

Math & Science Center to move downtown

Justin A. Hinkley • *The Enquirer* • February 18, 2011

After more than two years of planning and fundraising, \$14 million in private funding has been secured to move the Battle Creek Area Math & Science Center from Springfield to the food science nexus developing in downtown Battle Creek.

The 20-year-old center announced Thursday that \$7 million each had been secured from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the KelloggCo.'s 25-Year Fund to help renovate the former Cereal City U.S.A. building at 171 W. Michigan Ave. and move the center there.

The [KelloggCo.](#) donated that building to economic development firm Battle Creek Unlimited in 2009.

According to a press release from Battle Creek Public Schools, which manages the center, planning on renovations will begin immediately, with the new center set to open in fall 2012.

The district has had a buyer interested in the existing center, though officials weren't providing specifics.

The announcement came as the Math & Science Center celebrates its 20th anniversary this year and was coupled with the unveiling of a new Math & Science Center logo. The logo was unveiled and the move was announced to students in an assembly Thursday morning at the center and was met with raucous applause.

The downtown move would provide more laboratory and classroom space and allow for more community activities to be held at the center, said Connie Duncan, the center's director. The center currently serves 357 students from 17 area school districts, and Duncan said the new center could hold 20 to 40 more students without adding staff. The new center also would have updated facilities and technology for students, Duncan said.

The existing center is 83,780 square feet, the director said, while the new center would be 88,481 square feet, according to early estimates from architects TowerPinkster. It's a small increase, Duncan said, but the new center will also be more e

fficiently designed. For example, the center's distribution center is currently housed in five locations and now will be moved into one spot, Duncan said, which would require less square footage.

The expanded offerings are part of a nationwide push to increase technology-related education and also would provide more opportunities for students to connect with science industries downtown, officials said.

"It's probably very obvious I'm very pleased the Battle Creek community has this opportunity for enhancing the education of our students," said BCPS Superintendent Linda Hicks.

"I think it's a good idea to have it close to the home school," said Destini Marshall, a 14-year-old Battle Creek Central High School freshman. "I think it'll create more job opportunities downtown."

The move also is part of an ongoing downtown revitalization plan steered by BCU meant to create a nucleus of food science industry and education around Kellogg Co. and the International Food Protection Training Institute, among other related businesses.

That downtown revitalization was announced in 2008, but the center's move had been delayed because of a lack of funding. BCU officials had promised the move would happen with private, not public dollars.

The project started with an estimated \$18.5 million

price tag, which was scaled back to \$15.8 million and now is estimated at \$14 million, though Jim Hettinger, a former BCU head who is an advisor to the organization, said several grant applications still are pending.

"It's pretty exhilarating," Hettinger said Thursday. "This is a huge, huge step, but there's still a lot of work ahead of us."

The BCPS Board of Education has voted to set aside \$1 million over the next five years to fund upkeep at the new center.

Officials Thursday lauded the move's impact on local education and business.

"The new center will increase the opportunities for students to receive an optimal mathematics and science education in a transformed learning environment," Sterling Speirn, Kellogg Foundation president and chief executive officer, was quoted in Thursday's release. "This is an exciting opportunity for all of us to support education in our community."

STEM LEARNING

Having the center in that downtown nexus is part of BCPS' efforts in a statewide push to boost education in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (called STEM, for short), which Duncan said is important as Michigan shifts out of a manufacturing economy toward a technology-driven, future-minded economy of innovation. The Michigan Mathematics & Science Centers Network, of which Duncan is president, has begun organizing a statewide STEM initiative.

Locally, BCPS has already jumped the gun on STEM education. Next school year, the district's Dudley Elementary will launch a pilot "STEM academy" that would have students learning through more laboratory-style projects. Hicks said the Dudley STEM academy is meant to drive more BCPS students through the Math & Science Center and ultimately into local science and technology industries.

The downtown center is exciting, Hicks said, "because it provides that vision for students and our community. It's about creating a center of inspiration."

"There are going to be more jobs available in technical areas than qualified individuals to fill

those jobs," said Jeff Paxhia, a principal scientist with the Kellogg Co. involved in the company's school outreach program. "Hopefully, this will increase community awareness of the link between education and the fields that are growing here."

"We're most excited about the potential for internships (at downtown businesses) and the visibility of math and science in Battle Creek," said Christine Wentworth, president of the center's parent group, called PRISM, the Partnership for Renewing Involvement in Science and Mathematics. "That kind of education is so key to innovation happening in Michigan."

Math & Science Center students agreed.

"The way technology is going, a lot of even the more day-to-day type of businesses have to be computer-friendly," said 16-year-old Joe Peterson. "This is going to help us with a lot more breakthroughs."

Other area districts are also integrating more STEM learning into their classrooms, and President Barack Obama's education advisors have called for more STEM learning nationwide.

The local center provides STEM training to local teachers and helps local districts develop STEM curriculum. Though the downtown revamp is tied to food science, Duncan stressed Thursday that an expanded and more centrally located center would help all programming at the center, including engineering classes related to manufacturing and other programs.

Hettinger added partnerships have been developed with Western Michigan University through its Kendall Center downtown and the College of Aviation on Helmer Road.

INDUSTRY TIES

The Math & Science Center already works with several local businesses, including the Kellogg Co., Covance and Denso Manufacturing Michigan Inc. The downtown move would provide easier access for those partnerships, Duncan said.

Kellogg President and Chief Executive Officer John Bryant was quoted in Thursday's press release saying, "In a global economy, math, science and technology are the building blocks of innovation."

Tim Knowlton, Kellogg Co.'s vice president of corporate social responsibility, said the company already has strong ties to the center through some internships and company scientists frequently visit the center's classrooms. The Kellogg Co. was involved in the center's birth in 1991. The move, Knowlton said, will only provide more opportunities for the two working together.

"We'll be looking to improve and build upon the strong relationship that already exists," he said.

Messages were left Thursday with officials at Covance and Cello-Foil Products Inc., a Battle Creek packaging company with which the Math & Science Center partners.

And the move is good for downtown Battle Creek, too, said Hettinger.

"This just adds to the development of a cluster of new educational opportunities downtown, as well as economic opportunities," he said. "Those sorts of things are a draw."

Again, Math & Science Center students seemed on board.

"Our generation needs more people to take on these responsibilities as people retire," said Wyatt Ludman, a 16-year-old Lakeview High School sophomore. "This will give (students) a lot more opportunity."

SPRINGFIELD'S LOSS

Not everyone is excited about the move.

Some Springfield residents, many of whom still carry sore memories from Springfield High School's 1990 closure and the district's merger with BCPS, are concerned about education leaving the city to Battle Creek's west.

Some residents there are apprehensive as BCPS discusses the possibility of closing one of its three middle schools, which could include Springfield Middle School on Avenue A. The district has made no decisions on middle school closure but officials have said middle school reorganization could be necessary in light of declining enrollment.

"It sucks, man," said Springfield's Jeff Hayes, 50, his home within eyesight of the center. "I mean, look at it, that's still a nice-looking building, man. You hate to see it go."

"It's kind of bittersweet, really," said Springfield City Manager Frank Peterson, "Obviously, we're happy that Kellogg and the foundation are investing in schools, but we want to make sure that steps are taken to put that building into good use as soon as possible."

Peterson said he hoped the district would include Springfield leaders in conversations about selling the building.

Hayes said he understood the logic in moving students closer to downtown businesses, but he said the Math & Science Center had been a good neighbor to Springfield and he worried about what business, if any, might replace the center. He also said the quiet Springfield residential area was a

good fit for students.

That's one of the reasons Springfield's Joe Kulikowski Jr., a 52-year-old 1976 graduate of Springfield High School, said he wished the center could stay.

Like Hayes, Kulikowski said downtown made sense for the center and was a good location, "But not as good as the one it's in now."

"What if they put something in there that's going to draw a lot of traffic?" he added. "I've had no problems with those kids."

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Students at the Battle Creek Area Math and Science Center react to the news Thursday morning that the center is to relocate to the former Cereal City, U.S.A. (John Grap/The Enquirer)



Artist rendering of Battle Creek Area Math and Science Center at the former Cereal City, U.S.A., provided by Tower Pinkster.



Mischelle Squires puts together third grade science kits at the Battle Creek Area Maths and Science Center Thursday morning. (John Grap/The Enquirer)

For more information

- Battle Creek Area Math & Science Center: 965-9440 or bcamsc.org
- Battle Creek Public Schools: 965-9500 or battlecreekpublicschools.org
- Michigan Mathematics & Science Center Network: 734- 418-1479 or mimathandscience.org
- White House Office of Science and Technology Policy: ostp.gov

A look at Math & Science Center enrollment

The Battle Creek Area Math & Science Center serves 357 students from 17 local districts. Here's a look at the breakdown by district, based on a headcount, taken last fall:

- Battle Creek Public Schools: 47 students
- Harper Creek Community Schools: 57 students
- Lakeview School District: 81 students
- Pennfield Schools: 40 students
- Albion Public Schools: 13 students
- Athens Area Schools: 8 students
- Battle Creek Academy: 1 student
- Bellevue Community Schools: 7 students
- Calhoun Christian School: 3 students
- Delton Kellogg Schools: 13 students
- Gull Lake Community Schools: 1 student
- Hastings Area School System: 3 students
- Marshall Public Schools: 2 students
- Olivet Community Schools: 28 students
- St. Philip Central Catholic High School: 39 students
- Tekonsha Community Schools: 0 students
- Union City Community Schools: 14 students

Total: 357 students

Source: Battle Creek Area Math & Science Center