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Newly renovated Del Mar Hills Academy reopens



An updated classroom in the newly modernized Del Mar Hills Academy (Nancy Ingersoll)



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The new and improved Del Mar Hills Academy welcomed students back for a much-anticipated first day of school on Aug. 11.

After a year's worth of construction and Hills students and staff being split between Del Mar Heights and Ashley Falls School, Interim Superintendent Chris Delehanty said it was great to see so many smiles and a school community so excited to be together again.

"It was just a really fun day," Delehanty said. "It's always wonderful when we get to reopen a school."

As the school was built in the 1970s, the modernization involved a major structural rehabilitation for seismic retrofitting. One of the most noticeable changes of the school's \$21.9 million overhaul is the front entry and administration building, which was given a whole new look, complete with a new Del Mar Hills Academy sign that mimics a wave, a nod to the school's SurfRider mascot. Inside, the front office was completely reconfigured to better greet the public and provide improved spaces for the administrative staff and health office.



The new entrance to Del Mar Hills Academy, (Nancy Ingersoll)

All of the classrooms on campus were fully modernized and learning commons were added, similar to those seen in the new Del Mar Heights and Pacific Sky School. The commons are flexible areas for collaboration and small group learning, outside of the learning studios.

In the library/innovation center at the center of the school, the ceilings were raised and the beams refinished, which Delehanty said really opens up and brightens the space. The art and science rooms are located around the "innovation hub" and while plenty of books remain on the library shelves, books have also moved to the learning commons for a decentralized

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the library area, and more access to the parking lot for the new library concept.

"The whole goal is that students have more access to books, not less," Delehanty said.

As part of the modernization, all of the aging portable classrooms on the campus were removed, freeing up blacktop space for student play and activities. The blacktop improvements include a new basketball court for the lower grades. In a coming attraction, the playground equipment will all be replaced over this school year, Delehanty said.

The lunch shelter area was also improved and an ADA ramp and stairs now connect to the play field.

For many years, Hills was a school community that feared a potential closure. In 2018, the district had even proposed closing the campus and combining both Del Mar schools, but instead pursued the \$186 million general obligation bond Prop MM to fund the district's facilities needs. The passing of the Prop MM led to the construction of the new Pacific Sky, Del Mar Heights and now the Del Mar Hills modernization.

Carmel Del Mar School is the district's next modernization project. Currently in the design stages, the district aims to start construction next summer. Community outreach has also begun on the Ashley Falls modernization, with a third meeting planned this fall.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new and improved Del Mar Hills will be held on Friday, Sept. 5 at 4 p.m.

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