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Science, math charter gets boost

Foundations to fund \$15M high school at Science Center site

Jennifer Mrozowski / The Detroit News

Detroit -- A new science and math charter high school being built on the riverfront is about to get a big boost from a multimillion-dollar grant, according to an announcement planned for today.

The Thompson Education Foundation and The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan are expected to announce they will fund a \$15 million high school that will be tied to the University Prep Science and Math Middle School.

The middle school will be at a newly built facility next to the Detroit Science Center.

The high school construction effort is part of a broader push by the Community Foundation to rebuild the east-side neighborhood.

The schools' creators say they hope the partnership between the museum and school will attract people seeking new educational options for their children, including professionals working downtown.

The middle school, housed in temporary space at the Compuware building, is scheduled to move to the Science Center site this fall; the high school will open in 2010.

"Part of the strategy is the revitalization of the city built around great education for kids," said Margaret Trimer-Hartley, superintendent of the University Prep Science and Math Middle School.

The infusion of community dollars into the high school comes as discussion is picking up about increasing the number of charter options in Detroit.

U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, who was recently in Detroit, has expressed his support for charter options, and Detroit Public Schools' emergency financial manager Robert Bobb has said he is considering chartering more schools where traditional public schools have failed.

Detroit Mayor Dave Bing also has been a charter school supporter. Until recently, Bing served on the board of directors of the Public School Academies of Detroit, which included the math and science school.

The science and math middle and high schools are being chartered under legislation passed in 2003 to allow 15 additional urban charter high schools in Detroit, despite a statewide cap.

Julie Johnson, associate director of education programs at the Detroit Science Center, said the partnership will give students unprecedented access to the museum's traveling and permanent exhibits, as well as staff engineers and scientists.

Johnson has been working with the school's staff to determine how to meld the school's curriculum and required state academic standards with exhibits.

"This is hands-on, experiential learning," Johnson said.

Johnson added that teachers will be able to use floor models in the museum to enhance the school's science, math, language arts and social studies curriculum.

Daria Neal, a humanities teacher for the middle school, said the science center partnership will make lessons come alive.

"They'll see how science and math translate to real-world applications," she said. "Kids won't say, 'Why do I have to learn about this?' because they'll be going in and seeing how this will impact them."

University Prep Science and Math Middle School now has sixth- and seventh-graders but will grow to include an eighth grade at the science center site. At full capacity, the school will house 486 students, Trimer-Hartley said.

The construction of the middle school, including 80,000 square feet of additional space at the science center, also is being financed by The Thompson Education Foundation, which has provided funding to build several other charter schools in Detroit, including University Prep High School.

The \$17 million school portion will be 60,000 square feet and will have 35 classrooms. An additional 20,000 feet of new space at the science center will be a common area for the school and museum.

Students are expected to move into the new building Sept. 8, which will solidify the partnership with the Science Center, Trimer-Hartley said.


This past year, students and staff began establishing the relationship between the two entities through field trips at the science center that lasted from one to four days.

"We're looking at how to use this (museum) in as robust a way as possible," she said.

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