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Photo by Eric Bauer

D153 improvement projects under way at all three schools

BY MARILYN THOMAS
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Homewood schools staff and outside contractors have been working on the first half of the \$9.4 million in improvements to Willow, Churchill and James Hart Schools in Homewood.

The school board approved a number of improvements to update the aging buildings, dating to the 1950s and 1960s.

The board sold \$8.2 million in bonds to finance the work and is using \$1.2 million in pandemic relief appropriated through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for improvements to school buildings.

One major change is the replacement of the HVAC units to improve air circulation and air quality in the buildings. The district ordered 100 new units, but thus far only 20 have arrived, and several were damaged, said Superintendent Scott McAlister. He is hopeful the delays will be rectified soon.

While school is out for the summer, crews have removed the old equipment, McAlister said. At Willow School, they have made the necessary spacing adjustments that required cuts into the masonry so the new heating/ventilation units can be easily popped into place once they arrive.

Site preparations for an addition to the third grade wing of Churchill School have been done, but contractors can't start construction work because of the strike by Local 150 of the International Union of Operating Engineers. The strike forced the shutdown at quarries that produce crushed stone, sand and gravel needed for asphalt and concrete needed for the addition's foundation.

McAlister said the schedule had the classroom addition complete and ready for move-in in January, but the delay may push things back.

At Willow School a mobile unit with four classrooms was placed on what was the outside playground. McAlister said the district intends to make a new outdoor playground, but that project requires asphalt, so work can't begin because of the strike.

He was excited to have the mobile unit in place. It will be space for staff to provide special services for students.

The district is replacing boilers at James Hart and Willow Schools.

Renovations to the bathrooms in all three buildings are on hold due to supply chain issues and cost overruns, McAlister said. Several other projects, such as roof repairs at James Hart, were slated for 2023.



Marilyn Thomas/H-F Chronicle

A mobile unit is in place at Willow School. It will provide space for special services.