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EDUCATION, LATEST NEWS

Contract could come in next two weeks for new STEM school

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April 25 just might be a Renaissance day for Monongalia County Schools.

The Board of Education meets in regular session that evening, and if all goes to plan, a contract will be awarded to one of the four architectural firms from across the country vying for the Renaissance Academy project.

That's the name of the standalone institution geared to science, technology, engineering and math pursuits for the county's high school students that will be built near Morgantown by decade's end.

The \$72 million facility, which will sit on an expanse in the Cassville area in full view of Interstate 79, will offer STEM instruction for students from Morgantown High School, University High and Clay-Battelle.

DLR Group/Williamson Shriver, Alpha/Mills Group/Perkins & Will, Grimm + Parker/McKinley and ZMM/Cannon Design all made pitches to the board two weeks ago.

Breakdowns of those pitches were given to BOE members during their regular meeting Wednesday.

Then, they'll bring any questions or concerns to the April 18 meeting for further discussion, BOE President Ron Lytle said.

After that, according to the schedule, comes the awarding of the contract April 25 – and after that, comes the eventual turning of the earth at the 150-acre tract of land that will serve as the academy's home.

The district purchased the property for \$1.5 million three years ago.

Call that outlay, from the project cost of the STEM school to the property purchase, an investment in the education of Monongalia County's students, said Eddie Campbell Jr., district superintendent.

"In terms of brick-and-mortar construction, this will nothing like our school district has ever seen," he said.

He's talking just as much about academics as he is architecture, he said.

The academy, he said, is the county district's acknowledgement of changing attitudes and refined goals among growing segments of 21st century students who are trending toward career technical educational education – opposed to four-year colleges.

Even so, he said, The Renaissance Academy recognizes both camps in a district known for its academic successes in the state.

Students will be able to rotate in to the school without sacrificing any of the more traditional course offerings at their respective high schools, the superintendent said.

Working in tandem, the current Monongalia County Technical Education Center on Mississippi Street will be retooled at the same time for age-appropriate career offerings for the county's middle-schoolers.

Meanwhile, the Renaissance Academy remains the centerpiece of the district's 2020-30 Comprehensive Education Facilities Plan, which is a visionary operator's manual that is updated every 10 years.

Eastwood Elementary, the county's first total environmentally friendly school, was the marquee project for the CEFP's 2010-20 edition.

University High's construction on Bakers Ridge was the top achievement of the 2000-10 plan.

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