

EDUCATION

Mon BOE hopes to clear the road for Renaissance Academy next week

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Forget Tuesday morning's iced-up roadways that prompted the first snow day of the season for Monongalia County Schools.

That's because Superintendent Eddie Campbell Jr. and Board of Education members were working later that evening to clear some lanes for the future.

One big lane on the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) highway in particular.

The board meets again Dec. 5 with local and regional lawmakers, a gathering that serves as the district's traditional lead-in to the coming Legislative session in January in Charleston.

Meanwhile, Campbell told the board during Tuesday's weather-abbreviated meeting – it clocked in at just under 15 minutes – that he's also scheduled an additional session with the DLR Group, which will be part of that same meeting next week.

DLR is the firm tasked with designing the Renaissance Academy, which would be an exclusive standalone STEM school for the district.

The academy would be open to students from Mon's three public high schools, who could rotate in and out for special career technical education offerings without interrupting the core requirements at their respective schools.

Mon's existing technical center on Mississippi Street, in turn, would be retooled to offer such classes for younger students.

Campbell said he hoped to warm up the dialogue between the board, the architect and the lawmakers who could help advance the notion.

"That's a good idea," BOE President Ron Lytle said. "Brilliant."

And that's because it's a big sell, as Lytle and his fellow board members said earlier.

Nancy Walker, the longest-serving incumbent on the board, has seen several schools built in the county during her tenure.

The Renaissance Academy,

though, given its scope, cost and academic motivation, is different though, she said.

"It's really exciting but it's also really scary," she said during a meeting two weeks ago, "because it's a huge project and it has to be approached in just the right way."

The district wants the academy open to students by 2027.

While initial estimates put the cost of the school at \$72 million, earth has yet to be turned at the site of its planned campus, on a rise near Blue Horizon Drive that would make the school visible to motorists tooling along Interstate 79.

The 137-acre site has also been

reclaimed, with could present unforeseen infrastructure challenges that could affect the cost and those initial estimates.

In Mon County, the predominant driver for actually getting the school built will be the voters – who are traditionally generous at the polls in their affirmative votes for the excess education levy, which brings in an additional \$30 million annually to school coffers.

Preliminary bonding totals range from \$110 million to \$125 million, and the goal is to get a workable total on the ballot for this May, which would launch the project in earnest, depending upon how the vote goes.