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Construction work well underway at Braintree's East Middle School

By Fred Hanson

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A groundbreaking ceremony Friday celebrated the start of the \$83.1 million expansion and renovation project at Braintree's East Middle School.

BRAINTREE – East Middle School is two months into its transformation.

Land has been cleared for a new parking lot and drop-off area, footings are in place for one of the new wings of the building and the school's fabled "glass corridor" has been removed.

"I'm really impressed with what they've done so far," said Thomas Devin, a member of the school committee and the chairman of the school building committee.

On Friday morning local and state officials held a ceremonial groundbreaking for the \$83.1 million project in the area of what will become the school's main entrance. Looking on were a group of the school's Grade 8 students and some of the construction workers at the site.

Mayor Joseph Sullivan called the East project the start of a "comprehensive transformation of our school system."

Once the East project is completed, along with a planned expansion of the South Middle School, the school system will move Grade 5 classes up to the middle schools, freeing up classrooms in the town's elementary schools. Sullivan said this is being done to preserve favorable class sizes while managing steadily growing school enrollment.

The mayor thanked the many people involved in getting the project to this point

“We’re here for the students. We’re here for the future of our community,” Sullivan said.

The project will add new classrooms, a media center, gymnasium and parking area to the school. Solar panels will supply 30 percent of the building’s power. The present building, built in 1961, will be renovated.

It is the town’s largest school construction project since Braintree High School was built in the early 1970’s.

State Treasurer Deborah Goldberg, who chairs the state’s school building authority, was a participant in the ceremony. She called the project “an incredible renovation and addition” that will help its students develop the skills to compete for the jobs of the future.

“I look forward to coming back to cut that ribbon” to open the school when it is completed, she said.

The school building authority is paying \$40 million of the project’s cost, with the town paying the rest. Sullivan said the project will be funded out of the regular town budget process and he is not seeking a tax increase through a Proposition 2½ debt exclusion or override to pay the town’s share.

John Sheehan, the school’s principal, said the school has been working with construction managers Shawmut Design and Construction and project managers Hill International to minimize disruptions to the students.

“The noise is not as disruptive as we thought it would be,” Sheehan said

In fact, he said the construction project is more of a curiosity to the students.

Sheehan said that when the new school year begins in the fall, he hopes to give some of the students a closer look at the construction.

“It’s a way to take math and science lessons and turn them into practical applications,” Sheehan said.

The new sections of the school are due to be completed in September, 2019 and the renovations a year later.

