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Comparison shows LISD construction efficiency



By Tom Glenn
From the Desk of the
Superintendent

When the 2006- 07 Leander ISD school year begins on Aug. 16, our district will welcome its 26th, 27th and 28th campuses to the fold. These three new schools - Plain and Winkley elementaries and Wiley Middle School - will all come in on time and on or under budget.

Once these campuses open in August, we will have but a single new campus left in the bond funding authorized by LISD voters in 2003 (Rouse High School, LISD's fourth). This fall we begin construction on the first campuses authorized in the spring 2006 school construction bond election, making it an appropriate time to study "how we are doing" in our construction process.

Last Thursday evening's school board meeting included a report of comparison data provided by PBK, one of Texas largest educational architecture and engineering firms. PBK has worked with more than 100 Texas school districts over the past 25 years, and specializes in the planning, design and overall development of educational facilities. Their data on statewide construction costs and trends allowed us to measure how LISD matches up to other Texas school districts. We've mentioned in the past that LISD designs many upgraded finishes and systems into our projects - materials and systems that cost a bit more up front but pay off long-term for our taxpayers in lower maintenance and energy costs. With this in mind, we were curious to see how Leander ISD measured up in per-square-foot construction costs. PBK's statewide comparison data shows that we measure up well!

The median cost for elementary campus facilities across Texas is currently \$133 per square foot, with Leander ISD's most recent elementary campuses costing out at \$127 per square foot. The median cost for high school campus facilities across Texas is currently \$150 per square foot, with Leander ISD's most recent high school - Vista Ridge High School - costing out at \$143 per square foot when inflation values were added as if its construction had been completed this year.

Comparison data from PBK on middle school construction costs showed an even greater advantage for Leander ISD, where our costs not only came out below the median of \$145 per square foot, but also below the average of the lowest-cost quarter of all tracked middle schools (\$129 per square foot). Leander ISD's most recent middle school campus, again adjusted for inflation for an apples-to-apples comparison, came in at \$121 per square foot!

The fact that LISD is able to build quality classroom and campus facilities in our fast-growing environment at a cost below state median costs is not because it is cheaper to build in our area. (In fact, PBK says Austin-area construction costs are 4 percent above state averages.)

We can be pleased with the construction partnering process adopted by our district a decade ago. This process - and the hard work of our architect, engineering and construction partners - has allowed us to build long-lasting, energy-efficient buildings while looking out for our taxpayers. Certainly the leadership and monitoring provided by our Capital Improvements staff plays a big role, as well.

Our thanks to the total construction team that is adding three more on-time, on-budget campuses to the LISD family this fall. You have done a good job for our students, and for those who pay the bills.