

San Jose Mercury News

www.MercuryNews.com

DECEMBER 6, 2005

GRAND OPENING OF CHARTER SCHOOL'S FIRST REAL CAMPUS

DOWNTOWN COLLEGE PREP'S NEW DIGS

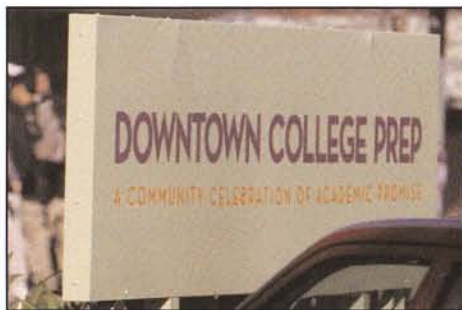
By Dana Hull
Mercury News

Downtown College Prep celebrated its long-awaited move into a brand-new campus Monday morning with a schoolwide assembly featuring San Jose Mayor Ron Gonzales, San Jose Unified Superintendent Don Iglesias, San Jose Bishop Patrick McGrath, and scores of other education and community leaders.

But the tour of the charter school's new digs at the former Hester Elementary School site at 1460 The Alameda was the highlight of the event. While founder and Executive Director Jennifer Andaluz showed guests around, teachers took students through their new home.



Copyright 2006 Len Vaughn-Lahman/San Jose Mercury News
Alumnus Julian Garcia, now a student at California State University-Monterey Bay, checks out the "great area" Monday at Downtown College Prep's new campus, at the former Hester Elementary School site on The Alameda.



Copyright 2006 Len Vaughn-Lahman/San Jose Mercury News
San Jose dignitaries, including Mayor Ron Gonzales, attended Monday's unveiling of the charter school's new campus.

"It's so big, and it's really artistic," said senior Mayra Rubio, 17, as she walked, wide-eyed, from the media center to a chemistry room. "This is like a real school."

On Monday, Santa Clara County's first charter school was in an actual school building for the first time. It was a historic moment for Downtown College Prep, which marked the occasion with T-shirts that said "Sweet Home Alameda."

San Jose architect Bill Gould and a team of designers and contractors transformed the former elementary school campus into a state-

of-the-art high school that was tailor-made for DCP's students and faculty.

There's a photography lab, scores of windows that bathe the bright, airy campus in natural light, and a college center where university recruiters can interview prospective students. The classrooms have new white boards, overhead projectors and cabinet space.

"I'm drooling," said Karen Sherwood, who teaches English as a second language. "I can use the white board and the overhead projector simultaneously! It's thrilling."

The large, purple-tiled bathrooms attracted dozens of girls who crowded in to check it out or pose in front of the mirrors.

And for the first time, DCP has a playing field for soccer games.

"I'll be rolling around in the grass and giggling," said math teacher Aaron Srugis during the packed morning assembly, to laughter from DCP's 390 students. Srugis recalled DCP's old days, when he would walk 20 minutes to make photocopies because the charter school was split between rented rooms in a downtown San Jose church and a YWCA building six blocks away.

DCP's student body is about 90 percent Latino, and nearly all will be the first in their

families to go to college. The school focuses on San Jose students who have traditionally struggled, and the small classes, extra attention and culture of high expectations have yielded extraordinary results. Test scores and passing rates on California's high school exit exam have skyrocketed.

The ambitious charter school also has an aggressive strategy to track how alumni do in college.

Nearly a dozen alumni from the classes of 2004 and 2005 stopped by Monday to check out the new digs.

"This is really nice," said Christopher Garcia, 19, who was part of DCP's first graduating class in 2004.

Now a student at San Jose State University,



Copyright 2006 Len Vaughn-Lahman/San Jose Mercury News
Students at Downtown College Prep look over schedules and directions Monday. When the charter school first opened, classes were split between rented rooms at a downtown San Jose church and a YWCA building six blocks away.

Garcia says DCP's environment made a world of difference for him.

"DCP honestly kept me going to school," he said. "They're really on your back, they always talk to your parents, and all of the teachers know all of the students. If I hadn't gone to DCP I don't think I would have dropped out of high school, but I would have done very poorly."

For more information, go to DCP's Web site at www.downtowncollegeprep.org.

