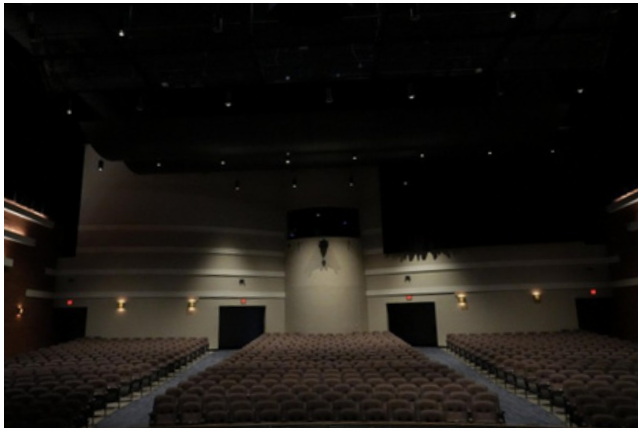




Westview's High School Performing Arts Center



Westview Nears Forty With a Blueprint for Renewal

By: Staff Writer

As Westview High School approaches its 40th anniversary, Tolleson Union High School District leaders are preparing for a sweeping campus renewal that would modernize aging buildings, expand athletics and performing arts, and improve safety and accessibility. Many of the planned projects could move forward if voters approve the district's proposed bond.

Superintendent Jeremy Calles discussed Westview's needs during a recent episode of the district's Education Exchange podcast with Principal Natalie Quiñonez, Student Body Vice President Analissa and Mayda, the junior class treasurer. The discussion paired the perspective of students who use the campus every day with the experience of a principal who once taught in some of its oldest classrooms.

Westview, the district's second-oldest campus, has already received one major improvement: its football field was converted to synthetic turf. Calles said the district's attention is now shifting toward a much longer list of Westview projects after significant work on the older Tolleson Union campus.

Several Westview projects had reached the final stages of design before being placed on hold when the previous bond measure did not pass. The list includes a new ROTC building, a field house with restrooms and concessions, demolition of aging portable classrooms, a full-size competition gym and other campus improvements.

A new ROTC building would provide the program with facilities designed for its instructional and training needs, including the required distance for marksmanship activities. Mayda, who participated in ROTC for two years, said students currently use joined classrooms that can become cramped.

"When we did marksmanship, we did it inside of a classroom, and it got a little bit squished," Mayda said. "I think it is really smart of us to continue with providing the room that is supposed to be there."

Quiñonez said ROTC contributes pride and leadership across Westview. "They do a wonderful job for our campus," she said. "In order to make sure that we continue to grow that program, we need to make sure that we bring them the building and the facilities that they need."

The proposed field house would address another longstanding limitation near the stadium. Current restrooms are connected to the ROTC building and can become hot and overcrowded during games. Visitors rely on portable toilets because there are no permanent restrooms on their side of the field.

"There is usually a huge line just to use the bathroom," Analissa said. She said improved restrooms and concessions would support school spirit and give students a visible sign that their campus is continuing to improve.

Quiñonez added that facilities at the stadium represent the school to the broader community. "It would be nice for the field house to represent us as well," she said.

The most transformative proposed project may be the removal of old portable buildings to create space for a full-size competition gym. The portables were originally designed for short-term use but have remained on the nearly 40-year-old campus for decades. Their demolition was previously delayed so the Digital Learning Academy could use the space, but the academy is preparing to move into a new facility near the district office.

"When I taught here, I taught in the portables," Quiñonez said. "They have been around for quite some time." A second gym, she said, would relieve scheduling conflicts among basketball, volleyball and other programs that now share limited space and practice at inconvenient hours.

A larger gym could also allow Westview to introduce boys volleyball, badminton and other sports students have requested. It would provide enough seating for full-campus assemblies, replacing the multiple sessions currently required because the existing gym cannot hold the entire student body.

"I have heard from multiple students that they want to start new sports, but they cannot because they do not have a place to practice," Maya said.

Safety projects are also central to Westview's capital plan. Laser leveling would address holes and uneven areas on junior varsity fields that can cause athletes to trip or twist an ankle. Improved perimeter fencing would strengthen the single-point entry system supporting the district's weapons detectors.

"Right now, the only good fields are the varsity fields," Maya said. On other fields, students must watch for "different holes or lumps" while practicing or participating in activities.

Analissa said the weapons-detection system was a positive change but should be reinforced by fencing that prevents people from bypassing monitored entrances. "Creating a better safety system is perfect for our school, especially because it is an old school," she said. "It is good to have renovations and continue to be renewed."

Quiñonez called perimeter fencing another essential line of defense. "Safety is the number one priority for us," she said. "We want to make sure that we get that first line of defense, which is the gates."

Other bond-dependent projects would confront the visible effects of age. Exterior weatherization and painting could reseal the buildings while giving the campus a refreshed appearance in Westview's colors. Students said the work could restore energy and pride as the school reaches a milestone anniversary.

"I would love to see the school painted," Mayda said. "I feel like it would bring a lot more energy and bring the school back to life."

Quiñonez agreed. "Just because it is hitting 40 does not mean it cannot look fabulous," she said, embracing the phrase "fabulous 40" as a vision for the renewal.

The performing arts center is another major renovation priority. Students described worn and damaged seating, unreliable sound and other technical problems. The center serves theater, dance, band, visual and performing arts programs, award ceremonies and community events, and it includes an orchestra pit that was recently used for the first time in years.

"If we upgrade the performing arts center, it will be a real crowd-pleaser," Analissa said. Improvements to audio and technical systems, she added, would benefit "dance, band, theater and all these other up-and-coming clubs."

Quiñonez, a former performing and visual arts teacher, said the center is one of Westview's most versatile spaces. "We have a lot of students involved in PVA," she said. "It needs to be updated. Let us bring 1989 back to life." Basic accessibility and repair needs are also on the list. Exterior steps are chipped, rusted and uneven in places, and students reported seeing people fall. Aging elevators can be unreliable, creating particular difficulties for people with disabilities and sometimes forcing users to cross to another building.

"Those steps are really something," Mayda said. "Some of them are chipped, and I have seen quite a few people fall down them."

Analissa recalled a parent becoming stuck in an elevator during a school event. "Getting the elevator fixed would be beneficial for people who have disabilities," she said.

Students and administrators also identified improvements beyond the formal project list. Tennis-court lighting could allow marching band, soccer, flag football and other programs to practice safely after dark when the stadium is occupied. Expanded shade, greenery and courtyard improvements could turn hot, underused rock and concrete areas into gathering spaces students actively seek out.

"The beauty of the school is that there is so much to do," Analissa said. "We have so many clubs, sports and activities. There are so many possibilities, but so little room to do it."

Quiñonez pointed to a recently completed turf-and-canopy area outside her office as evidence that well-designed spaces quickly become part of campus life. Students use it to eat, play games, socialize and create videos. She said similar investments across the campus could create a more welcoming, collegiate atmosphere.

Calles said the goal is to transform areas students avoid because of rocks, concrete or direct sun into spaces they want to use. Improving the junior varsity fields and adding lighting could also create more practice alternatives for programs competing for limited space.

"When we make an investment and see how students are using that area, we know it is a wise investment," Calles said. "The courtyard renovations are on the list as we look at different ways to bring more life into the middle of campus."

Westview is landlocked by nearby homes and an elementary school, making it difficult to expand outward. The proposed bond would allow the district to make fuller use of the space it already has - replacing temporary structures, rehabilitating aging systems and creating safer, more flexible facilities.

"This campus is going to be a great focus of ours," Calles said. "We want to bring it back to life as it turns 40, refresh it and make it look brand new again."

The completed turf field offers an early glimpse of that renewal. If the bond passes, Westview's next phase could extend from the stadium to the gym, classrooms, performing arts center, elevators, stairs, fields and courtyards - positioning the campus to begin its fifth decade with facilities that match the energy and ambitions of its students.