

CY-FAIR SCHOOL DISTRICT

District reconstruction projects begin this month

Jersey Village, Cypress Creek high schools to get renovations, new construction

By **KIM JACKSON**
CHRONICLE CORRESPONDENT

The Cypress-Fairbanks school district will launch two massive reconstruction projects this month to transform the physical and organizational structures of Jersey Village and Cypress Creek high schools.

The two \$50 million-plus projects or — \$60 million-plus if Cy-Fair ISD voters approve a school bond referendum Nov. 6 — will rebuild, renovate and add onto two of the district's oldest high schools. Construction crews will start work by the end of October and heavy construction after the first of the year. The projects will take two- to two-and-a-half years to complete.

Through a process involving students, parents, residents and school officials, it was decided Jersey Village would be divided into four small "learning communities," each with about 800 students in the 9-12 grade, said Pam Wells, Cy-Fair ISD's associate superintendent for general administration.

Cypress Creek High School's plan is similar, but with a twist. The school's ninth- and 10th-graders will be divided into four small learning communities with about 425 students each, while 11th- and 12th-graders will follow one of four "career pathways."

The school will have eight sections, one for each of the small learning communities and career pathway communities.

Students at both schools will share common facilities — cafeterias, band rooms, gymnasiums, and athletic facilities — but will spend most of their time in the smaller group atmosphere.

Wells said bond money approved by voters in the district's 2004 bond election will fund the majority of the renovation, reconstruction and new construction work. Some additional work will be done on both schools if funds are approved in the 2007 bond election.

"The plans were developed and laid out based on the needs of those schools," Wells said.

Cypress Creek High School

Cypress Creek High School principal Jim Wells said the structure will serve two purposes.

The small learning communities create a safe haven for ninth- and 10th-graders; and the career pathways lay the foundation for 11th- and 12th-graders to prepare for a post-high school education and to gain insight in to a possible future career.

WANT TO GO?

■ **Community meeting:** Parents, students and community members are invited to attend an information meeting about the Cypress Creek High School project at 7 p.m. Tuesday at Cypress Creek High School's Auditorium, 9815 Grant Road.

■ **Meeting to come:** Similar meetings will be held about the Jersey Village High School project in early 2008.

"We need to prepare our kids," Wells said. "The bottom line is that Cypress Creek High School is trying to help them go beyond the high school experience and get them ready for the real world."

Wells said when students enter high school they are "cast to the seas" and often flounder for a year or two before figuring things out. Dividing those students into smaller groups with teachers and administrators focused on them will help guide them through rough waters. He said about 80-90 percent of students who drop out of high school do so before the 10th grade, so this approach could also help those students stay in school.

The four small learning communities will be housed on Cypress Creek High School's first floor, primarily in the area where classrooms are located now, and will focus on core academic subjects, including math, social studies, English and science.

During the students' 10th-grade year, they will start a career research unit or course, and teachers and counselors will begin working with them to determine which career pathway they will follow beginning their 11th-grade year.

Those four pathways are health, social and environmental sciences; information technology; arts and communication; and business and professional.

Three of the career pathway communities will be located in an addition that will be constructed on the Cypress Creek campus site, and the fourth will be located near the school's gymnasium.

Jersey Village High School

"With 3,200 students in one large high school, many feel they are anonymous," said Ralph Funk, Jersey Village High School principal. "We are creating four 800-student high schools within one."

Funk said the Jersey Village planning team said the four small learning communities was a good place to start at their school.

He said the school could evolve later into a plan similar to that adopted at Cypress Creek.

He said the students would be divided into the four small communities beginning with the 2008-09 school year.

They will remain in the same communities with the same teachers and administrators, all four years.

and two on the second floor, with classrooms and administrative areas assigned to each of the learning communities.

Yoas said there would be social studies, math and English classrooms, and an administrative suite in each community.

The science labs and classrooms will be in a new addition to the building.

If the 2007 bond is approved, the number of labs and rooms will climb from 21-28, and space for the early childhood learning program will be added.

Claude Yoas, Cy-Fair ISD's director of facilities planning, said the reconstruction project will divide the school into four sections, two on the first floor

PHOTO BY KIM JACKSON