



New middle school open for business

Story by Abby Beauregard, Sam Aaron and Trey Rice • Photos by Sam Aaron

With population growth in the town and surrounding area of Chapin, Lexington Richland School District Five has built a new middle school for seventh and eighth graders. Fifth and sixth graders shall remain at the old middle school building, now called Chapin Intermediate School.

"Last year we were sixth, seventh and eighth grade and we had 1185 students and 10 portables," Chapin Middle School principal Anna Miller said. "So we needed more space."

With overcrowding in both Chapin Middle and Elementary schools, the District decided to build a newer, larger middle school. The old middle school however, would not be left to waste.

"We needed another school to help with the growth, but we had overcrowding at the elementary schools and middle schools and we could only build one school," Miller said. "By making Chapin Intermediate [house] fifth and sixth and Chapin middle seventh

and eighth, it helped with the overcrowding of the elementary and middle schools by building one school."

With the building of an entirely new school, there is also the requirement of funding for such a project. The District's bond referendum, approved by voters in 2008, funded the project.

"This is the final project in the bond referendum," Miller explained. "Several years ago we had a District bond referendum. A lot of projects were involved in that and the building of Chapin Middle School was the final project."

Construction of the new middle school began in May 2014. While it was nearly completed by the start of the school year, a few finishing touches were still needed. Despite these final steps, the school gained conditional occupancy from the construction company, so the school year would not be delayed.

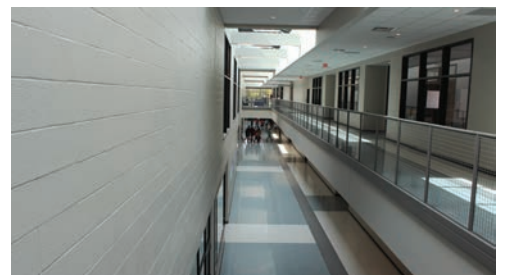
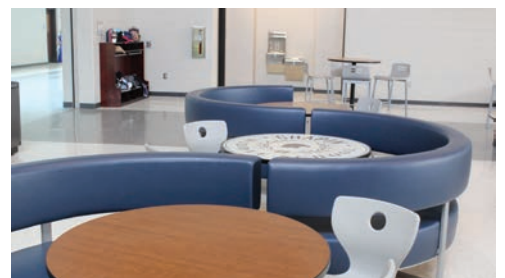
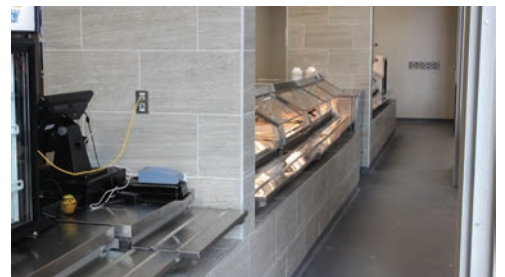
"We were able to get conditional occupancy which means that the school made certain

agreements with the construction company so that we could occupy the building," Miller said. "We're finalizing some landscaping, fencing is going up, [and there will be] some painting along our carline area to try and keep the traffic off of Broad River Road."

Still, despite its unfinished status, the reaction to the new building has largely been positive.

"We have so many more windows and it's open," eighth grade math teacher David Fisher said. "We have common areas where students can relax a little when they're not sitting in class all the time, a recess area instead of a parking lot, outside courtyards [and] a designated car line that really works; it does what it's supposed to do. For me it's just so much more open and bright and I don't even have to turn on the lights in the classroom."

In addition to the new building, Chapin Middle School also started a new program called Fun Academies. This program allows



students to sign up for classes based on students' interests.

"One of the things that we do that I think is pretty neat is that we have what we call fun academies," Miller said. "Those are four sessions per semester for 30 minutes each. Our students sign up by interests so it can be anything from ideology to zumba to photography to knitting, crocheting and cross-stitching, cake decorating, law enforcement, veterinary science and things of that nature," Miller said.

With a new neighborhood sprouting up in Chapin, the school is expecting an increase in its student population in the coming years. Eventually the school may have to finalize plans to add a third wing to the building.

"The school is wonderful. The only thing they need is more space already," PTO President and parent Vera Timmons said. "They're trying to address some of those issues with new neighborhoods being built in the area, across the street for instance. They're going

to have to increase capacity for the school."

Since Chapin Middle only accepts students from those zoned to attend it, there should be less trouble with overcrowding than there has been in the past.

Miller said the students are happy, though, and she remains enthusiastic about the future of the school.

"Our teachers, our support staff, everybody here has been so wonderful about it. It's a great feeling: our kids are happier, we have a lot of windows and state-of-the-art space," Miller said. "Our students have really enjoyed a lot of that, with smiles on their faces all the time."

Chapin Middle School contains an ergonomic design with breathtaking facilities. The school uses natural lighting to balance the bold, modern architectural elements. Facilities include a gym and cafeteria as well as labs and naturally-lit classrooms.