



September 22, 2009

Math and Science Center nears destination

*Annie Martin
The Enquirer*

The Battle Creek Area Math and Science Center has taken another step towards moving to the former Cereal City USA building.

Battle Creek Unlimited Inc. proposed a plan to the Battle Creek Public Schools Board of Education Monday that would move the center, which is currently housed in the old Springfield High School, to the downtown area. The proposed project, which would cost an estimated \$18.8 million, would include a new distribution building to the west of the existing Cereal City facility.

TowerPinkster, an architecture and engineering firm located in Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids, completed facility assessments of four sites and recommended Cereal City over the present facility, the former Southwestern Junior High School site and the Battle Creek Enquirer building. Cereal City is an average of 53 years newer than the other buildings, meaning it has a longer useful life, according to a report provided to trustees.

CU is seeking ways to fund the project, senior adviser Jim Hettinger said. Possibilities include obtaining grants from organizations such as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, selling the rights to the new building and finding a private owner to take over the building. The center has also applied for a federal grant.

"We've had some very good corporate support for the Math and Science Center and we intend to talk with some of those donors," Hettinger said.

The center provides math and science instruction to high school students and distributes science kits to school districts throughout the state. The kits, which help fund the center, provide both curricula and materials for teachers. Kit sales surpassed \$2 million last school year and the center has already passed that mark in sales for the 2009-2010 school year in the months of August and September alone.

Director Connie Duncan said the center has outgrown its kit distribution facilities, which are currently centered in the old high school gymnasium, and has had to turn away orders.

Duncan said she felt the proposed facility would meet the current needs of the program. Additionally, she said she would like the center to offer classes for part-time students.

"What we cannot do at our site is grow as a center and grow programs for kids who don't make it into the Math and Science Center's four-year program," she said.

The Math and Science Center is one of 33 Michigan Mathematics and Science Centers. Those centers receive state funding, but that money is part of about \$1.2 billion in cuts recently approved by the state Senate. A final school aid budget has not been set yet.

Secretary William Burton made a motion for the Board of Education to support attempts to revitalize the center, with four conditions: Battle Creek Unlimited should pursue other community partners in the revitalization effort, try to reduce the estimated cost, hold a community forum and come back at the board's Nov. 16 board meeting with a sense of how the new building would be funded.

Because Battle Creek Public Schools is the fiscal agent for the Math and Science Center, the board must approve the new building, President Mark Laubengayer said.

The Math and Science Center is not just an asset to schools but to the community, Hettinger said.

"If we look at the ways we can enhance that program, we can make Battle Creek the place to go for math and science education," he said.

Nancy Lassen's son, a senior at St. Philip Catholic Central High School, is starting his fourth year at the Math and Science Center. Lassen said having the center downtown would help foster relationships between students and local employers and encourage college graduates to stay in the city.

"What the Math and Science Center can do is help students see how what they learn in a book is related to real work," she said. "The idea is helping students build networks and see opportunities in math and science (in Battle Creek)."

Annie Martin can be reached at 966-0468 or almartin@gannett.com.

Additional Facts

In other business

The Battle Creek Public Schools Board of Education on Monday also:

- Heard a report from Denny Welling, director of facilities and operations, who said construction at Battle Creek Central High School is going as planned. Work on the new cafeteria has begun and the school year has gone smoothly with the construction work, he said.
 - Approved a new elevator and other improvements in the Battle Creek Central High School field house for a total cost of \$464,453.
 - Voted to approve a first reading of seventh- and eighth-grade curriculum revisions.
-