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New high school in New Brunswick earns high marks from visitors

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Just walking into the shiny new 1,000-seat auditorium at the new New Brunswick High School was enough to give 17-year-old Donaya Forster a rush of excitement.

"When I walked into the building I actually had tears in my eyes," said Forster, a senior who is active in the school's fine arts productions.

On Tuesday, city and state officials, alumni and several students gathered for the official ribbon-cutting at the new 400,000-square-foot New Brunswick High School. The building, at 1000 Somerset St., will be open for classes after the winter break on Jan. 4. Members of the JROTC Drill Team and Elite Chorale got a sneak peak at the building Tuesday, as each group performed at the ceremony. The rest of the students will tour the building on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.

Parents toured the building Tuesday evening and are welcome to attend a second open house at 6 p.m. Thursday.

"The high school is the embodiment of countless hours of development and planning spread out over an 11-year period," said Richard Kaplan, the city's school superintendent. "Today we move forward to implementation."

The new high school was designed around a new curriculum, which centers on six themed learning communities, each with a central focus such as math, science and engineering; law and public safety; or fine and performing arts. Kaplan said the new curriculum was designed to prepare students for the colleges and careers they will enter after graduation by introducing them to specialized skills and experiences in high school, in addition to their coursework in the traditional school subjects.

The building was completed eight months ahead of schedule and about \$5 million under the \$185 million budget, officials said. The project was funded by the state's School Development Authority and managed by the New Brunswick Development Corp., known as Devco. Joseph Jingoli and Sons, Inc. was the construction firm.

"The moment our children enter this school, they will see our commitment to their future," said Mayor Jim Cahill. "They will know the bar has been raised."

The new building has 93 classrooms and can house up to 2,000 students. It will replace the current high school at 1125 Livingston Ave. That building, which was built in 1964, will be renovated and turned into New Brunswick Middle School.

John Krenos, president of the Board of Education, said the new high school is actually the fifth high school the city has had. The first was erected in 1866, he said.

The newest New Brunswick High School, however, is larger and more technologically advanced than any of its predecessors. The facility has a 2,000-seat gymnasium, the latest computer and Internet technologies, and even a health and wellness center. The center, which will open in September, will

provide medical services to students and community members, Kaplan said, while also providing educational opportunities for students interested in the health-care field.

Melissa Rodriguez, president of the Class of 2010, said she would miss the old school, to an extent.

"It's sad that we're leaving the old school and I love that high school," she said. "But this new school is great. And it's great to be the first class to graduate from here."

Jesse Crawford, a 1980 graduate who now works at the First Baptist Community Development Corp., said the new school is wonderful.

"This is a dream come true," he said. "I attended the high school on Livingston Avenue. I remember we didn't have central air in the high school, we had window air conditioners."

Crawford said at one point in his high school career he considered — but decided against — dropping out of school. He hopes the new building will make it easier for the current generation of high school students to stay in school.

Senior Jabril Doty, 17, said he is definitely interested in spending more time at the new building, even if it means he can't sleep in.

"I actually want to go to school early and stay as late as possible," he said.
