

Banfield feels the space crunch

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A class of second-graders sat and listened to Banfield Elementary School teacher Devin Winter as she gave instructions for a T-shirt activity for them to work on Friday afternoon.

The kids sat at tables with their books and folders under their chairs. Their class is like any other, except it's not held in a typical classroom. They're in the school library.

"We don't have walls, but that's OK," Winter said, who was hired this fall at Banfield as an art and second-grade teacher.

A couple of partition walls section off a large area of the library in between some rows of book shelves. The students, five chairs to each of the four tables, face the windows that look out over the playground as they listen to Winter who points to instructions on the paper easel.

The students are in the library instead of a classroom because there are too many students and not enough space for them.

Banfield, with 575 students, is Austin Public Schools' largest elementary school from a student-enrollment standpoint. Some class sizes are 27 to 28 students, Principal Jeff Roland said.

Austin Public Schools is looking to the future with a \$28.9 million bond referendum that would build a new grades 5-6 school and make an addition and modifications at Woodson Kindergarten Center to account for growing enrollments. The district will see 400-500 more students over the next four to five years. Voters will decide the ballot question on Nov. 8.

Second-grade boom at Banfield

The second-grade population coming into Banfield grew over the summer. So that left four classes full of 28 second-graders each. The solution, which was just implemented Sept. 12, was to bring some of those students into a make-shift classroom space in the school's library.

For part of the school day, a group of 20 students from each of the four second-grade classes gather with Winter in the library for math, reading and language arts. This brings the class sizes down in all of the second-grade classes.

The staff and parents were all helpful and pitched in to make this accommodation happen, Roland said.

The school did have to alter the library schedule. It's a bit of an abbreviated schedule so that when the second-graders are at lunch or recess, that might be a good time for others to use the library.

The solution of moving some students into the library has received support and positive feedback at the first PTC meeting, Roland said.

So far, so good

The kids have been doing a good job of adapting to being in the library, Winter said. Splitting up into another

second-grade group will help each of the teachers do a better job of meeting the needs of the students, she said.

With the adjustment, it's all about getting the students used to the routine, she said. The library is still a place to learn, and working with the library-goers is also a lesson in teamwork, she said as she then reminded her students to keep their voices down to whispers as they worked.

"We're here to educate students, and we're going to make it work," Winter said.