

'Now they can be proud of their school'

For Greater Lowell officials, \$65M upgrade pays off every day

By Amaris Castillo

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TYNGSBORO — Tile floors shone underneath the shoes of Greater Lowell Technical High School Superintendent-Director Roger Bourgeois and School Committee Chairman Ray Boutin on late Tuesday morning. The tiles are new on the first floor, like the corridor the men stood in, thanks to a \$65-million expansion and renovation.

Down the hallway and around a corner, kitchen staff prepared food ahead of the day's first lunch period. They worked yards away from the new cafeteria. Before the expansion, staff would prepare food in another area of the school and transport meals by elevator to upper floors for distribution to students.

Greater Lowell Tech broke ground in 2013 on the highly anticipated project. Since the completion of most of the changes nearly two years ago, school officials have boasted about new and renovated spaces, infrastructure upgrades, and exterior improvements. There's a new roof, new science labs, a new greenhouse, upgrades on the school's Olympicsized swimming pool and new school entrances.

There are also less visible changes, such as new heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems. Just a few small changes are left to be made, according to Bourgeois and Boutin, who on Tuesday gave *The Sun* a tour of the building.

To Bourgeois, who retires in August, the most important thing Greater Lowell Tech staff does is "work hard to create a welcoming, accepting, and supportive environment for students."

"What this construction project helps us do is it contributes to that welcoming environment," the superintendent- director said. "They come in, the area's bright, it's well-

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Greater Lowell Tech freshman Charlotte Leclerc, 15 of Dracut, picks up lunch at the tortilla station. The new cafeteria addition is the most visible part of the school's renovations. **See a slideshow of the tour at lowellsun.com.**

SUN PHOTOS/JULIA MALAKIE



The new cafeteria has charging stations along the window walls for students to charge phones or laptops.

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TECH/ From Page 3 lit, the floors are all brand new. It's a more welcoming feel."

The renovations have resulted in a better learning environment for students, according to Boutin.

"You don't have drafty windows. You don't have a leaky roof," said Boutin. "You've updated it so they come to a school now that they already like to go to and now they can be proud of their school — that it's a modern school."

Boutin and Bourgeois walked through the school Tuesday, first pointing out the new entrance.

"The idea behind the entrance is, as people are walking in, they're surrounded by student work," Bourgeois said, pointing at several full display cases lined against the wall. "If you notice those benches that are across from security, those were made by the students."

The men strolled through the school, at times greeting students and teachers. One of the stops was at a cafe that's part of an expansion to the school's culinary arts program.

"Hey! How are you?" Bourgeois cheerfully asked student Nicka Hite, who sat alone at a table just outside the cafe.

"I'm doing good!" she responded.

"How are you?"

"I'm good. I'm good," Bourgeois said. "Thank you!"

Hite, a special needs student, said she helps teachers set up the cafe tables.

"I got sad because we didn't have it last year," she said of the cafe. "But I'm happy this year because we have the cafe."

Boutin and Bourgeois then led the way through The Artisan, the school's restaurant, where students learn about how to cook in and run a restaurant. The eatery now has a new walk-in freezer and walk-in refrigerator.

Boutin credits much of the renovation results to Bourgeois and school committee members who put in extra hours to stay on top of the project's developments.

Bourgeois said Greater Lowell Tech is almost 40 years old now.

"What this renovation did for \$65 million is it basically refurbished the building that was reaching the end of its useful life," he said. "We're going to get another 40 years out of a building that probably would have cost \$240 million to build anew."