

\$325 million project to transform schools

Tiffany Lankes

Staff writer

At the city's School 50, students have learned to play musical instruments in a sequestered corner of the hallway and a room barely a step up from a storage closet.

The band is so big that all of its members don't fit on the stage during performances.

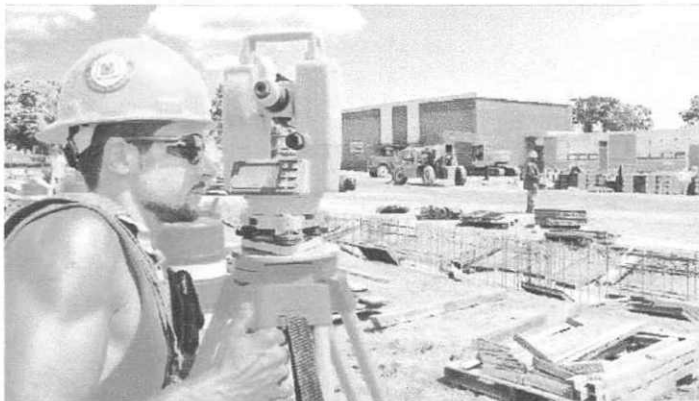
"They have to sit on the floor," said principal Tim Mains.

But soon that will change, as construction in the biggest school renovation project in the district's history gets started.

School 50 is one of the first schools on the list of those slated for a makeover, which will include a new gymnasium and some reconfiguring of space to create a larger library, art room and stage for performances.

Work on the first phase of the project is under way, with construction crews at Schools 17, 50 and 58 as well as the Charlotte and Franklin high school campuses. All of those projects, with the exception

See PROJECT, Page 6A



Joe Herter uses a transit level to help with the placement of a wall as construction gets under way at School 50. The construction is part of the City School District's \$1.2 billion modernization project. SHAWN DOWD/ STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Article Continued Below

[See PROJECT on Page A06](#)

Project

Continued from Page 1A

of School 58, will be finished in time for the start of the 2013-14 school year. School 58, the largest of the renovation projects in the plan, will take two years.

Plans to renovate school buildings have been in the works since 2007, when state legislation authorizing the \$1.2 billion project was passed.

The board overseeing the project is made of seven members appointed by the superintendent of schools and the mayor but operates as an independent entity.

The first phase will involve \$325 million in renovations to a dozen city schools.

"We've had a lot of people working on these plans for the past four, five years," said Jerome Underwood, the district's senior director of operations. "Now we're in the ground, we're working."

Planners considered capacity, academic programs and the condition of the facilities in deciding which schools to renovate first.

The improvements will include new classroom wings to either replace portable classrooms or to house new students as those schools add new grade levels.

School 58, known as World of Inquiry, is adding a high school that will offer its popular Expeditionary Learning program so students can stay at the school from kindergarten to twelfth grade. The program focuses on hands-on lessons, and students complete projects to master the curriculum. At the secondary level, the designs will accommodate specialized academic programs.

Like School 50, the renovations will allow some schools to expand academic programs by reconfiguring space to create music rooms, auditoriums, modern gymnasiums and science labs.

"The parents and the teachers said we want more performance space," Mains said. Not only will the plan improve city schools, administrators also hope it will save them the millions of dollars it costs each year to maintain and do minor renovations on aging buildings.

At School 17, the kindergarten hallway is sinking so much that in some places the wall and the floor are separating. Music class takes place in a cramped room designed for regular classes, not dozens of students and musical instruments. The kitchen is so small that the staff cannot prepare a hot meal each day for every student.

Schools have been working with parents, teachers and members of the communities to design plans that best address these issues and meet students' needs.

"Our facilities definitely needed to be updated," said School 58 parent Candice Lucas. "The kids have to feel comfortable in their surroundings."

TLANKES@DemocratandChronicle.com [Twitter.com/TiffanyLankes](https://twitter.com/TiffanyLankes)



Construction work continues at School 50 on Seneca Avenue on Tuesday. Work at this school is expected to be complete by the start of school year in September 2013.

SHAWN DOWD STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Powered by [TECNAVIA](#)

Copyright © 2012 Democrat and Chronicle 08/08/2012