



RIVER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Mr. Philip Martell, Superintendent of Schools



August 26, 2023

Dear River Valley School District Education Community:

It has been brought to my attention that a less than factual post was recently made on social media related to the Welding Program at the STEAM Academy. I want to clarify to you what has been done and what we are actively engaged in doing for the Welding program and its students.

To the points raised by the poster, I want to share context, a timeline of events including the Board motion for the project, the engineer's inspection and planning progress, obtaining the required building permit, enlisting a general and related subcontractor, subsequent internal demolition, and the renovation costs for the former Tech Ed space to be converted into the new Welding Lab.

The following is a detailed list of events that have been undertaken and an informational timeline for each. I feel compelled to inform you and its relative necessity for our constituents to understand the progress that has been made to this point. I am obligated to share these items to add concrete context to the two phases of this Welding project as it relates to the current progress of Phase I.

First, in March 2023 due to the high interest of River Valley students in the profession of Welding we began discussions to consider undertaking the construction of a Welding program at the STEAM Academy. To be clear, Welding is on the Tri-County Workforce Development Boards High-Priority Occupation (HPO) list as well as the Pennsylvanian In-Demand Occupation List (PAIDOL). Given those discussions, the School Board on Tuesday, April 25, 2023, approved a motion to build the Welding program and subsequent lab space with an amount not to exceed \$2M dollars.

Next, at the beginning of May an engineering firm was enjoined for the project. Their mission was to begin their process and due diligence of surveying, inspecting and developing a detailed, formal designs and set of construction drawing for the program. During that process, numerous in-person meetings were conducted with the various engineering departments and district personnel to ensure the efficiency and efficacy of the project. This process attribute began in early May and was finalized in mid-June. These detailed and engineering stamped construction plans were then submitted to the district and the Indiana County Planning office for approval.

Once the Planning Office approved the drawings a building permit was issued in late June. Simultaneously while the engineering process was occurring, a general contractor was obtained to spearhead the project and engage subcontractors for HVAC, Electrical, Ventilation (fume Extraction), and Excavation/Cement. Then on June 30, Lincoln Electric was issued a PO for the complete welding fume elimination system along with the welding booths, curtains, and weld tables. The work for this portion is slated to begin in September. The cost for this Phase I segment is \$367,525.00.

Then, the welding instructor position was posted with the subsequent interviews being held in June. Three district representatives interviewed the candidates and provide their recommendations for the best candidate for the position. The School Board acted on the recommendation to hire the candidate at its regularly scheduled meeting in June. The instructor began on July 10 to develop the curriculum for the program and engaged in the process of the weekly engineering meetings. To be clear, the STEAM Academy Welding students began their theoretical Welding instruction on day one. Just like any school year, students were presented with information on the new program, orientation, grading, safety, and they will be receiving applicable Welding theory as the weeks continue. The students have a separate classroom to continue their instructional progress while their lab is under construction.

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Beginning in early July the demolition of the space began and the development of the spaces for the tool room, boys and girls locker rooms, as well as a barrier separating the students from the Phase II work. Throughout July and August various subcontractors' meetings and walk-through inspections were conducted. Those were critical for the subcontractors to provide their bid for the job. Included in the work details was a scope timeline to complete their individual section. With the last engineering revision occurring on August 14.

Specifically, August 18, the electrical contractor ordered the panels switch gears, and the remaining equipment needed to complete that work. As of this moment barring any supply chain concerns September 11 is the start date. The cost of the electrical component of Phase I is \$184,838.71. On August 23, the HVAC PO was issued, and that company will be able to start within the next two weeks. The cost of the HVAC system is \$298,940. Included in this portion of the HVAC is a new compressor and an additional roof vent.

The cement contractor for the Lincoln air system placed a call with the one-call system, it should take roughly three days for them to be complete. After that time construction on the new pad will start. The site work and pad, barring any significant inclement weather, should be completed by Friday, September 15. The cost for this segment of the project is \$8,823.53.

The actual Welding equipment is on order for Phase I and as soon as the applicable will be installed in the lab. The total cost of that equipment is \$98,358.34 with an additional \$84,717,66 being established for three Augment Reality® Miller Electric Welding machines. These machines permit students the ability to develop their associated Welding skills. The machines will virtually simulate Shielded Metal Arc Welding (STICK), Gas Tungsten Arc Welding (TIG/Heli-Arc), Gas Metal Arc Welding (MIG) in all positions on various joint designs on plate as well as pipe.

Given all of the forgoing FACTS and the timeline of events, it should be clear that the district has allocated \$1,043,203.24 dollars to the Welding Lab in Phase I. The balance of the expenditures in the full allotment will be utilized to complete Phase II. So, in short, within the next two weeks, there will be substantial movement, and once it starts you should see Phase I working diligently toward completion.

Finally, as far as River Valley students attending ICTC's Welding program, as of July 18, there were only six RV students enrolled in their Welding program. Their total enrollment at that time was posted as 61. Currently, there are 23 students enrolled in River Valley's Welding program. Given the overwhelming numbers of River Valley students interested in Welding Technology, they would not have been granted access in ICTC's program due to capacity limitation thereby RV students not being able to pursue their own chosen career pathway based on their individual strengths, interests, and values.

Respectfully,

Mr. Philip Martell
Superintendent of Schools

