

# Students, staff start a new chapter at Oxnard's Elm Street School in brand new building

Alexa D'Angelo, Ventura County Star Published 6:02 p.m. PT Feb. 19, 2019 | Updated 6:10 p.m. PT Feb. 19, 2019

Bye, bye, school. Thank you for the memories. I'll miss you. RIP. I love you forever.

Messages scrawled across the walls, the floors, the doors and the pillars of Elm Street School in Oxnard reflect the love students and staff feel for their school. By the end of the day Thursday, there wasn't a surface untouched by paint, chalk or Sharpie.

The Elm Street School Leopards said goodbye to their beloved school Thursday afternoon before they filled the halls of their brand-new, 21st-century school Tuesday. In just two weeks, the old site, which stood since 1948, will be bulldozed — the messages of love and thanks will go with it.

The new, nearly \$30 million school, on the same lot as the old building, will serve 650 or so students in state-of-the-art classrooms, and there's a stark contrast between the old Elm and the new Elm.

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But the old school is special, said Principal Leticia Ramos. The old school provided the foundation generations of students needed to get to middle and high school. In the walls of the old school, Ramos found out they had achieved a seal of excellence from the California Association for Bilingual Education. Elm is a dual-language immersion school, meaning the students spend 50 percent of their day in Spanish and 50 percent in English.

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In the walls of the old school they raised student achievement, they increased academic engagement and lowered suspension rates, Ramos said.

They took care of their kids, Ramos said.

"It's a pretty special place. This is just unique," Ramos said. "I've always said to my staff, 'There's so much potential here.' The energy and the heart and the love for this community and the building, we've been able to do some pretty great things for the sake of our kids and our families."

The K-5 school just off of Elm Street in Oxnard is the latest in the district to go through reconstruction. As part of a facilities masterplan and financed through school bonds, the Oxnard School District is working to rebuild the schools that have, frankly, seen better days. Elm is no different.

The old cafeteria doesn't fit anywhere close to all of the students. The portable buildings are falling apart. The furniture in the classrooms is old and outdated.

But the kids are always smiling.

"It's sad," one student said to Ramos, with yellow paint dripping from his hands after leaving his prints on the walls. "I'm going to miss it," said another who had several sharpies in her hand.

Every few minutes, a student stopped their principal for a hug, to say they were sad Thursday. One wanted to know if writing on the walls constituted vandalism.

They spent the afternoon saying goodbye to their beloved building. As hundreds of students wrote notes, left handprints and signed their name, it was clear the old building became a home for so many.

Nena Lucero teared up more than once as she left her name on all the buildings she taught in. She's been at the school 23 years.

"I'm very sad. It's not the same," Lucero said. "I have students who have come back to me and they are out of high school and it's just really hard. I love the new school and I know the kids are going to love it and it makes the families feel so good, and that I want, because that's why I've stayed here is because of all of them and all these crazy kids."

## The new Elm

The new, 57,797-square-foot building is two stories with a large quad that can fit all the kids, easy. A black-and-gold color scheme is in place throughout the campus, which is fitting for a school whose mascot is a leopard.

The classroom spaces are a little bigger, outfitted with new furniture conducive to project-based learning. The library resembles something closer to a college campus than a K-5 school.

But perhaps the biggest difference can be seen in the cafeteria and multi-purpose room. First of all, it's huge. All the kids can fit in there at once. There's space for a stage now. There are all new chairs. There's a screen that unfurls from a place in the ceiling for school-wide presentations.

"The kids come up to me after they've seen it and say, 'Ms. Ramos, I'm going to get lost,'" Ramos said. She told them they won't. They'll be OK.

But the constraints of the older building didn't stop the staff from making sure the students got the most out of their education.

"The thing is that there are no excuses. It's about how you make it happen for these students," Ramos said. "Look what we were able to do in this building and imagine what we will be able to do in the new school."

The classrooms now can be manipulated for different lessons with desks on wheels and chairs easier to move. There are floor-to-ceiling whiteboards. There are multiple screens mounted to the walls so the class can break off into smaller groups.

Corina Saturnino has been at Elm since 1997. She said in her time she's seen the school go through a lot of change, the new building is probably the biggest change.

"It's surreal because I've been here such a long time this is really my second home," Saturnino said. "I've seen so (many) changes, mostly with staff and in the district. It's kind of strange. It's a lot to process."

But while the campus may look completely different, the focus on learning and excellence will still permeate through the walls of the school — just as it did before.

"This building is old but so wise and giving," Ramos said as she bid farewell to the old campus one last time. "The Elm book must continue to be written because great things will and are to continue to happen at Elm — because we are Elm."

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