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Construction to begin on Norman high schools

By Megan Sando

Phase I construction will begin at Norman North and Norman High schools beginning summer 2015, after being approved Monday by the board of education.

The Norman Public Schools Board of Education approved plans to begin construction on Norman High's athletic facilities and academic facilities at Norman North.

The renovations are a result of a no-tax increase \$126 million bond approved in February 2014.

Heath Tate, principal architect at MA+ Architecture LLC, said new football stadium seat backs, restrooms and a concession building, track and field sand pit covers and chain link fence repairs are part of projects to be completed this summer at Norman High School.

At the baseball field, expect new outfield and side field fences, improvements to the field and an upgraded scoreboard on the north side. The north gym basketball court will get a new center court logo and a two-tone finish on its floor.

Tate said the estimated cost is \$952,411.

Architect Ben Smith of the Architects in Partnership Project presented plans for Phase I construction at Norman North. Nine classroom renovations at the Freshman Academy, earth work and utilities, and miscellaneous athletic projects are estimated at \$1.5 million.

Summer 2015 construction includes two new tennis courts. Structural work will begin on the College and Career Center as well, projected to be complete by next summer.

"There will be some nice progress this summer," Superintendent Joe Siano, Ph.D., said.

All of the bond projects must be completed within three years.

Some \$21 million of the project is set aside for a Freshman Academy and College and Career Center at both high schools. Learning commons will foster technology and collaboration.

Siano said schools must embrace technology, without letting the fears and pitfalls derail educators, adding that "unfortunately school today is preparing you for more school."

Designs that will serve as the "brick and mortar" for collaborative learning are at the base of increasing retention rates among freshmen and preparing them for being college students or part of the work force.

Nick Migliorino, Ph.D., assistant superintendent and chief technology officer, said the common areas that bind the career center and academy are meant to inspire students to attend college.

Through open areas, soft seating, a coffee bar and technology at their fingertips, student learn something new. In the work world, people work together.

Director of Secondary Education Holly Nevels said students are already preparing for this new environment at school.

The focus is on collaboration, project-based learning and intelligent classrooms with interactive technology. Perhaps the biggest difference is a switch from the "fish bowl" mentality to a "guided inquiry."

Nevels said instead of choosing a project out of a hat, a student must make up their mind about a project to take on that they are interested in and explain why.

"The focus is on real learning and real research," she said.