

Athena center to be fixed using settlement funds

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The Athena Performing Arts Center at Greece Athena High School will likely be closed for the bulk of the upcoming school year so contractors can fix problems that have plagued the showpiece theater from the start. The biggest issues: obstructed views and numerous seats in the 1,600-seat auditorium that are installed too close together to allow anyone to sit in them.

“It’s disappointing that we’re going to lose use of APAC for basically a year, but we’re hoping that once this is done and everything is up to snuff, that will be the facility it was supposed to be way back in 2001,” said Sean McCabe, president of the Greece Central School District board.

Problems in the facility were just a handful of the troubles that stemmed from botched oversight of a \$119.5 million capital improvement project in the district from the early 2000s. Among the issues: the state Comptroller’s Office determined the district overspent by \$2.5 million on the project, then hid the excesses from the public by shifting the expenses to the district’s general fund.

And, the project was rife with shoddy construction work at 20 schools: heating systems didn’t work right and neither did the security systems; drainage systems weren’t hooked up; entry

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canopies at four schools improperly shed ice during the winter, presenting a danger to students and staff; a loading dock was built in an area inaccessible to trucks; in one instance, a brick wall was built across a light fixture, making it impossible to change the bulbs; at another school, the flagpole was installed atop a platform so high it required two custodians and a ladder in order to raise the flag.

In 2008, portions of 13 schools had to be closed for emergency repairs after an engineering firm found that critical clips meant to secure the building walls to the roofs were never installed. Similar issues were found and fixed at Athena Performing Arts Center.

Also in 2008, the district filed a lawsuit against Tetra Tech Architects and Engineers, the architectural firm responsible for overseeing the project. A \$5.2 million settlement was reached in that case in 2013.

That money will be used to make the fixes at APAC — which opened in 2005 — and 13 other schools. Planned work includes fixing the seat spacing and sight lines in the theater, as well as providing access to the stage from the front of the auditorium, rebuilding the wheelchair ramps to meet code and replacing the vinyl floor in the lobby with an appropriate flooring. At other schools, the hazardous entry canopies will be fixed, ventilation issues will be addressed, a settling floor slab will be fixed at Pine Brook Elementary and areas where concrete was removed from science room floors to allow plumbing installations at Olympia School will be repaired. District architect Louis Bianchi said the largest of the projects is fixing the seating issues at APAC. The district has hired Hunt Engineers and Architects to design the repairs and LeChase Construction Services will oversee the work at the performing arts center. School employees will manage the contracts for projects at the other schools. Bianchi said plans are for the settlement funds to cover the fixes that need to be made as well as the legal fees associated with the lawsuit. McCabe, who was elected to the school board in 2008, well after the \$119.5 million project was completed, said the board has taken steps to better safeguard taxpayer money used for construction, partly by breaking future projects into smaller pieces so they can be better monitored and by insisting on more stringent oversight.

Voters in the district on March 24 approved a \$35 million repair and renovation project unrelated to the fixes from the early 2000s project.

“What we’ve been doing now is breaking the projects up, doing smaller groups of health and safety repairs, and I think that’s an easier way of trying to manage our projects and avoid these other issues,” said McCabe. “When you’re looking at a \$100 million plus project, there’s so much going on and in so many areas it’s difficult to have the level of oversight that’s needed.”

Bianchi said APAC will close in early October and the work should be done by June 2016, with construction at the other schools to be completed during the next two summer breaks.

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The Athena Performing Arts Center on Long Pond Road in Greece faces a lengthy closing so repairs can be made.

SHAWN [DOWD/@SDOWDPHOTO](https://twitter.com/SDOWDPHOTO) STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

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LOUIS BIANCHI,

SCHOOL DISTRICT ARCHITECT

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