

CITY'S NEWEST HIGH SCHOOL OPENS TODAY

By Cindy Ramirez
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Despite expected last-minute scrambling for chalkboards, textbooks and supplies, teachers at El Paso's newest high school said the first day of school today will mark the start of a new learning era.

"I intend to have class (today)," said Americas High teacher Sandra Reinhardt, who spent Labor Day preparing her classroom for the first day of school. "I believe that all the teachers here are ready to start teaching (today)."

Americas High, the third high school in the Socorro district, had postponed its opening twice because of construction delays. And though construction of other phases will be ongoing, about 1,200 students are expected to stroll down the school's hallways for the first time today.

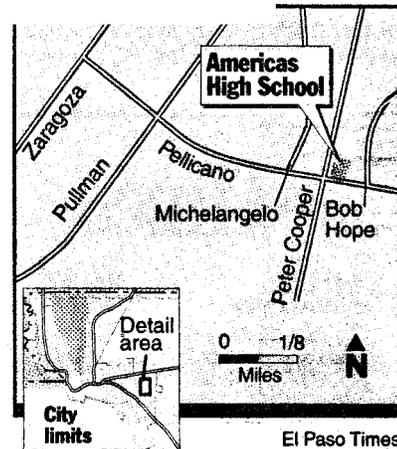
The school initially will house seventh- through ninth-graders, and will have its first graduating class in the year 2000.

Americas High is the Socorro district's second new high school this decade and third overall. Rapid growth in El Paso County has spurred construction of four new high schools in the '90s—Montwood and Americas in the Socorro district, Franklin in the El Paso district and Mountain View in the Clint district.

At least two more high schools are planned for El Paso County before the turn of the century—one in Northeast El Paso and one in San Elizario.

The opening of a new school triggers excitement throughout the affected neighborhood.

"It's not like any first day of school," eighth-grader Mandi Silva said as she walked by the school Monday. "I think even though we got a late start . . . we'll be the best in the city in no time."



But Principal Antonio Baca also asks parents, students and teachers to be patient, as the first few days of school won't be especially smooth.

"We can expect it to be like any other first day of school, but I think we're ready to get started," Baca said.

The construction delays left Americas students with an extended summer that will be offset by shortening spring break and other vacations. Americas will move to a year-round calendar in the 1997-98 school year.

The school - whose design mimics that of a mall - should help encourage students to succeed, teachers said.

"I think students will be more motivated to study if, they feel their surroundings are different and unique," first-year science teacher Lorna Furtado said as she looked around her triangular-shaped classroom.

The \$24 million Americas High will open with 60 classrooms and a makeshift cafeteria area until the entire campus is complete in the fall 1997.

The second phase of construction will include a band room and kitchen, with a library, gyms, athletic facilities and 50 more classrooms.

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