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BCPS discuss Math and Science Center move

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The Battle Creek Public Schools Board of Education on Monday signaled a willingness to start studying the relocation of the Battle Creek Area Math and Science Center downtown, a move local business officials said would help the city reclaim a national niche in food science.

Jim Hettinger, former president and CEO of Battle Creek Unlimited Inc., said in a presentation to trustees that the Math and Science Center's proposed move to the now-vacant Cereal City USA museum would be an integral part of a recently announced injection of about \$85 million for downtown revitalization.

Board President Steve Hoelscher agreed, and said Monday the board will convene a special session in the near future to kick the relocation study into gear.

The board also approved a contract, not to exceed \$50,000, with KBD Planning Group Inc. to come up with a vision of just what the new Math and Science Center would offer and look like.

The new downtown investment, which includes a physical facelift, was driven in part by Kellogg Co.'s decision to expand in Battle Creek. The company plans to build a \$22.5 million office building adjacent to its current headquarters. The new structure is estimated to bring 700 additional employees to the city's center.

The Math and Science Center's transition from its current Springfield home, Hettinger said, would cost about \$8 to \$12 million. Area schools would be asked to pitch in about \$4 million. Hettinger said BCU would be seeking funding from state and federal sources to cover the balance.

Hettinger said educators envisioned the new downtown Math and Science Center overhauling its curriculum to feature food science and reaching out to at-risk teens.

With proximity to Kellogg, Post, Ralston Foods and the W.K. Kellogg Institute, students could avail themselves of internship opportunities and hands-on activities.

Hettinger said the Math and Science Center could help churn out future food science professionals who would both contribute to the livelihood of a refurbished downtown and return to Battle Creek to work.

"We want to move from the kind of projects that attract people to the kind of projects that develop people," Hettinger said.

Superintendent Charles Coleman said no timeline was in place to make a decision on the Math and Science Center's move, and that the district needed time to engage other districts and the City of Springfield in the process.

"These are tough economic times," Coleman said of the \$8 to \$12 million price tag for the move. "That figure is really a projection, and it hasn't been finalized, but we know that it is incumbent upon us to open this discussion up to the community."

Hettinger said Kellogg wanted to start work on its new office building this spring, and he anticipated all downtown work being finished as early as 2012.

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