Community tours new facility
NEW EARLY CHILDHOOD STUDIES CENTER UNVEILED AFTER ADDITION, RENOVATION

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Families tour the preschool room in the new Early Childhood Studies building Tuesday at Hancock College during an open house. The new and existing buildings make up a complex including new classrooms and labs, a new kitchen and an outdoor classroom that serves as a statewide demonstration site.

September 11, 2013 12:15 am • By Lauren Foreman

City and school administrators, community organizers, parents and designers filled play areas outside Hancock College’s recently renovated Early Childhood Studies center Tuesday.

Hancock held a public art dedication and open house to unveil offerings of a $6.5 million building addition to invited guests.

A group of more than 80 attendees listened to remarks from the Hancock superintendent, Board of Trustees president and vice president of facilities and operations among other speakers before a group of prekindergarten students ended the ceremony with a performance of the much-rehearsed rainbow song.

“This is state-of-the-art learning for our students, and it’s really impacting the community in a positive way,” Hancock College President Kevin Walthers said.

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He watched as Gabriel Duarte, a preschool student, sent water flowing through a “water wall” or stream and embedded rocks with the touch of a button.

It was the culmination of the rainbow song preschool students performed.

“This is the way the water flows all daylong,” they sang.

The group huddled around the water wall and blended into the wandering crowd.

While some attendees watched the stream and snapped pictures of playgrounds and three outdoor classrooms, others milled about six indoor classrooms, an industrial kitchen and two added observation rooms.

Bernard Jones, a Hancock College school board member, has served as a trustee representing the Lompoc Valley area since 2004.

“This is probably the best public childcare facility in the state, and we have it right here,” he said of the Santa Maria facility.

Early Childhood Studies, Building I, encompasses about 8,900 square feet of building space and 2,700 square feet of canopies and overhangs.

Kelley LaCasse, a special education teacher and former Hancock student, said her favorite part of the facility was an art piece designed by artist Sandra Johnson.

“I love the art exhibit,” she said. “It reflects play and children in a positive way.”

Three bird sculptures on the lobby of the children’s lab school held sheets imprinted with a monarch butterfly, rainbow and chrysanthemum.

“[I] tried to design a piece that was whimsical, and organic and fluid,” Johnson said.

Yvon Frazier, program director of the children’s center, said the nature-centered art piece — which symbolizes the child, student and adult journey at Hancock — fits seamlessly with the goal to inspire both indoor and outdoor learning.

Frazier said exposure to nature is important for students to understand how to interact in outdoor environments.

“Anything that can happen inside the classroom can happen outside of the classroom,” she said.