

Classrooms multiply in City Heights; Prop; MM funding opens doors to Herbert Ibarra, Cherokee Point

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Schools in City Heights have long operated beyond capacity, squeezing students into portable classrooms and busing others to less crowded campuses elsewhere in the city.

That will change Sept. 6 when two of four elementary schools planned for City Heights are to open.

Herbert Ibarra and Cherokee Point elementary schools are the first permanent campuses built under Proposition MM, a \$1.51 billion bond measure approved in 1998 for school construction and modernization.

(Ellen Browning Scripps elementary, which opened in 2001, is a temporary school of prefabricated buildings).

Less than two miles apart, Herbert Ibarra and Cherokee Point represent an \$85 million public investment in an area undergoing a rebirth.

Both schools are designed to be community centers.

Parent and community meeting spaces are built into the campuses, as well as soccer and baseball fields that will be open to the public after school hours. Both schools have full-size stages, unusual features in elementary schools, that might be used for community theater.

The City Heights area is among the poorest in San Diego, with median household incomes that are about half those elsewhere in the city. Government figures say families in the Cherokee Point area have a median household income of \$29,981. The median income in the Ibarra neighborhood is \$22,888.

Jay Powell, executive director of the City Heights Community Development Corp., says the schools will be catalysts for neighborhood revitalization.

"It's just an extraordinary public investment that will reap manifold benefits," he said.

The principal at Cherokee Point, Richard Cansdale, has met with the Cherokee Point Neighborhood Association and formed a partnership with the nearby Copley Family YMCA to offer Cherokee students an aquatics program.

Ibarra Principal Susie Sovereign, who moved into her office two weeks ago, has already

met with Powell.

Price Charities, which has a history of investing in educational initiatives in City Heights, has awarded each school a \$50,000 grant.

Herbert Ibarra and Cherokee Point are stuccoed in shades of tan and beige, and both feature contemporary designs, accentuated by slanting roofs and large banks of windows that provide interiors with an open, airy feel.

The two-story classroom buildings accommodate up to 900 students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

They will relieve crowding at Central, Edison, Euclid and Jackson elementary schools. They also will eliminate the need for about 500 students to be bused elsewhere, saving the district about \$171,000 in annual transportation costs.

The San Diego Unified School District last opened new schools in City Heights in 1997. The two, Monroe Clark Middle School and Rosa Parks Elementary School, instantly filled to capacity.

One City Heights student who will be attending Cherokee Point is Brayanna Monterrosa, 9. She has been riding the bus to Bay View Terrace Elementary School in Pacific Beach the past three years. To get to school on time, Brayanna had to get up at 6 a.m. for a 45-minute bus ride to and from Pacific Beach.

Her new school is a block and a half away.

"It just feels great to have a brand new school in the area. It's just uplifting," said Brayanna's mother, Esmeralda. The students will have access to the latest technologies, including wireless Internet access and laptops.

Classrooms have built-in sound systems and video projectors, laser printers, DVD/VCR players and cable access.

Teachers have laptops linked to their classrooms' sound and video projection systems, enabling them to use Powerpoint, iMovies and iTunes for instruction.

"You will see kids using technology as early as kindergarten," Cansdale said.

Teachers also will have wireless, hand-held devices that allow them to control software applications from anywhere in the classroom. The notes they write and the information they highlight on their hand-held devices can be displayed on a pull-down screen in the classroom.

Instead of bulky overhead projectors with whirring fans, teachers will use compact document cameras that can directly project and magnify books and three-dimensional

objects on a screen.

In addition, they will have clip-on wireless microphones so students in the back of the classroom can hear as clearly as those who sit in the front.

Studies have shown that voice amplification systems help keep students' attention and especially benefit English-learners who rely on clear pronunciations to learn the language.

Both Ibarra and Cherokee will have a large number of Spanish-speaking students.

Voice amplification systems have been limited to classes for the hearing-impaired, but they have become more common now that research has shown that many classrooms are too noisy for students to learn.

"The concept is really very simple: you wouldn't have a classroom without lighting. Why would you have a classroom where the students can't hear the teacher?" asked Lois Kostroski, executive director of the Educational Audiology Association.

The gadgets are new to many of the teachers, who attended a series of training workshops over the summer.

"I think it's wonderful and intimidating at the same time. I have a lot to learn," said Susan Walters, who will be teaching third grade at Ibarra.

The teachers marvel at the newness of things in their classrooms, from the carpeted floors and dry-erase boards to the built-in shelves, drawers, cubby holes and cabinets.

Amy Palacios, a teacher at Cherokee point, said it gave her chills to think about "coming into a clean slate where we will create the (learning) environment together. It's a good feeling." said Cherokee Point teacher Amy Palacios.

Michael Sprague, a member of the City Heights Area Planning Committee, hopes the schools will lead to a gain in student achievement.

"In San Diego, there is almost an exact ratio between overcrowding and the ability to read," Sprague said. "The more overcrowded a school is the more likely kids can't read."

Herbert Ibarra elementary, situated on about 8 acres, is named after the district's first Latino principal. He retired in 1981 as head of San Diego High.

Cherokee Point elementary, at just under 7 acres, is named after the neighborhood in which it's located, where streets converge in the shape an arrowhead.

More than 340 homes and apartment units were razed to make room for the schools,

and 1,218 residents were relocated. Thirty families have used their relocation compensation to purchase homes.

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Caption: 4 PICS

1. Michelle Collins will be teaching fourth grade at Herbert Ibarra elementary. She's working on a bulletin board, getting ready for classes Sept. 6. 2. The push -- or, in this case, pull -- is on to get Cherokee Point ready for the start of classes. Roberto Baca is pulling a load of furniture to an assembly point in one of the classrooms. 3. Susie Sovereign (right), principal at Herbert Ibarra elementary, met with teachers Michelle Collins (left) and Jane Fuzak. 4. Principal Richard Cansdale (on stairs) is checking out all levels at Cherokee Point. "You will see kids using technology as early as kindergarten," Cansdale said, referring to the high-tech tools at his school and at Herbert Ibarra. 1,2,3,4. David Brooks / Union-Tribune photos

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Edition: 1,6,7

Section: LOCAL

Page: B-1

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