

The Glennallen Elementary Replacement Project - Two Years Later



New face of the Glennallen School. Photo by Emmie Van Wyhe

The Glennallen School is nearing its second anniversary since the Grand Opening on March 24, 2008. The Copper River School District is proud of the project and believes it has proven to be a success.

The old Glennallen Elementary served the community for over 40 years until the 2002 Denali Fault earthquake caused some minor foundation issues that later became major areas of concern. A study was completed and determined that replacing the facility would be more economical than attempting to reinforce the existing foundation.

In addition to the foundation issues, the facility was not very energy efficient, resulting in very high heating costs. A replacement would allow the school to fix these problems and create future savings.

The Glennallen School Replacement Project began with a community-wide effort to secure funding from the Legislature for the project. Representative John Harris and then Senator Gene Therriault both visited the old school and observed for themselves the need for a new facility and the project was funded entirely by an appropriation from the Alaska State Legislature.

From design to completion, the project took approximately 18 months. This timeline was one of the biggest challenges. In order to get the most for their money,

they had to complete the facility in a very short time frame. Fluctuations in market prices caused by the spikes in oil prices during construction were a concern. By utilizing a unique design-construction model, the school was able to begin construction while the design phase was still being completed. This required extensive coordination between the Copper River School District, the architects, and the contractors.

This project brought many changes, but the biggest by far was the relocation of the Elementary school. Glennallen Junior/Senior High School and Glennallen Elementary used to be two different facilities.

By combining the facilities into one, the district improved energy and space efficiency while creating a more inclusive school culture. The entire facility is shared – gyms, classrooms, and common areas. Students are able to benefit from all aspects of the new facility.

The school climate and culture are significantly different as a result of the combined facility. Older students and younger students can both benefit from peer academic exercises. Younger students are motivated and excited by older students in a way they often aren't by adults.

There have been several other positive outcomes of

the replacement project as well; campus-wide assemblies, improving sports practice schedules, and increased opportunities for utilizing subject experts K-12.

By combining the facility, the school has been able to contain maintenance and energy costs related to the Glennallen campus. With energy costs being a concern of the school prior to the replacement project, energy efficiency improvements were a top concern in the design. Several improvements were made including more energy efficient lighting throughout the facility and an improved H-vac system.

The lighting through the new facility is much more energy efficient. Every room uses a motion detector system for turning lights on and off, including the gymnasium. The type of florescent lighting is particularly efficient and allows teachers to utilize different levels of lighting. Natural light is used in all classrooms. Large energy efficient windows allow lots of daylight. In conjunction with the multiple light settings in the classrooms, energy is saved.

The gym lights are state-of-the-art fluorescent lights that use a fraction of the energy traditional gym lights use. They are also instant on and off and do not require 'warm-up' time. This allows the lights to be turned off and on without the delay normally associated with large gym lights.

The H-vac system is also energy efficient. The system uses timers that allow the building to use less heat when occupied. A simple control in the office can be set to provide more heat for evening activities, and then return to lower energy modes automatically when not needed.

Community support is another great aspect of the project. The multi-purpose room was designed specifically with a community kitchenette so that it would be more accessible to the public. The building also has security features that allow the school to be more open and accessible without sacrificing student safety or facility integrity. The multi-purpose room can be utilized by local groups and organizations for meetings and events. It is a great facility and a nice way to help organizations in the community.

According to Jaime Matthews, President of the Glennallen PTO, "the new school is a first-class facility. We now not only have the space we need, but the tools to accomplish the goals of that space. The current facility has opened the school and the community up for a much wider variety of events and activities. As a parent, I've seen the multi-purpose room, specifically, utilized for many new activities. It is great for our kids."

Finally, the project has even contributed to the local economy in several indirect ways. Contractors utilized local businesses; the contractors used local hire and local



Top: Energy efficient light banks in the multi purpose room. Above: Two students enjoy reading by the natural lighting provided by the large window in the library. Photos by Tammy Van Wyhe, Glennallen School Principal.

sub-contractors. Also, many local artists created custom works of art for the facility. Superintendent Michael Johnson commented that "the variety, beauty and creativity on display from local artists is stunning".

According to Tammy Van Wyhe, Glennallen School Principal, "we are thrilled with the facility we gained through the replacement project. While the quality of a student's education relies primarily on the faculty and staff doing the teaching, the environment in which the learning takes place plays a huge role in a student's overall educational experience. The elementary replacement project has benefited ALL of our students, grades K-12, in a number of ways. In addition, our community gained a state-of-the-art building that is energy efficient, functional for a variety of events, and aesthetically beautiful."