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## Island Coast High school goes up quickly

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Cape Coral's newest high school is halfway home.

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Island Coast High School officially made it through its first semester last week at its temporary location at portables on the High Tech North campus.

The Gators will be spending another semester there, but Lee County School District construction project manager Scott Reichenbacher said the school's future home - a three-story, \$63-million, 50-acre campus in

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northeast Cape Coral - is on schedule for a June 15 completion.

"We're all pleased to death," said John Gannon, the senior project manager for Kraft Construction Company.

"Just six months ago, we were looking at sky," Gannon said as he looked to the building's roof Thursday.

Gannon said Island Coast has gone up faster than any project he has worked on. Gannon partly attributed the progress to the building industry slowdown, which has allowed them to hire subcontractors for the project who might not usually be available.

Robert Koenig, Kraft Construction senior vice president, said there were 26 major sub-contractors working on the project. He said there were 40 total.

"This has gone really fast - it's gone really well," Koenig said. "We'll finish in fine form and fashion."

The project broke ground Feb. 5. Actual construction began in mid-April.

Reichenbacher said the project is right on schedule. The majority of the work remaining includes applying floor and wall finishing as well as site and athletic fields landscaping.

"I'm really proud of this one," Reichenbacher said.

The athletic fields at Island Coast will be the first in the district to use celebration grass, he said. Celebration grass requires less watering than traditional Bermuda grass and rebounds more quickly after heavy use, which he said would conserve water and save money.

The new building is designed to hold up to 2,000 students, but the district designed Island Coast with the capability to expand.

"We designed the structure to build up," Reichenbacher said. "If we have to expand we can go vertical."

The main structure is three floors, but there are additional one-floor structures that Reichenbacher said were designed to allow for two additional floors to be tacked on.

But don't expect any expansion in the next year or two.

Island Coast opened this year as an all-ninth grade school. School Principal Peter Bohatch said he was confident retention would be high with this year's freshmen next school year, when it becomes a four-year school. He is expecting a strong crop of new freshmen, but he is unsure of how many juniors and seniors would leave their current schools to attend Island Coast in the 2008-09 year.

"We haven't gotten projections yet," Bohatch said. "We'll be happy with 1,200 (students in the 2008-09 school year)."

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Bohatch said he and his staff were still debating how to best use the campus next year as 1,200 will leave for a lot of space in the 272,000-square-foot building.

"There could be sections not used," he said. "We don't want the students too spread out."

Bohatch gave School Advisory Committee members and The News-Press a tour of the new facility Thursday.

"It's incredible," said SAC member Kim Prorok as she walked the hallways and snapped photos of the interior with fellow SAC member Carolyn Gates. "It's like a college campus."

Bohatch said he visits the campus every week and can't wait for the halls to be filled with Gators.

"Every time I come here, I get more excited," he said.

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