

Stillwater dedicates new addition

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By HILARY MATHESON Daily Inter Lake |



Stillwater Christian School will dedicate its new addition Sunday.

The \$1.8 million project adds 10,800 square feet to the private school in south Kalispell.

Construction was still underway Wednesday as crews were cutting and installing wood slats for the walls of a new lobby and main entrance.

The design of the lobby is minimalist — natural wood, cement floors and outside industrial metal siding that will be expanded to cover the rest of the existing front of the building.

“We’re getting there,” Stillwater Superintendent Dan Makowski said. “We’re finished pretty much inside and it’s mostly landscaping and siding to be done yet.”

One feature of the lobby is a commons area with tiered platforms for students to sit and gather in front of long windows with a west-facing view. The lobby also contains a conference room.

Students have already begun using the six new high school classrooms. These new rooms include a science lab, lecture room and Harkness room. The Harkness room is one highlight of Stillwater’s high school curriculum and contains a specially designed oval table conducive to student-driven discussion.

Bible and rhetoric teacher Micah Tinkham teaches classes in the style of the Harkness method. The long oval design aligns with the Harkness philosophy of student-driven discussion where students can all see each other.

"I love it. It raises discussion to the next level," Tinkham said while on his way to give a test in a new lecture room next door where students readied themselves in desks set up on tiered risers.

In a calculus/physics room, there isn't a traditional "front" of the classroom. Tables are pushed together in the center of the room and whiteboards hang on opposite walls.

"A lot of times kids will all be up at the boards working, explaining or demonstrating their work," Makowski said.

A new math lab provides a flexible space to either work in desks or at computers.

In the gym, improvements include a new concessions area, bleachers and a refinished floor.

With the new classrooms, existing classrooms are used in new ways. Band and choir now have separate classrooms next to each other. Previously, one room served both purposes.

The art room, previously housed in a tight room, was moved into the old science lab. The old art room is now used as storage. The school's growing Montessori preschool program has moved from a Quonset hut into two elementary classrooms that have been converted into one large room with new self-contained restrooms.

Grade levels have also been reconfigured into more defined wings that house high school, middle school and elementary students as a result of the new addition.

The decision to build an addition is a response to the increased popularity of the school's art, music and Montessori preschool programs. In the early 2000s, the school had considered building a new campus north of Kalispell but that plan was scrapped during the recession and the focus turned to developing the current campus.

Makowski said this is the first phase of modifying Stillwater. As money becomes available, the second phase is to build two more classrooms, bathrooms and a hallway at the back of the school that connects the new addition to the existing building.

Stillwater Christian School has a total enrollment of 354 students.

The building dedication and open house begin at 4 p.m. Sunday at Stillwater, 255 FFA Drive in Kalispell.