

USD 473 Prioritizes Facilities Upgrades Across the District

Facilities remain a top priority for USD 473, where multiple buildings serve nearly 1,200 students and hundreds of staff members each day. Ensuring that learning and working environments are safe, comfortable, and appealing has been the focus of several large-scale projects in recent years.

One of the most significant undertakings has been improvements to the district's HVAC systems. For more than four years, the Board of Education has worked toward a comprehensive plan to modernize heating, ventilation, and air conditioning across all schools. The goals are to provide fresh air, maintain consistent temperatures, and increase energy efficiency through improved equipment and controls.

The first phase replaced outdated furnaces and air conditioning units at Rural Center, Enterprise, and Blue Ridge Elementary schools. These updates also introduced Wi-Fi-capable thermostats that allow adjustments to temperatures, set schedules, and monitor systems remotely from a computer or mobile device.

Subsequent phases have focused on upgrading building controls at Chapman High School, Chapman Middle School, and Chapman Elementary. Each summer, one building has been completed, with the final step—Chapman Elementary's controls—planned for next summer. These systems are essential for managing the district's complex network of boilers, heat exchangers, cooling towers, and other components.

Another critical step involved servicing the district's heat exchangers. Over time, mineral buildup created blockages that restricted water flow, which looked like water trying to move through a honeycomb. A specialized company was brought in to clean the exchangers and replace damaged plates, ensuring better efficiency and reliability.

While it may be surprising to think of Chapman's "new" schools as aging, the buildings constructed after the tornado are now 14 years old. As technology is often the first system to show wear, updates have become a natural and necessary part of maintenance. I often refer to this analogy, "Think about your own cell phone—you probably don't still use the same one from 14 years ago."

Roofing projects have also been a priority. Leaks not only disrupt classrooms but also create insurance concerns, since coverage is tied to the age and condition of roofs. Last year, the district replaced the roof and gutters at Blue Ridge Elementary. This summer, Enterprise Elementary received a completely new roof system. The bright white surface reflects sunlight, while the durable materials are designed to last for decades. Nearly all district roofs are now covered under warranties.

Beyond essential infrastructure, the district has made investments in athletics and will continue to discuss more upgrades. New track-and-field throwing areas have been installed, allowing Chapman to host the Regional Track Meet. In the gymnasium, two new shot clocks are being added this year, meeting updated Kansas State High School Activities Association (KSHSAA)

requirements for postseason basketball games and a commitment by the North Central Kansas League to do the same.

Though much of this work happens behind the scenes, facilities improvements remain critical. Whether visible or not, these projects all contribute to the district's mission: providing safe, comfortable, and high-quality spaces where students and staff can thrive.