

Published Tuesday, September 8, 2009 10:15 PMPDT

Topstory

All stops pulled for Studio

Sage Hill School's new studio boasts ceramics station, 20 Apple computers and more. Students at the school are required to take two years of art.

By Joseph Serna

Overlooking the school's 262-seat Black Box Theater from the sound booth above, it's easy to forget you're still at a high school, not some theater set in Los Angeles. From the building walls, floors, ceiling and even the plumbing, no cost was spared for these kids.

So what was here a year ago?

"Sage brush," said a proud Chris Marshall, arts department chairman for Sage Hill School.

If you ever wondered what \$18 million and a year of construction could get you, the "Studio" at the private Sage Hill School in Newport Coast will give you the answer.

For the more than 400 Sage Hill students, the 30,000-square-foot facility offers the latest in building design and technology for them to explore their every artistic fancy.

Like to dance? Check out the school's new dance studio, with its lowered floor giving dancers more head space to perform lifts and accommodate lighting for live performances.

How about playing an instrument or singing on a chorale?

The Studio's acoustic-friendly ceilings were designed specifically for classical instruments in one room, and a chorale's harmony in another. The walls are even covered in a special material making them more soundproof.

Want to work with your hands? Check out the ceramics studio.

Besides the loading dock behind the building providing door-side delivery of heavy equipment, the ceramics' room floor has specialty plumbing so teachers can conveniently hose down the tables and floor.

The clay-saturated water will be filtered so teachers can recycle their materials while the water is flushed out, Marshall said.

Or if film or design is your fancy, the nearly 20 Apple computers in one space give students a chance to create designs, collages and images while another room offers the latest in film and sound editing equipment.

Thursday will be the Studio's grand opening, and this year's freshmen will be the first who will get to experience all seven disciplines offered in the building.

Sage Hill students are required to take two years of art, with elective classes offered in the

student's favorite subject after that.

School administrators' pride and joy though, and likely most expensive, is the Black Box Theater.

The state-of-the-art theater allows students behind the scenes of the show to set up light sequences by remote and change the sound quality at the click of a mouse.

An important monologue coming up? One button subtly projects the speaker's voice for all to hear as if they're right in front of you.

Are the performers supposed to be in a large cathedral? A quick mouse click, and suddenly voices sound as though they're echoing of marble walls 100-feet away.

"It changes the size of the room," Marshall said of the technology.

Sage Hill administrators said the Studio will also be used for community film festivals and performances on top of school productions.

Sage Hill School

Opened in September 2000 and sits upon 20 acres of usable property.

435 students are enrolled, but there is capacity for more than 450.

The \$18-million Studio, which is 30,000 square feet, was funded by a 30-year bond from the school.

Before the studio, students set up tents outside the school for performances and used other classrooms.

Administrators said they are next considering a massive science building, and possibly an aquatics complex.

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