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Daybreak school big on innovation

By Sarah Bills

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SOUTH JORDAN — Keith Morey doesn't even have to leave the building after his morning workout at the recreation center in order to assist in his daughters' classrooms or view the latest projects at Daybreak Elementary School.

Morey's daughters are two of 1,100 students, who enrolled in the state's first combination public school and community recreation and learning center that opened at the end of August.

The building's unique design — sharing space between the school and the community center — allows for several benefits, including permitting parents greater participation in their children's education. The venture is a collaborative effort of Jordan School District and Kennecott Land.

It reinvests and engages parents in the schools, said Morey, who is the manager for Daybreak — a planned community located at 11400 South and 4500 West.

"If you're already here working out, it's easy to say, 'maybe I'll spend an hour,' " he said.

In addition to the recreation facilities in the community center, several rooms in the building will be devoted to continuing education.

The Jordan School District is working with the University of Utah to develop a curriculum of evening classes that meet the needs and interests of adults in the community, said Doreen Strauss, Daybreak Elementary School principal. But, classes likely won't begin until the end of this year or early next year.

"The definite focus is parents being a real partner in the schools, and we're not just saying that," Strauss said, "we mean a real partner."

Shared space is one of the benefits of having the two facilities combined in one building, Morey said. The center is built on 17 acres while most elementary schools are only built on 10 acres.

And unlike most elementary schools, Daybreak has a second story. That combined with numerous windows and spacious hallways allows more light into the school, creating a better learning environment, Strauss said.

The school's unique and innovative design was made possible because for the first time ever, developers approached the Jordan School District early on in the project, said Melinda Colton, director of communications for the district. Often the district is left to try to fit a

school in between housing developments when growth explodes in an area.

"We're delighted that Kennecott Land would come to us in the very planning stages of the development," Colton said.

Because Daybreak is a planned community and developers had anticipated building the elementary school, they put a lot of thought into the school's set-up and organization, Morey said.

For example, bus pick-up and drop-off points are on the opposite side of the school from car traffic in order to minimize congestion and maximize safety. And walkways are in place underneath busy roads to promote pedestrian safety.

The community center includes a child care facility for parents who are assisting in classrooms or using the recreation center.

Within the school, classrooms are organized by grades, kindergarten through sixth, with the five classrooms in each year surrounding a room shared by the entire grade. The room's walls are easily modified, allowing all of the third-year students for example, to gather for a guest lecture or an activity. And because each of the classrooms has windows that face the group room, teachers can observe and learn from one another, Strauss said.

Daybreak Elementary is one of three schools planned for the area, Colton said.

It is a melting pot in that 80 percent of the students do not live in the community, but are bussed from South Jordan, Riverton or Herriman

"Our growth is just exploding," she said. "It's a school that's really been needed."

Colton said she expects the school, which runs year round with four tracks, to reach its 1,200 capacity by the end of the year.

Ultimately Daybreak will house 13,600 homes on 4,000 acres, but that could take 15 to 20 years depending on the market, Morey said. As for now, Daybreak is home to 300 families.

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