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Klein Cain High School: Honoring the Past, Looking to the Future

By Ian Powell, Savannah Jung March 8th, 2018

In 1849, German immigrants, led by Adam Klein, settled in the northwest Houston area and founded a community that was dedicated to creating the brightest future possible for all. In 1938, the school district, located in northwestern Harris County and encompassing approximately 87.5 square miles, was incorporated and named the Klein Independent School District.

Fast forward to present times and that tight knit community has become a beacon attracting families and businesses to the area. In 2008, reacting to strong enrollment growth, the Klein Independent School District passed a bond referendum that included planning for the school district's next comprehensive high school.

From the start, the new school would be unlike any other high school in the school district. Klein ISD began the process in a non-traditional manner and looked for the best possible design with a design competition, and PBK won the competition and was commissioned to implement the new design.

Of great importance to Klein ISD was their desire to reflect the roots of the community's founding families. PBK's winning design incorporated traditional themes together with historical influences from German architecture to pay homage to the founding fathers of the Klein area. Together with Klein ISD's educational leadership team, PBK then set to work on planning Klein Cain High School to model the most effective principles of Next Generation educational design.

Beginning with a deep re-inspection of what makes the most effective "classroom", Klein moved forward with an 'L' shaped layout for their instructional spaces to provide better learning opportunity for its students. In the new setting, Klein learners are able to work collaboratively in teams and groups, with a teacher's participation or independently, for peer-to-peer learning. Moveable glass partitions in adjacent collaboration spaces provide expanded transparency and a higher degree of flexibility to extend instructional space beyond the traditional walls of the classroom. The majority of classrooms have exterior windows allowing natural daylight to permeate the room, and every classroom has high transom windows to adjacent circulation spaces, contributing to an overall reduction in the need for artificial lighting.

Another prominent example of Klein ISD's commitment to changing their learning environment is the Learning Commons, which challenges the notion of what a traditional school library can be. High ceilings, varied lighting, and articulating glass-wall systems provide an unparalleled degree of openness and transparency. Deeper within the Learning Commons, micro-environments, like the glass-walled Think Tank, are embedded to provide for small group study and research. The main corridor, or "Main Street", has a continuous skylight that allows for daylight to illuminate the school's interior.

Mrs. Nicole Patin, Principal of Klein Cain High School, is very excited about the opportunities that Next Generation design presents for her learners.

"The most innovative and exciting aspect of this entire building is that learning can take place no matter where a student is on campus, due to our many collaborative and flex spaces, our amazing learning commons and our amphitheater," Patin expresses.

Principal Patin recognizes that these Next Generation aspects have also changed the way the staff and administration think about educating their students.

"Klein Cain High School, with its physical design and layout, has really allowed me to think outside of the box as an administrator when it comes to what is possible for the educational experiences we offer our students," Patin says. "It also allowed me to focus on hiring teachers who want to think outside the box, step out of their comfort zones, and make education truly come to life."

These outstanding Next Generation contributions help make Klein Cain one of a kind, but the students, faculty and staff are the true reason Klein Cain is so special. When Hurricane Harvey hit, it devastated the Houston area, destroying homes, commercial buildings, and anything that stood in its path. Within Klein ISD, Lemm Elementary School was severely impacted by the storm and left the students and faculty displaced and unsure of the future.

The school district decided to co-locate the Lemm Elementary staff and all 700 K-5 students into the newly opened Klein Cain High School. Klein Cain High School opened its doors and arms to the students and teachers of Lemm and offered them a place to continue their education. This presented the unique opportunity for the elementary students to experience Klein Cain's Next Generation capabilities. Within the first week, an organic and impromptu bond developed between the high school students and the elementary school students. Teachers and administrators observed high school students exhibiting leadership and care for their young cohorts.

The new school certainly reflects the roots of the district, but it is the people who walk its hall that embody the character and values of Klein ISD and Klein community. The exemplary attitude of the students and faculty, together with the re-imagined educational environment, ensures that every student who comes through the doors of Klein Cain "Enters with a Promise and Exits with a Purpose".

About the Authors

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