Pickens schools ready for inspection

All five new facilities on track to open on first day of school

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Five new schools in Pickens County are on track to open with the Sept. 6 start of school, and Superintendent Henry Hunt said it will be "one of the most exciting and memorable years" in the district's history.

"It's a very hectic time for us, but things are progressing and we look forward to all the projects completing and opening on time," said Bob Folkman, building program administrator for the School District of Pickens County.

The five will be the first new schools to open as part of the district's $374 million building program, said Julie Thompson, spokeswoman for the district. They are Liberty High, Pickens High, Dacusville Elementary, Chastain Road Elementary and Pickens County Career and Technology Center.

Pickens County schools are the last district in the state to open this year, Thompson said, with the Sept. 6 date designed to make sure everything was ready. No delays are expected, she said.

Folkman said the schools are in the "finishing stages" and are getting ready for inspections by the Office of School Facilities. Dacusville Elementary has passed its inspection, he said.

The career center will be inspected Aug. 1, he said, and the other three new schools probably will be inspected the week of Aug. 8.

The new football stadium at Daniel High will be ready for the first home football game on Aug. 26, Folkman said.

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Hunt said taxpayers have invested in "safe, secure facilities that promote the highest standards in teaching and learning, and I believe they will be very proud of their investment."

He said students will have schools "that offer equal instructional opportunities and learning environments," and the improvements will strengthen the recruitment of business and industry to Pickens County.

Roy Costner, with a daughter at Liberty Middle and a son at Liberty High, said the new schools could give people in the area a sense of pride.

Costner said his wife, who teaches at Liberty Middle, is excited about moving to the old high school, which is to be converted to the middle school, because of the improvements.

"Would I have been a proponent of building all these schools at one time? No, probably not, because that seems like an awful lot of money to spend at once," Costner said. "But we can't go back and change that, so do I feel good about it? I feel good about it because of the people that are there."

Thompson said the initial funding dated to November 2006 when board members approved the use of an installment purchase agreement similar to what was used to build schools in Greenville County.

The controversial plan has drawn criticism from some in the community and praise from others over the years.

Folkman said the building program includes construction of four new high schools, the new career and technology center, the new Dacusville Elementary and the new Chastain Road Elementary as well as renovations to other schools.

Chastain Road Elementary will become the Liberty attendance area's second elementary school, he said.

The new Easley High is slated to open in January 2012, and the new Daniel High will open in August 2012, Folkman said.

He said work in the building program is going on at the seven new schools being constructed as well as renovations at Edwards Middle, McKissick Elementary and Liberty Elementary and an addition at Dacusville Middle.

Thompson said renovations to all the elementary schools have been completed except for some work still going on at McKissick and Liberty.

She said the building program also calls for the conversion of the existing Liberty, Pickens and Easley high schools to middle schools and renovations to Gettys Middle.

The plan had initially called for Gettys to be closed and its students moved to the former Easley High, Thompson said, but instead both facilities will eventually serve as middle schools.

She said Gettys is the largest middle school in the district and had about 1,300 students in January.

Gettys Middle is slated to be the last project completed, which is set for January 2014, Thompson said.

She said registration for the two new high schools — Pickens and Liberty — is scheduled for Aug. 22-25 and 29 at the new schools depending on what grade students are in and will be a chance for students to get their first look at the schools.

Thompson said annual meet-the-teacher events are scheduled for Sept. 1 for elementary schools and Aug. 29 or 30 for middle schools depending on the school and grade level.

Dedication ceremonies are also planned: Sept. 18 for Liberty High; Sept. 25 for Pickens High; Oct. 16 for the Pickens County Career and Technology Center; and Oct. 23 for Chastain Road Elementary.

Thompson said they have already had the dedication ceremony for Dacusville Elementary.