

New classrooms at Woodson ready for day one

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Woodson Kindergarten Center is ready for the first day of school on Tuesday, complete with six additional classrooms and new main office space.

Parents and students had a chance to see their classrooms and get a first glance at the school addition last week during conferences.

"It is not hard to see how excited they are," said Jason Denzer, in his seventh year teaching kindergarten. He has the room of red crickets.

Last year's kindergartners helped break ground for the classroom addition last February during a cold and snowy morning. Contrast that to conference time when temperatures were in the 90s. Construction moved along and got the rooms on the southeast side of the building ready, along with other modifications to office areas.

The project was part of a \$28.9 million bond issue voters approved in November 2011. The addition came due to growing enrollment in Austin Public Schools. Three sections of Woodson students have already been in school since early August on the modified 45/15 schedule.

For Denzer and the other new teachers on the red team, they had to pack up their classrooms last year and put them back together again within the past couple of weeks to prepare for the youngsters.

"It's quite an experience," Denzer said. "We'll take it though. Absolutely worth it.

"If you don't have space, it makes it hard to instruct properly."

Teacher Marcia Siegel, a 23-year teaching veteran, was happy to give a tour of the new wing, highlighting the new cupboards in the rooms and even the new bathrooms. She had many, many boxes of items that she needed to move into her new classroom, but she agreed with Denzer that it was all worth it.

"We just stayed and we plugged along and we got it done," Siegel said.

With more space this year, play center time and open gym time will be offered on a more regular basis for students, instead of just every other day like it was last year.

"This is helping us be more efficient and effective," said Ellie Verdoorn, Woodson teacher. "It puts the kids first."

Kindergartner Caroline Kniefel enjoyed sitting at a brand-new table in her new classroom during conferences. She sat and colored a picture while her mom Melissa Albert filled out forms.

"I think she's a little nervous," Albert said of her second-youngest child. "She's more excited."

It wasn't just new students and their parents who seemed to have the new-school-year excitement. Verdoorn has been teaching for 34 years, 31 in Austin, and she was still glowing as she welcomed her newest students for a first look at their school home for the year.

"We are tickled," Verdoorn said. "We are as excited as the kids."