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EDUCATION, LATEST NEWS

# Proposed STEM school begins staking a claim in Mon

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One informational session at a time, the Renaissance Academy is continuing to inch toward the day when it actually welcomes Monongalia County students into its classrooms.

That's the working name of a planned \$72 million standalone high school that would be solely devoted to STEM — the academic and hands-on studies of science, technology, engineering and math.

Mon's Board of Education members met last week in a work session with DLR Group, an Omaha, Neb.-based architectural firm that has designed similar schools in Missouri, Colorado and Arizona.

The firm first met with the BOE last March to present its portfolio while talking architectural and academic success stories at those schools.

“That’s something they volunteered to do,” said Ron Lytle, board president.

“We haven’t hired anyone yet. Right now, it’s just a matter of figuring out what this school is going to look like for the county.”

The school district already was considering just what high-schoolers might look like over the next 10 years.

With more and more students nationwide choosing to bypass traditional college for career pursuits, the district announced in 2020 it too was going to offer similar tributaries, in part, on its graph.

If it goes to plan, said school will be the showcase of the district’s 2020-30 Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan, or CEF, a paradigm-shifting, dice-roll updated every 10 years.

Call the CEF an operator’s manual of district of district doings, with equal chapters on the practical, pragmatic and visionary sides of the slope.

Eastwood Elementary, to date Mon’s only officially certified green school, was the linchpin of the 2010-20 plan.

The Renaissance Academy, meanwhile, would be a magnet school, in effect, for the county’s three existing high schools, Superintendent Eddie Campbell Jr. said.

Morgantown High students and their counterparts from University and Clay-Battelle could rotate in two-day-a-week stints for technical instruction, which their other classes in the core disciplines.

It wouldn’t be taking away from the county’s strong academic tradition, the superintendent said.

Mon is already among West Virginia’s top-achieving districts, regularly sending students off to the Ivy League, Stanford and other marquee institutions to graduate.

The district, in the meantime, wants to see the school open for the 2027-28 academic year.

That means securing grants and other funding — besides deciding whether or not to front another education levy to help pay for it all, Lytle said.

A site has already been selected, the board president said, if it proves workable for such large-scale construction.

The district bought the property, which was the site of a former strip mine, for \$1.5 million in the months before the pandemic two years ago.

It is located at the intersection of U.S. 19 and W.Va. 7, on the way to Cassville.

Prime real estate for just such a project, Lytle said.

Depending upon direction of travel, the board president said, one can see expanse from the highway.

“It’s a beacon.”

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