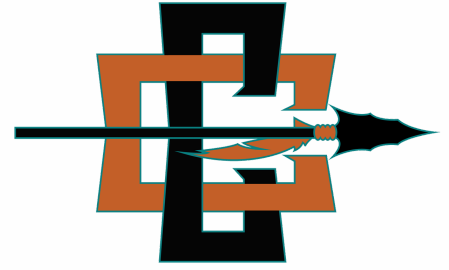




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Refreshed painted buildings at Copper Canyon

Copper Canyon Builds on Campus Renewal as Proposed Bond Could Fund Next Improvements

By: Staff Writer

Copper Canyon High School has already received visible upgrades, including a refreshed exterior and a synthetic turf field that supports athletics and campus traditions. School leaders and students are now looking toward a broader set of improvements that could move forward if voters approve the Tolleson Union High School District's proposed bond.

Superintendent Jeremy Calles discussed the campus's completed and proposed projects with Principal Bo Oxford, Student Body President Adan Torres and Spirit Commissioner Angie Arvizo during a recent episode of the district's The Education Exchange podcast. Their conversation highlighted how facilities shape the daily student experience - from the spaces where students compete and perform to the places where they eat, study and move between classes.

One of the campus's most noticeable recent changes was a complete exterior repaint. The faded purple and teal palette was replaced with weathered saddle and mesa tan, giving the nearly 25-year-old campus a more contemporary appearance while retaining Copper Canyon's identity.

"I personally think that it provided the campus a refresher, giving it a more modern look while still providing our emphasis on our colors and what represents Copper Canyon," Torres said. Arvizo said the refresh affects more than appearances. Students, she said, respond to an environment that feels cared for and current. "They see the colors, they see the spirit and they enjoy it," she said. "Students like to be at school."

The district also replaced the natural-grass field with synthetic turf, eliminating the bare patches and uneven conditions that can be difficult to avoid in Arizona's climate. Torres said the field now serves football and other sports while also supporting events such as senior sunrise and senior sunset. "Having an all-turf field provides opportunities for extracurricular activities," Torres said. "It impacts the community in greater ways than football."

The next phase of work discussed on the podcast is more extensive. If the bond passes, proposed investments at Copper Canyon could include an auxiliary gym, renovations to the performing arts center and courtyard, laser leveling of athletic fields, improved perimeter fencing, upgrades to the ceramics area and other improvements identified through continued campus planning.

An auxiliary gym is among the most significant priorities. The current gym must be shared by basketball, volleyball, physical education, unified sports and other activities. That limits scheduling and makes it difficult for Copper Canyon to add programs students have requested, including boys volleyball and badminton.

"I am fully on board with it," Torres said. As a student interested in boys volleyball and tennis, he said the additional gym would let students participate in multiple sports without having to choose between overlapping seasons. Oxford said the space would serve far more than competitive teams. "If we had that space, not only for extracurriculars, but for our PE classes, for our unified sports and really all that are involved, that would be really beneficial for this campus," he said. An air-conditioned auxiliary gym would also move more activities out of the extreme heat.

The performing arts center is also slated for potential renovation. Students described an aging lighting system, inadequate cooling in the technical booth and backstage areas, worn flooring and other conditions that can make rehearsals and performances uncomfortable.

"I am in theater, as well as tech, and I am in the booth," Arvizo said. "We can maybe get a new light system, as ours is already failing. It gets very hot, and some students at times do not even want to go because of how hot it is." Torres said renovating the center would benefit theater students as well as career and technical education programs and other campus groups that use the space for ceremonies and awards. "If we can provide a sense of comfort and modernism, it would engage larger crowds and allow students to feel more welcome in a place where they are frequently at," he said.

Heat is a recurring concern across Copper Canyon because most classroom doors open directly outdoors and students often walk long distances across the large campus. Proposed courtyard renovations could add shade, seating and places for students to study, charge laptops or eat lunch outside, reducing pressure on the crowded cafeteria.

Oxford said a redesigned courtyard could create a more collegiate atmosphere while giving students independence. "They want to sit down on a bench and study, read or charge a laptop," he said. "That gives them the opportunity to be out there, be trusted and really have that look and feel of a college campus."

Arvizo said additional shade is essential because some students already seek relief beneath trees or behind campus signs when the cafeteria is full. She also suggested awnings above classroom doors so students and teachers are protected from intense sun and rain.

Campus security is another central element of the proposed improvements. The district introduced weapons-detection systems this year, but Calles said low perimeter fencing can undermine those efforts when it is easy to climb. Proposed fencing with security tops, combined with shade, lighting and improved camera views near entry points, would strengthen the campus perimeter while making morning screening more comfortable for staff and students. "With perimeter fencing, I feel as if it will make students feel safe," Arvizo said, noting that reports of incidents and lockdowns at schools can be frightening for students.

Calles said the goal is a safer and more functional entrance. "Putting shade over those weapons detectors, along with providing extra lighting within that shade structure, would not just make the students feel more comfortable coming in, but also the staff members who are out there for an hour in the morning in August," he said.

The campus's age is also showing in specialized learning spaces. Oxford said Copper Canyon has strong student interest in performing and visual arts, yet its ceramics area needs additional storage and long-overdue renovation. Student government leaders also described a cramped storage room that forces them to place materials in other classrooms and sometimes work on the floor.

"We are pushing 25 years old on our campus," Oxford said. "Things get old, they get outdated, and we outgrow some of that current space." Renovated ceramics and visual arts areas, he said, would better support classes that routinely fill with interested students.

Students also asked district leaders to consider needs beyond the current capital plan, including two additional tennis courts, classroom window tinting, more shade structures and fans, a larger information technology workspace and replacement of aging classroom and library furniture.

Torres compared a facilities refresh to the importance of presentation in culinary arts. "Appearance does matter," he said. "Creating a more welcoming environment creates a bond with your students." Calles said the district will continue gathering student input as it refines its priorities. He acknowledged that much of Copper Canyon's original furniture remains in use and agreed that modernization needs extend beyond the most visible capital projects.

"The campus is 25 years old now, and there is a lot of original furniture still left on the campus," Calles said. "A furniture refresh is something that definitely could be needed." The completed repainting and turf installation show how facilities investments can change the look and use of a school. The proposed bond would determine whether Copper Canyon can advance the next set of projects - expanding athletic opportunities, modernizing arts and instructional spaces, improving campus safety and making the outdoor campus more comfortable in Arizona's climate.

For more information, please visit our podcast: https://youtu.be/UYPQ49DO_Wc?si=es-tYP-LQ7KsDgms