



West Point High School

West Point Looks Beyond Newness as Bond Could Shape Its Next Chapter

By: Staff Writer

West Point High School may be the newest campus in the Tolleson Union High School District, but students and school leaders say its next chapter will require thoughtful investment in athletic space, campus safety, shade, landscaping and traffic flow. Several of those projects could move forward if voters approve the district's proposed bond.

Superintendent Jeremy Calles recently joined Principal Brandi Haskins and Student Body President Olivia Acosta on the district's The Education Exchange podcast to discuss the campus capital improvement plan and additional needs emerging as WestPoint grows into its facilities.

Unlike older district campuses, West Point is not facing a long list of major renovations. Its priorities instead reflect the realities of operating a newer school: replacing landscaping damaged before trees and shrubs could fully mature, expanding spaces that are already heavily used, strengthening perimeter security and maintaining the building before small issues become costly problems.

Landscape improvements are among the projects currently under consideration. The proposal would replace trees and shrubs and add greenery to a campus where students already value outdoor areas.

"I think that is something a lot of students would enjoy," Acosta said. Through her work with the Civic Action Club, she has heard students ask for a garden, more greenery and additional color. "I think the proposed landscape improvements would be well liked by students."

Haskins said students notice and appreciate every green space on campus. "The first few years of the school, we got hit with some big storms," she said. Because some young trees were damaged before becoming established, she added, "to be able to add even more greenery would be amazing."

A proposed auxiliary gym could have an even broader effect. West Point's main gym is used throughout the school year and summer by interscholastic teams, club sports, unified sports and other student activities. The lack of additional court space limits the district's ability to add programs such as boys volleyball and badminton and can force teams into inconvenient practice schedules.

"If we are able to give students more access to extracurricular activities to channel their energy into, I think that is going to leave a positive impact on our campus all around," Acosta said. Haskins said an additional gym would quickly become one of the busiest spaces on campus. "It would allow our coaches to stagger practice times so that they are more convenient for students and families," she said. "Everyone is using our gym at all times. It is busy the entire school year and the summer."

The capital plan also includes laser leveling of athletic fields and improvements to perimeter fencing. Level fields can reduce injury risks for baseball, softball and other athletes. Fencing upgrades would reinforce the district's weapons-detection systems by creating a more secure boundary and bringing the campus into alignment with updated district safety policies.

Haskins said West Point was designed with three layers of fencing, but operating the campus has revealed places where the original design can be strengthened. Some fences remain low enough to require additional height, she said, and strategically placed fencing could allow the school to isolate event areas rather than open the entire campus and parking lot to outside users. "I think it is really looking at how we can build upon what we already have," Haskins said.

Acosta raised another concern: openings between fence poles can create opportunities to pass objects through the perimeter. "It is always going to be imperfect," she said, "but whenever we can improve, it is always something that we should take action on."

Exterior painting and weatherization are also included in the campus plan, although the work is a longer-term priority because WestPoint is still relatively new. District leaders said the goal is preventive maintenance - resealing and repainting on a planned schedule instead of waiting for visible deterioration or water intrusion.

"The buildings are holding up very well," Haskins said. "To do some of these preemptive pieces for the weatherization really makes a difference." Maintaining a regular painting and weatherization schedule, she added, will help the district avoid more significant repairs later.

Calles agreed that early action is generally the better financial strategy. "It is always more cost-effective to address issues when they are smaller issues instead of waiting for them to get bigger," he said. Because West Point's formal capital list is shorter than those of older campuses, Calles also asked the student and principal to identify needs that should be considered as planning continues. Acosta's first answer was emphatic: "Shade, shade, shade."

West Point's open design includes a large quad with extensive sun exposure. Acosta said shade has been the leading student-selected idea for two consecutive years and that any measure to cool outdoor areas would be welcomed. Haskins also cited the need to maintain outdoor charging stations and ensure students can use their laptops throughout the quad.

The conversation expanded to classroom technology. Portable charging units that can power two laptops at a time are being piloted as a way to prevent students from clustering around wall outlets or moving desks during instruction.

"There is a surplus of outlets; however, only so many people can surround them at a time," Acosta said. "A lot of the time there is shuffling throughout the classroom that ends up taking from learning time." Portable chargers, she said, would help students while keeping attention on instruction.

Haskins said the devices could also free teachers to arrange furniture around effective teaching strategies instead of outlet locations. "We would love to say every student comes to school every day with their laptop charged, but that is not the real world," she said.

Acosta also proposed a campus recycling program and a safer, more convenient exit for students parked behind the school after extracurricular activities. Haskins said future fencing and gate work may provide an opportunity to revisit that access point while maintaining campus security.

Traffic flow emerged as another priority. The school's original parent pickup design has required extensive staff supervision and temporary cones to direct vehicles. Haskins said permanent traffic-control features could create clearer patterns for families, student drivers and buses entering and leaving campus. "There are only so many cones you can use," Haskins said, adding that a permanent solution would strengthen safety for students whether they drive themselves or arrive with family members.

Acosta suggested working with the City of Avondale to explore a traffic signal near the student parking lot, where congestion increases before and after school and after major events. The combination of new student drivers, arriving parents, departing buses and event traffic can make the turn onto Avondale Boulevard difficult.

West Point's relative newness gives the district an opportunity to act before ordinary wear, heavy use and changing student needs become larger problems. If the bond passes, the campus could gain athletic capacity, improve safety and accessibility, expand shade and landscaping, and protect the public investment already made in the school for years to come.

For more information, please visit our podcast: <https://youtu.be/zDTpdi1VikA?si=FZE2rMwqluV4FBDs>