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# Ground set to be broken on new Early Childhood Center

SEPTEMBER 26TH 2018 BY DEE LOFLIN

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The Poplar Bluff Board of Education approved a \$5.8 million bid, lower than anticipated, for Brockmiller Construction to build a new Early Childhood Center on the Kindergarten site, after carefully planning since December 2016.

Vice president Ken Davis made the motion, which was seconded by member Alana Robertson, and affirmed by Dr. Cynthia Brown, Roger Hanner, Jerrod Murphy, Heather Tuggle and John Scott in a unanimous decision on Thursday, Sept. 20, in the Administrative Building.

“I’m tremendously excited that the board has authorized us to move forward with this project,” exclaimed R-I Superintendent Dr. Scott Dill afterward. “We have worked collaboratively with the Long-Range Planning Committee and the Board of Education over the course of two years to develop this idea, and ensure that it accomplishes the immediate and the long-term needs of both the Early Childhood Center and the comprehensive educational program for the Poplar Bluff School District.”

With extensive experience in the school business, architects reported, the Farmington based construction company intends to mobilize at the Camp Road location on Monday, Oct. 1. The completion date was extended a month and a half to November 2019 so

contractors did not have to factor in overtime in the advent of weather delays, potentially driving up the bottom line during the bidding process. A relocation date for the Early Childhood program from the present Mark Twain building will be determined at a later time.

Based on input from Early Childhood educators, the 34,000-square-foot facility on the western side of the Kindergarten Center campus will include two separate wings for 3 and 4 year olds, each containing six classrooms. There will also be two extended day classrooms, a sensory room, an intensive needs room, two speech rooms, a suite for the Parents As Teachers program, two large storage areas, a nursing station, administrative offices, a centrally-located library and a multipurpose room designed with storm shelter capabilities, according to architect Aaron Duncan.

The state-of-the-art interior design, created by VVELL Studio in Maplewood, will feature a township theme starting with the ‘town hall’ in the lobby accentuated by a cupola skylight and carpeting resembling grass with tulip poplar leaf shapes. The classroom corridors will serve as the ‘streets’ with separate color associations to help young students, complete with a skyline depicted on the walls above the cubby spaces. The floors will be texturized with geometrical shapes to create “learning moments,” according to project manager Mike Pollard, Duncan’s colleague.

“Why not go ahead and have fun with it,” asked Pollard of Dille and Traxel Architecture during the August school board meeting. “It’s been probably one of the most fun projects we’ve had in a long time.”

The Poplar Bluff architectural firm authorized to oversee the work previously designed the Kindergarten Center, which opened in 2010. The facilities will be aesthetically similar with a connecting link for shared common spaces and teacher collaboration. An open area in between the exterior of the buildings will be designated for an enclosed outdoor playground. A total of 175 parking spaces will be added to the property. The internal roadway will be extended with traffic lanes so each school will have separate entry and exit points. An alternate bid of \$72,000 was included for substituting concrete paving in lieu of asphalt.

The construction will be paid outright from capital project balances instead of lease financing, saving the district millions of dollars in interest payments, school officials have estimated. The project represents the second and final phase of the district’s long-range plan funded through a single levy measure approved by voters in 2014, which added over 200,000 square feet of modernized classroom space across campus, improving the

learning experience for students grades 1-12.

Before moving to Mark Twain in 2001, the Early Childhood program was located at the former Kinyon Elementary building on Vine Street and originally – Wheatley School on Garfield Street. While having a preschool-aged specific building for the first time will be a major upgrade for the community, the school board president said, he is even more excited about the opportunity the vacated building on North Main Street opens up.

“The new Early Childhood Center will be a vast improvement,” Scott stated. “More importantly, it will allow us to continue development of a comprehensive alternative school.”

The last piece of the long-range plan will be to convert the Mark Twain campus into a dedicated non-traditional high school with alternative pathways for earning diplomas, absorbing the credit recovery offerings of the Graduation Center, presently housed at the Technical Career Center. Programming plans by school administration are already underway.

The groundbreaking for the new Early Childhood Center has been scheduled for 10 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 11, at 1200 Camp Road. The ceremony will begin at 9:30 in the Kindergarten Center cafeteria.

Pictured: Contractors interested in the Early Childhood Center project attend a pre-bid meeting led by Dille and Traxel Architecture and school officials on Thursday, Aug. 30, at the Poplar Bluff Kindergarten Center.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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