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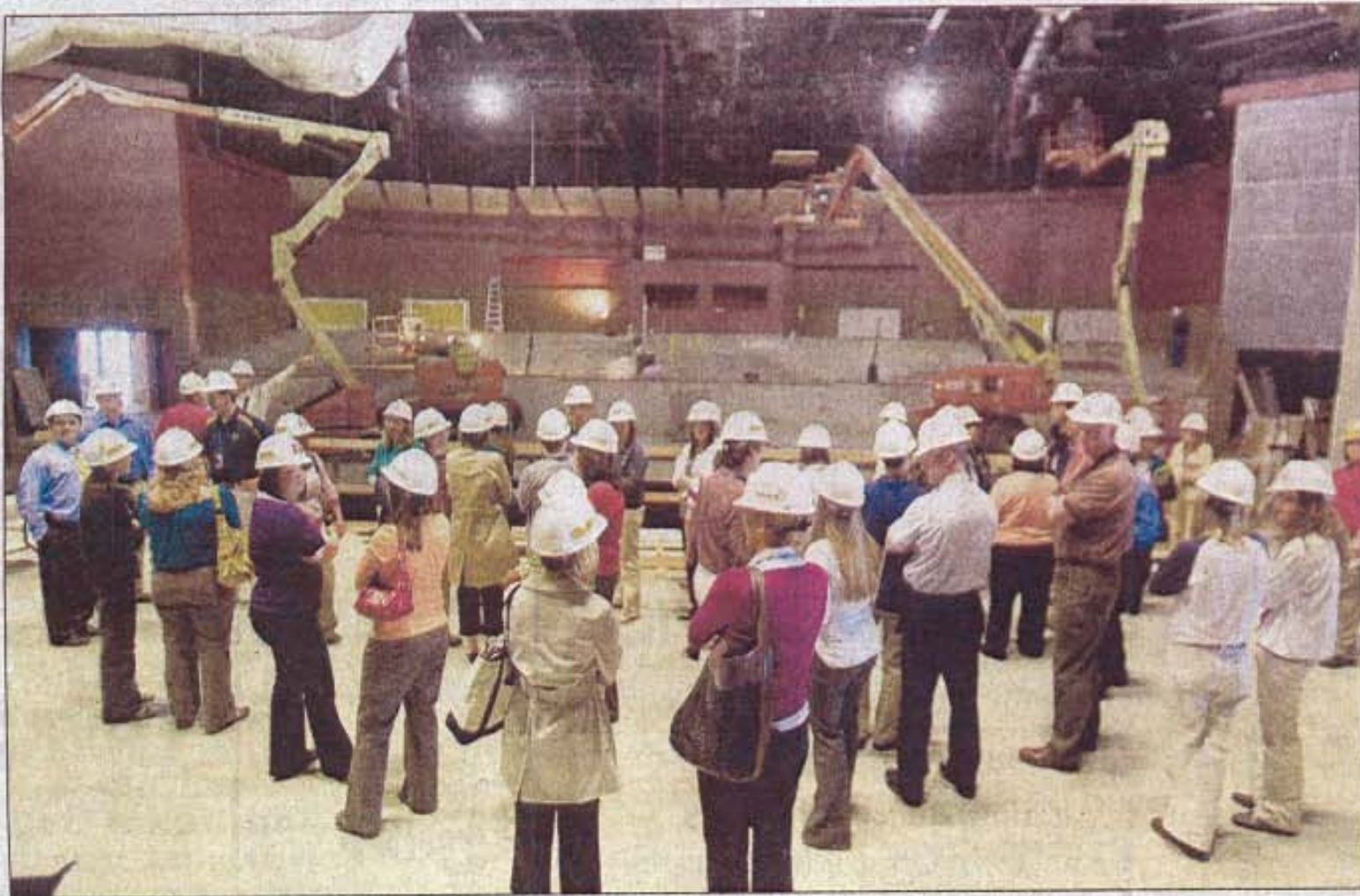
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O'Fallon's new school nears completion



DERIK HOLTSMANN/News-Democrat

O'Fallon teachers stand on the stage inside the auditorium of District 203's new freshman high school campus, which is expected to be ready for the start of the school year this fall. Top, teachers examine one of the science and biology classrooms. Below, workers move through the building's main entrance.



BY SCOTT WUERZ
News-Democrat

O'FALLON — Work on District 203's new high school freshman campus is reaching its final stages and is expected to be completed under budget, according to Superintendent Darcy Benway.

"It seems like everything is coming together nicely," Benway said. "It looks like the keys will be turned over to us in June in time for furniture delivery and that we'll be all settled in and ready to go when the next school year starts in the fall."

The building on Milburn School Road was projected to cost \$38 million, according to Benway. She would not

say how much remains in contingency accounts because she said unexpected problems could still crop up in the two to three months before completion.

"I can't put a number on it until everything is complete," Benway said of the amount the building is under budget.

Mike Guthrie, who will be the principal of the new school, took a group of about 40 teachers there Wednesday to look over their new classrooms and the other facilities.

"We have had all kinds of meetings about it, and I have shown people the drawings and plans of the new building," Guthrie said. "But

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you can't really sense what it is going to be like until you see it with your own eyes. And this building makes a great impression."

Guthrie said it was designed for efficiency of energy and efficiency of movement with the classroom wing separated from the halls for extracurriculars and the places where nonteachers are working.

"The loading dock area will be sealed off from the building so no one has access to the kids," Guthrie said. "When visitors come to the building, they have to enter through the office, and they can't go out into the halls unless someone hits a button to let them in there."

The division of the building keeps classrooms close together, Guthrie added.

"There shouldn't be a lot of problems with tardiness like there is now,"

Guthrie said. "The kids don't have that far to go to their next class."

District 203 honors biology instructor Kevin Kellermann, a 21-year veteran of the school district, inspected his science lab Wednesday.

"I think it is going to be a great facility," Kellermann said. "The space I'm going to have now is a little bit smaller than the one I have at the existing high school. But it was put together from what were supposed to be two classrooms. This space has been designed for exactly how we plan to use it."

One complaint teachers have expressed is that they wish built in desks in the new classrooms could be moved around. But Guthrie said that with the wiring in the desks to run computers and the overhead projector, being able to rearrange the classrooms just isn't practical.

Benway said the new

campus will house about 650 freshmen starting with the 2009-10 school year. But it could be expanded in the future to hold as many as 2,000 students.

"The building was designed to be expanded with hallways that could be extended like the fingers of a hand," Benway said. "The important thing was to build the cafeteria to be able to handle that kind of expansion. And the cafeteria at the new school could accommodate as many as 2,000 students."

Once the building is completed in June, furniture will be delivered and installed. Benway said she expects there to be plenty of time to get the school stocked and set up for the start of the 2009-10 school year.

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