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Roswell ISD: Modern Learning

DECEMBER 1, 2010 MICHELLE MCNICKLE WESTERN



Michael Gottlieb,
superintendent

Michael Gottlieb, superintendent of New Mexico's [Roswell Independent School District](#), had quite a challenge on his hands when he took on his role seven years ago. The district is made up of 21 schools, none of which had seen updates or construction of any kind since 1964.

"We had to make sure we were providing what was needed to our students and staff," said Gottlieb. "We had a company come in and help us develop a plan of what had to be done to revitalize the entire school district."

Roswell Independent School District serves more than

10,000 students in two comprehensive high schools, one alternative high school, four middle schools, one charter middle school, 12 elementary schools, and an early childhood school for three- and four-year-olds. Gottlieb said the district had many factors to consider in this renovation, including which schools would be first and how they would present this information to the public.

"An engineer conducted a survey of the entire district," said Gottlieb. "This included the schools' structural safety, electrical systems, roofing, and everything else you could imagine. They studied the schools from top to the bottom, including football stadiums, to ensure they were safe for fans and students."

Building overhaul

The district began the process of revitalization by commissioning engineers and then looked to teachers, principals, and community leaders to solidify what Gottlieb called the district's master plan. "Anything we do has to be part of our master plan," he said. "For example, we have two comprehensive high schools, so we have to make sure they are complying with Title IX, and that they are offering services equally at both high schools."

New Mexico had clearly defined guidelines for Roswell to follow when it came to renovations. With the state's help, Gottlieb and others looked at their plans and then at the heating, cooling, and electrical systems in the schools.

"We also looked at our schools' foundations," he said. "For example, when we had our engineers look at one school's foundation, they said repairs would cost 75% of what it would cost to build a new school. They recommended we build a new school. We agreed."

During the engineers' study, Gottlieb said they discovered one of the district's high schools was lacking appropriate soccer and softball fields. "We're in the process of building additional soccer fields and in the second phase of building the softball field," he said. "It took time to get the land approved; this was part of state law when it came to purchasing and selling land. But like everything else in our master plan, we had to make sure it was in compliance with Title IX."

The district recently finished its second phase of renovations. "It's a continuing process," said Gottlieb. "We always want to make sure the public is aware of what's going on. We're also continuously providing our plans to the state, so they can look at what we're doing in terms of construction."

Roswell is set to release additional renovation plans in August 2011. Gottlieb said the district is hoping for its fourth bond issue and needs to get the public on board. "The state has given us their approval," he said. "We started on the blueprints and are getting things ready so we can show our plans to the public, our engineers, and our master plan people."



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Tech-minded

Although not in every classroom as of yet, the district is in the process of doing away with chalkboards and regular white boards and is excited to be implementing Promethean digital boards.

"We have been able to get a majority of these boards thanks to grants, both from a private foundation and state and federal grants," said Gottlieb. "It's approximately \$10,000 per digital board. We spent a lot of time and effort going to private foundations and applying for state and federal grants to get that in place. We take the activation of these boards seriously, including the software and setup process."

Gottlieb said the district has seen increases in attendance, academic scores, and better behavior as a result of Promethean boards. Roswell also recently implemented the use of short-cycle assessment software as part of its effort to gauge students' progress.

The district uses software such as Children's Progress for kindergarten through second grade students, Accuity for grades three through eight, and Discovery Assessment at the high school level. "We monitor how well it aligns to our benchmarks, our performance standards, and our curriculum," said Gottlieb. "It's a spiral progression. I also sit down with every administrator and go through testing procedures."

Gottlieb prefers to take a hands-on approach when getting feedback on the software. He meets with each principal individually and as a group four times a year to see how schools are monitoring and adjusting to the school districts' required approaches.

"We like to assess if this software is covering the essential skills we set out to cover in our 180 days of school," he said. "As a result, we've seen that the alignments of our standards to these systems were very good. You'll never find something that's 100%, but we're running as high as a 57% to 90% correlation."

As Roswell continues to make progress on its renovations and add technology, it is focused on maintaining high standards for its students. "For example, we've moved algebra down into the middle schools," he said. "People think this is crazy, but our goal is to move algebra down to the sixth grade. We're setting our standards high and will continue to provide our students and staff with the tools to do so."

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