

FOUNDATIONS

EDUCATION

TCAT-Athens holds groundbreaking for expansion



DPA File Photo

Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT)-Athens faculty and staff as well as McMinn County Mayor John Gentry (far right) and Tennessee Board of Regents officials toss the ceremonial first shovel fulls of dirt for the new expansion at the building.

An educational institution in Athens has begun the process of expansion.

The Tennessee College of Applied Technology (TCAT)-Athens held a groundbreaking ceremony for a new, additional academic building on its campus.

The new structure will be for a variety of educational purposes in the technical fields and TCAT-Athens President Susan Hatto said the building will reflect the versatility they hope to have in it.

“We want to have a building workable for everything,” she said. “With every detail, we’ve tried to be very, very intentional.”

She said the goal of the project from the start of planning was for it to be a 50-year building.

“That’s the directive I was given — this needs to be built for time,” she said, noting that as a result “this is a little bit different design” than the current structure.

In the current building, each room was planned out for a specific purpose and designed that way. This addition will have shared lab space among the programs that will be taught within.

“We need to make sure the building can be flexible with us,” she said.

She also stressed the importance of ensuring both buildings that will be on campus can be self-contained if they need to be so students don’t need to bounce back and forth during events like severe weather.

“We want to make sure every luxury is



DPA File Photo

TCAT-Athens President Susan Hatto speaks during the groundbreaking ceremony as (from left) Tennessee Board of Regents Chancellor Dr. Flora Tydings, Etowah Area Chamber of Commerce Director Frank Clark and McMinn County Economic Development Authority (EDA) Director Lindsey Ferguson look on.

in this building,” she said. “I think the building will serve us long term, but for now it meets the needs we have.”

City of Athens Communications Coordinator Frank Clark called Tuesday an “exciting day for TCAT-Athens” and noted that with the “long history of success” the school has had in the community, it’s “good to see it moving forward.”

McMinn County Economic Development Authority (EDA) Director Lindsey Ferguson also spoke,

emphasizing that TCAT-Athens’ ability to produce students ready to work has helped to bring industrial interest to the county.

“Over 30% of our workforce here in McMinn County is in manufacturing and it’s ever so important for us to continue to build that pipeline of a skilled labor force,” she said. “TCAT-Athens, along with our other training providers, is the reason we have the strong manufacturing presence we do.”

McMinn County Mayor John Gentry

also noted that this expansion is one in a long line of growth in the county.

“We’ve probably grown more in the last four years than the previous 30 in new buildings,” he said. “East Tennessee is such an attractive place to be and we’re in the marvelous middle. It’s a great day.”

This expansion comes as part of nearly \$1 billion spent by the state government on expanding technical education across counties.

“We were dumbfounded,” Tennessee

Board of Regents’ (TBR) Danni Varlan said of the reaction upon hearing the news of how much money would be coming to the TCAT system. “A billion dollars, that’s an unprecedented amount of money at one time to do a job that literally is going to change every single TCAT in some way.”

TBR Chancellor Dr. Flora Tydings also stressed the importance of spending this amount of money on TCAT.

“This will be a legacy, an investment in students for a lifetime

to come,” she said. “We’re not designing these buildings for now, we’re designing these buildings for ever.”

She also thanked the faculty and staff of TCAT-Athens for making the school a success.

“This building is for you and for all the hard work and dedication that you’ve put in,” she said. “And the hours you spent making that place you call home now work for you — you design this now to be a place where it’s not going to work, it’s going to excel.”



EXCELLENCE IN ACTION.



E.K. Baker Elementary
EK Baker's CDC Crew competed in the Special Olympics this year and received multiple ribbons in competition!



Calhoun Elementary
Calhoun School Families have enjoyed themed family nights this school year with multiple learning stations!



Englewood Elementary
Englewood Elementary sent their girls basketball team off to the TMSAA State Basketball Tournament with a pep rally on Friday, February 14.



McMinn Career & Technical Education Center
Students in the Rehabilitation Careers class at McMinn County Career and Technical Center learn a variety of health care skills important to rehab services. Students are practicing patellar reflexes as part of neurological screening in the rehab setting.



Rogers Creek Elementary
October, Rogers Creek, in collaboration with our PTO, hosted the 1st annual Trunk-Or-Treat. Area businesses, churches, families, & Rogers Creek teachers came together to support the event.



Niota Elementary
"Beta Club celebrated our Superintendent during the month of November. We made posters and handmade cards. We presented him with a giftcard and told him how much we appreciated him. He also shared some inspiring words to our students."



DAY OF SCHOOL
Riceville Elementary
Riceville Elementary celebrates 100 days of school



Mountain View Elementary
Mountain View is a reward school based off of 2023-2024 school TCAP Data. Current Faculty and Staff are pictured.



Central High School
Ms. Melanie Walker's Cosmetology II class practices curling hair.

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McMinn Career Tech

Athens City Schools celebrates ACMS Athletic Complex grand opening



DPA File Photo

Athens City Schools administrators and the ACMS girls' soccer team cut the ribbon to celebrate the grand opening of the ACMS Athletic Complex.

Athens City Middle School unveiled its state-of-the-art athletic complex in a ribbon cutting ceremony late last year.

After officially completing the construction of the consolidated school in 2023, putting all of Athens City Schools on one campus, the grand opening of the athletic complex marks the final step in what ACS Board Chair Chris Adams called a vision of the school board for over 20 years.

The athletic complex includes two turf fields, one for soccer and one for softball and softball will split. Now, all Athens City School sports home events can be played on campus.

"It certainly took a lot of planning and thinking about what made sense for the education of our children and the most efficient way to do that," Adams told The Daily Post-Athenian.

"The idea of being able to fully function and operate on one campus was an idea that came together about five or six years ago."

Adams said the school building and education of the students has always been at the forefront, so much so that the idea of the athletic complex may have seemed too good to be true at points. But, he credited ACS Facilities Supervisor Bob Owens as part of a team that put a plan together for the athletic complex.

"The biggest part was just making sure we had the money available," Owens said. "At the time, things were changing and no one quite knew what the costs were of it all. Once we were done building the school, we realized we were about three million under budget from the \$40 million we had to build the school. So, we were able to use some of our savings in order to do this thing and get this turf."

Immediately following the ribbon cutting — ceremoniously done by ACMS student-ath-

letes, ACS board members and ACMS administrators — the ACMS girls' soccer team played on its brand new field against Cleveland Middle and ACMS softball played against Tellico Plains on its new turf field.

For current ACMS student-athletes and those to come in the future, Owens said it's a special facility.

"I mean, it's turned into a beautiful facility," Owens said. "Everybody should be proud of it."

The simple convenience aspect of having all its games on campus is beneficial, according to Adams.

"Being able to have all of our sports on campus is just huge," Adams said. "The community has been very good to us and allowed us to play our sports — baseball, soccer and some other sports — off campus because we just didn't have the proper facilities. But now that we've got it here, it's nice."

Adams continued to say the campus as a whole has come a long way, something he hears from alumni around the area.

"I, for one, was an Athens City Schools product many years ago," Adams said. "And a lot of my friends have come back to drive by and they just can't believe what has been accomplished here."

Owens, who is in his 36th year with the ACS system, had a big hand in the completion of the complex, according to Adams.

"I guess I was just in the right place at the right time," Owens said. "I was a teacher at the junior high for 20 years before I was an administrator for eight. When I came to central office to be over facilities and maintenance, they'd already had a plan in place to build a new school. When we got the design, I just became the construction manager for the system. I love it."

And through the



DPA File Photo

Athens City Middle School principal Mike Simmons addresses those in attendance for the ACMS Athletic Complex grand opening.

process of the new school and athletic complex construction, Owens said he's been honored to have a hand in it.

"I've learned a lot and it was humbling that they would put faith in me to be able to oversee something like this," Owens said. "I couldn't be more proud of what we've accomplished. It's certainly been a team effort, it took everybody. We have a lot to be proud of."

Adams, too, credited many people for making the process work.

"I want to give a huge credit to not only our system, but our community," Adams said. "To put all of this together and for them to get behind us on an idea we had, it's all worked out very very well."

The more that you read, the more things you will know. The more that you learn, the more places you'll go.

Dr. Seuss

Athens Utilities Board

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MCS virtual school ends spring enrollment

There are now 38 students enrolled in the brand new McMinn County Schools virtual program, with 14 of them new to the system.

MVP (McMinn Virtual Program) Coordinator Josh Moore was on hand at the school board's called meeting in February to provide an update on the program that kicked off in November.

He said the cutoff for the spring enrollment into the program was Jan. 24 and they had enrolled nearly 40 students.

"There's a wide variety of reasons to want to do it," Moore said. "Some of the reasons are literally, 'I don't like people.' Some were going to homeschool."

The program is free and it offers a full K-12 education experience from home, with the support of Tennessee-certified teachers and cutting-edge educational technology.

The McMinn Virtual Program is not a standalone school but an extension of the student's zoned school, meaning students enrolled in MVP remain a part of their local school community. Whether they live within or outside of McMinn County, enrolled students can continue to participate in school events, including sports, dances, clubs and graduation ceremonies.

MVP offers students the ability to learn from home using

a district-provided laptop or tablet. The curriculum — developed in partnership with Pearson, the world's largest learning company — is NCAA-approved. The program features a combination of live (synchronous) classes for core courses and independent (asynchronous) learning for other subjects.

"What we get with this program is essential," Board Member Dustin Prichard said. "We have students who are seniors who say, 'I just don't want to be in the building.'"

Moore also cited a student who family moved to Cleveland, but she is able to finish her high school career as a McMinn County student through the program.

"This is an opportunity for kids to stay in our school system," Moore said.

It was noted that attendance is monitored for the students as well.

Moore said that while there are a lot of benefits to the program, "it's also not for everybody."

He said there were four students who began virtual, but then decided to move back to in-person learning.

"It's rigorous," he said. "You've got to be committed."

Moore said this is a way to bring students into the system who weren't there previously, or keep them from having to leave, and there's no recruitment

of in-person students to virtual, though they can make that move.

With 38 students currently enrolled, Moore said he hopes to see 70 to 80 in the program by this fall.

"I don't see how we couldn't double the number," he said, noting that "at least 10" students have expressed interest since the spring deadline passed.

MCS Director Lee Parkison also pointed out that virtual students can participate in everything that in-person students can — extracurricular activities, sports, the graduation walk, etc.

"We're going to give it a good look when the year ends and see where we are with it," he said. "This is a rigorous program."

Parkison said this has been under consideration for some time, as he's analyzed 20-25 different programs and never found one he believed could work. But this one was different.

"Pearson is the real deal, we've just got to make sure we've got the participation," he said. "We just wanted to give students another option."

Moore said he expects to start taking requests for fall enrollment around late March or early April.

Anyone interested in inquiring about the program or potential enrollment can call 423-745-1612 and ask for Moore or visit mcminnvirtual.com

McMinn school board enlists assistance in renovation plans

The McMinn County School Board has taken a new step toward realizing the long-sought goal of renovating or consolidating the school buildings.

For the duration of time that the board has been working through whether to renovate, consolidate or build new structures for some of the 11 schools in the county, they have been working with Main Street Studio Architects in Sweetwater. While that partnership will continue, the board members forged a new alliance during a called meeting in February.

In a 9-1 vote with Board member Mike Cochran in dissent, the board adopted a contract hiring the Shpigler Group to provide assistance in evaluating economic and operational issues associated with the schools planning.

Led by David Shpigler, the group is based out of Atlanta and has been in operation since 2001.

"School districts all across the country are dealing with economic and operational stresses," Shpigler told the board members during the meeting. "There's no quick fix. There's a process we go through."

That process includes building a financial model that will be intended to give the board members clarity on how much it will cost over years to settle on one plan over another. Shpigler said the board members have asked them to look at the "possible scenarios," including consolidation of schools, building brand new buildings and fixing the current structures.

Shpigler cited school systems in Bowling Green, Ky. and another in Texas as examples of their work — in Bowling Green they implemented a five-year plan, in Texas they ended up going with a 23-year plan.

He stressed that while they've got examples of past work they've done, they won't necessarily carry those recommendations here.

"You can't just look at what

somebody else did and try to do it here," he said. "That's why we model everything out."

He added that the firm has worked with larger, smaller and similar sized districts as McMinn County. He also pointed out that the ultimate recommendation won't be just about what makes sense financially, but about what the county needs educationally as well.

"This is perfect, this is exactly what we need," Board member Tony Campbell said.

Shpigler was asked about working with Main Street Studio Architects and he was positive about the work they've done so far.

"There's going to be a lot of value there," he said. "A lot of the work that's been done so far is going to really be helpful in going in the right direction."

The initial work to be done, Shpigler said, is to look over the system's budget and ask "are there numbers that appear to be out of whack." They will then continue from there to develop a recommendation.

"This is a long term decision and we need to get it right," Board member Bill Irvin said. "It's not going to hurt to take a little more time."

Director of Schools Lee Parkison said he wishes this agreement had been put in place several years ago.

"If we had this kind of information available ... we might be way beyond where we are now," he said.

However, Cochran expressed doubts about if this is the best way to carry on this project.

"I think we've got the cart before the horse," he said. "We need to build around an educational plan rather than build the educational plan around the buildings."

He suggested gathering information from teachers and staff on what they need before enlisting anyone to move the project forward.



Etowah City School
Etowah, TN 423-263-5483
Dr. Mike Frazier, Director of Schools



Student citizens for the word of the month: Noble



8th grade students visit TN Tech University to participate in STEM activities and learn about post secondary opportunities



Students helping load hurricane donations from ECS



Jr. Beta Club visited the Cumberland County Playhouse in Dec.



Staff Members of the month, Melissa Carter and Alyssa Tuttle



Principal Jackie Martin reading to 1st grade students



Students celebrating UTrust Principal Appreciation Day for Mrs. Martin



Math Fest teams for ECS

Barnett looks back on first year of new school building

May of 2024 marked the first school year in the new building that houses Athens City Primary and Athens City Intermediate schools and Athens City Schools Director Joe Barnett reflected on that first year of operation for the new building.

Barnett stated that ACS officials are very grateful to the citizens and leaders of the City of Athens for helping provide both support and the new school building.

"It's been transformational for our kids and our teachers," Barnett said. "You want to acknowledge the work of those who came before ... you kind of see their vision when you walk on campus and I think that is a great tribute to them."

Looking towards the building itself, Barnett believes the consolidated building holds several advantages.

"It is a bright, clean, state-of-the-art space that has wide hallways, great lighting, upgraded technology, all of those things are just so advantageous for our students and teachers," he stated. "We have taken the resources and the staff from the four different schools and they are working together to centralize everything and it works more efficiently. The consistency of being close by really helps the children as well."

Other conveniences noted by Barnett consist of: availability of centralized art classes, energy savings, stronger staff connections and more.

Despite the advantages, Barnett noted there were still some challenges presented by the new building.

"Ongoing construction as they finish up while still trying to host our classes has been difficult," he said. "The teachers and admins

have been super flexible to allow the contractors to complete their work but it has been a challenge."

Reflecting on his career as an educator, Barnett noted there were a few things that surprised him concerning the new school building.

"From my perspective, there had been some interesting challenges such as thinking of ways to serve this many students," Barnett said. "Looking at the design to this school, they have the primary school on one side and the intermediate school on the other side but in the middle you have shared spaces such as the media center, the art center, the STEM labs and more. Thinking about that, it really makes a lot of sense but it requires a lot of collaboration to make that work scheduling-wise, but this has been super efficient and really caught me by surprise."

Looking ahead, Barnett wants ACS as a district to reflect on how they utilize their available space.

"We want to make it work for everybody but one thing that I love about this building, especially for the intermediate school, is the close-by between the middle," he expressed. "Transition is sometimes hard for kids and I think the building helps with that transition of moving from 2nd to 3rd grade because of the familiarity they have already acquired."

Barnett stated that it has been very encouraging for ACS to receive the support that it has from the community.

"That speaks volumes about the City of Athens' values," he said. "They are willing to invest to make sure our kids have what they need to reach their potential moving forward and it is very encouraging to see that in a community."

MCS officials recount second annual grief camp experience

For the second year, students in the local area had a chance to learn ways to deal with grief.

Calhoun Elementary School recently hosted its second annual grief camp for students across the local area, with children from McMinn, Meigs and Bradley counties showing up.

During the McMinn County School Board's February meeting, Calhoun Principal Jon Franks and Calhoun Guidance Counselor Shelly Tullier recounted the formation of the camp and what the experience is like.

Franks noted that the camp was a creation of Tullier.

"She has spent hours and hours and really months ahead of time preparing for this," he said. "It's something we feel like is needed not just in Calhoun, but across the county."

Franks said getting children to deal with grief can be difficult, but rewarding.

"It's very draining, but also something very needed and good for our students," he said.

Tullier explained that she decided to start up the camp

in the 2022-2023 school year, when she found that 16 students at Calhoun were "grieving the death of somebody significant."

"I went to Mr. Franks and said we've got to do something - I don't know what, but we've got to do something," she recalled, noting that she had a friend who ran a grief camp in Cleveland. "I had always helped her do it, but I had never done one of my own."

The camp lasts for one day and Tullier noted they rotate through different sessions - art, team-building exercises, writing and therapy animals.

The therapy animals include miniature horses and dogs, which are brought into the school to work with the campers.

"The kids don't always realize they aren't the only one dealing with this," she said. "They think, 'I'm a kid, it's just older people that have people that die. I'm the only one feeling this way.' (At the camp) They realize they're not alone."

She said that the

camp also allows for networking between the students, which is initiated by them.

"The campers make connections, they exchange phone numbers," she said. "They create friendships. I don't have anything to do with that."

She noted that children have come away from the camp realizing they were greatly helped by working with the therapy animals - even if they have pets of their own - writing in a journal and building a memory box.

She added that teambuilding games also help "build community and relationships."

Resolute Forest Products printed and bound the journals used for writing.

"We encourage them to find different ways to express their emotions and, hopefully, keep those coping skills the rest of their life," she said.

There were 22 women and two men who volunteered to help with the camp this year.

"We give them the tools to deal with their grief," she said. "Grief is a journey, not a destination."

TODAY'S CHILD... TOMORROW'S HOPE!

Meigs North Elementary

334-5454

Justin Jennings, Principal



The letters Q and U were joined together in a Kindergarten wedding in Mrs. Green's room at Meigs North.

Meigs South Elementary

334-5444

Matt Curtis, Principal



Participants of the Meigs South Spelling Bee

Meigs Middle School

334-9187

Ronnie Woods, Principal



Mrs. A's 8th grade science students at Meigs Middle School have been exploring Earth's structure with a variety of hands on activities and labs. They've used graham crackers to demonstrate plate tectonic movement, used playdough to see weathering affecting the rock layers in our crust and landforms, grouped manipulatives to decipher types of rocks, drawn out concept maps for the rock cycle, and even observed rocks as they move through the rock cycle by using starbursts.

Meigs High School

334-5797

John Grissom, Principal



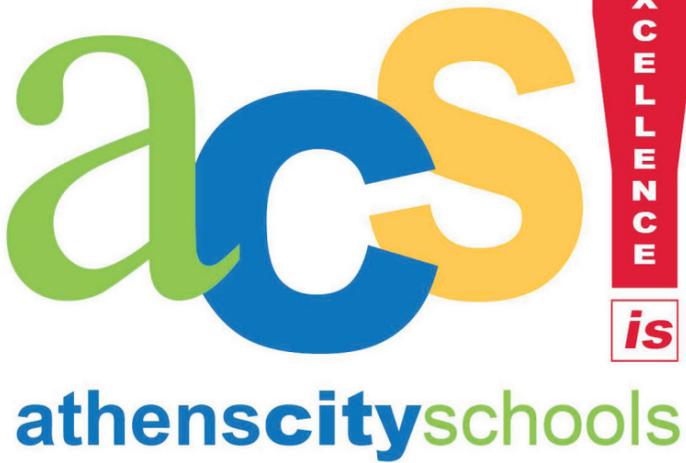
It was a great day on Rocky Top as Meigs County HS juniors toured the University of TN Knoxville. Students learned about the programs, extra curricular activities, and support that UTK has to offer to its students. MCHS hopes to send several of these students to become a Volunteer! Go Vols!

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