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By Teresa Stowell of the Daily Times staff

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LAKE MILLS - The walls in the new addition to Lake Mills Middle School are painted several different colors, each representing a class from fifth to eighth grade. But the color the school will be known for will be "green."

Once the remodeling and renovation of the school is complete, it will be a "green" school and one of very few in the state certified as a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, also known as LEED for Schools. LEED for Schools was developed in 2007 by the United States Green Building Council as a comprehensive tool for schools that wish to build "green." A rating system is used by LEED for Schools to show how many sustainability and energy efficient measures the district has taken. There are four levels in the rating system including bronze, silver, gold and platinum. The district's initial goal was silver certification but now it may be certified as gold or even possibly as platinum.



Daylight was an important aspect of improving the learning environment at Lake Mills Middle School. Students are pictured above in the cafeteria that has an entire wall of windows. When there is enough daylight the lights in the rooms turn off. Below left are the lockers for the seventh grade. (JOHN HART/Daily Times)

"It's been really exciting and completely amazing," Dean Sanders, superintendent of the Lake Mills School District, said. "Everything from the HVAC to the air quality to the recyclable products and even to the shipping and energy costs has been done in an environmentally friendly way."

In 2008, district residents approved a referendum for the new addition to the middle school and renovation to the current school, all at a cost of about \$15.6 million. Discussion about building the school with sustainable resources and the LEED certification began after the referendum was approved when initial designing began. From the start district staff, administrators, school board members, the district's construction manager Miron Construction and architects Bray Architects have worked to make it an environmentally friendly school.

"The school district expressed the importance to ensure the health and safety of their students and staff," Theresa Lehman, director of sustainable services for Miron Construction, said. "Did it smell like a new school? No it doesn't. The district wanted to select all low volatile organic compound or VOC products. That new car smell people are used to is actually really bad for you. Those materials are gassing off VOCs. The middle school is very healthy. All the paints, caulks, ceiling tiles and flooring have low VOC. You don't get that new school smell."



Although it may not smell like a new school, it really looks like one. A walk through the new addition will show the shiny new floor, which many will be surprised to learn is made of rubber.

“Because the floors are all rubber they will never have to be sealed or polished,” Dennis Riedl, district building and grounds supervisor, said. “That will not only save us on products and time, it will also save us from being exposed to those harmful chemicals.”

The new addition includes three levels and once the whole project is complete

students from fifth through eighth grade will attend the school. Each class has been assigned a color including fifth grade, green; sixth grade, yellow; seventh grade, blue; and eighth grade, red.

Sections of the school are designated to each class. In the new addition a special wing was built for both fifth- and sixth-graders so those students won't have to leave their area and interact with the older students. The only time they will leave their wing will be to attend music, art and gym class. The designated colors for those grades have been used for the lockers and the walls in the wings.

“There have been studies done that show when students are in a healthy school exposed to daylight and really good acoustics with no echoes they perform 20 percent higher on national standardized tests, have less absenteeism and less behavioral problems,” Lehman said. “So the district made acoustics a huge part of this school. The rubber flooring is developed to absorb sound instead of bounce it off, as well as the ceiling tiles in each of the classrooms.”

One very important part of the school is the new gymnasium. The new gym is actually bigger than the high school gymnasium. A curtain in the middle of the gym allows for two full-sized practice courts. But what many may not realize is another sustainable aspect to the construction of the gym. The wooden floor is made of wood grown specifically in a controlled atmosphere. Each piece of flooring is labeled as LEED certified.

“This school has amazing sustainability practices but they have also wanted to be responsible for the taxpayers' money. Some of these things cost a little more initially but they'll get a huge payback for the life cycle of the school,” Lehman said. “And because they began planning to be a LEED school from the very beginning of the design process, they've achieved all of the sustainable practices under budget.”

Another major aspect to the “green” school is the extensive geothermal heating and cooling system installed. Last year 84 wells that are 5 inches in diameter and 300 feet deep were buried 5 to 8 feet below the baseball field. Water is circulated through the tubes underground and then brought into the school where the heat pump removes the heat and puts it into the school. The same water goes back down into the hole and the Earth heats it back up to about 50 degrees and the process repeats itself. There are about eight to 10 schools in the state who have installed the geothermal system.

When first arriving to the school, many may notice a large wall of windows in the cafeteria. Daylight was an important factor to providing a successful learning environment but it also proves to be a way to save on energy costs.

"The district introduced a lot of windows which will integrate daylight. All of the rooms have daylight sensors so if it's bright enough outside the lights will go off," Lehman said.

All of these sustainable management and energy efficient aspects are just a few examples of how this school has become a LEED school. It is not only a model to other school districts, it's also been a learning tool to the students of Lake Mills Middle School. All of the teachers were given an extensive tour of the new addition by Lehman who taught them more about the school's sustainability. Each teacher plans on incorporating 10 hours of instructional time throughout the year revolving around some aspect of the school.

"The science classes have already done some work learning about the geothermal system. My son even knows how it works better than I do," Sanders said. "Other classes have done writing projects on the school, and math classes have compared the cost savings in the energy efficiency."

Once the project is complete the school will be a total of 129,000 square feet, almost double the size of the original building. But with the extra space the fifth-graders will also be taken out of the elementary school and into the middle school. Moving the fifth-graders from Prospect will also make a big impact on the elementary space.

"It will be wonderful to alleviate some of that crowding at the elementary," Sanders said. "We've had a portable classroom there for at least 10 years and we're hoping to get rid of that."

The middle school will be open to the public today from 1 to 3 p.m. for residents to take their own tour of the building. In April the school plans to host an energy fair to highlight the school's energy efficiency as well as vendors with environmentally safe products.

"This is really a great story for Lake Mills to tell other school districts," Lehman said. "Every school struggles with how are we going to balance our budget, how are we going to control energy costs when you can't control the price of energy. Although some schools contract a portion of their energy costs, it's only a small portion. This is a great success story for Lake Mills."

There are only 22 schools in the world that have received LEED certification and only one school located in California has received platinum level. Eight schools in the world have received gold certification, while eight schools have received silver certification. The Lake Mills Middle School will be reviewed for certification in the fall after the renovation of the original building is complete. The school may be the first renovated school in the Midwest to receive gold certification.

"Everyone has put their hearts and souls into this and understands the value of minimizing the impact on the environment while providing a better learning environment. It's also made everyone better stewards of the taxpayers' money," Lehman said.
