

# HOME NEWS TRIBUNE

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2008

## EDITORIAL

### High praise for on-time, on-budget school project

State and local officials say construction of New Brunswick's next high school is proceeding within cost and on time. If those calculations hold true, the finished product will be a welcome departure from so many of the botched and over-budget new school projects funded by New Jersey in recent years.

Of note, part of the reason the high school seems to be coming together within projections is a spate of planning done in advance of work to ward off cost overruns.

While the \$185.2 million price tag makes the city's high school one of New Jersey's most expensive to date, planners front-loaded its construction contracts with a host of cost-of-inflation buffers. Those precautions look to have been sound thinking.

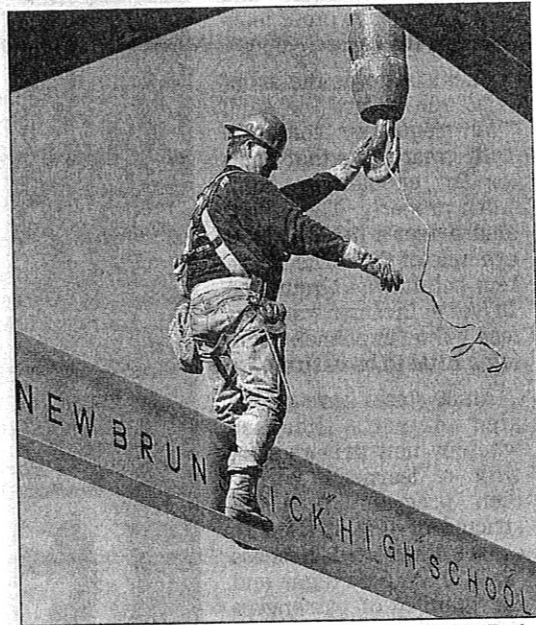
For example, construction planning accounted for cost-of-living increases for labor and anticipated inflationary pressures on the price of materials.

"When we entered into a contract with the contractor," said Sarah Clarke, a vice president at New Brunswick Development Corp., the developer, "they had to provide and guarantee prices for the duration of construction, so they had to make assumptions for each year." That allowed the planners to better know their obligation and control it.

Earlier this decade, New Jersey infamously borrowed \$6 billion for the construction of urban schools — in those districts formerly known as the Abbotts — and proceeded to complete only about a third of those schools that were promised. Much of the money was wasted on faulty plans, faulty construction and faulty bureaucracy. The state agency overseeing it all, then known as the Schools Construction Corp., underwent an overhaul and was given a new name, the New Jersey Schools Development Authority.

New Brunswick's high school is one of its biggest test cases. The on-time, on-budget work is an indicator that the agency may finally be straightening out its act.

None too soon, either, with another \$3.9 billion of school construction projects — all borrowed money — in the works.



Staff photo by Jason Towlen

**Ironworker Don Dingler of Spencer Steel stands atop the final I-beam to be placed during the Oct. 7 topping off ceremony at the site of the new high school in New Brunswick.**