



Dunlap will add classrooms

Moving district offices, expanding high school will ease congestion

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DUNLAP — Dunlap School District 323 offices will relocate to an office building in Peoria in March to make room for much-needed classroom space at its overcrowded high school.

Construction also should begin in March on an eight-classroom addition to the north end of the high school building that will be ready for the start of the 2010-11 school year.

"The surge in student population in sixth, seventh and eighth grades that had us addressing those needs with the construction of a new middle school has now hit the high school," said Steve Rieker, chairman of the District 323 School Board. "Now the need for additional classrooms at the high school is the most pressing facility issue we have."

The high school expansion is the first phase of a districtwide expansion plan that will ultimately increase grade school and middle school classroom space as the student population continues to climb. School officials expect to have a referendum question on the November ballot to raise money to construct a new grade school. Neither the amount of the bond issue nor where the school would be built has been decided.

The first phase of the high school construction includes two 1,150-square-foot classrooms in the space currently occupied by district offices. The 14,500-square-foot addition includes six 1,000-square-foot classrooms, larger computer and science labs, restrooms and space for 306 student lockers. It would be built on what is now the parking lot between the high school and the tennis courts. The tennis courts might eventually be moved, Rieker said.

The estimated cost of the initial construction phase is \$4.4 million. The amount would be raised by some combination of issuing bonds and using money the district currently has in reserve.

"We don't anticipate a tax rate adjustment for phase one," Rieker said.

Tom Welsh, principal of the high school, welcomes the extra elbow room next year.

"The problem is with student congestion, sure, but it's also a problem because some teachers don't have assigned rooms, which means they don't have access to their classroom for prep time. It's particularly bad for science teachers, who need to prep a science lab."

The second phase of the high school expansion would begin in the summer and be completed by the start of the 2011-12 school year. It calls for 17 classrooms built as the school's first second-story level, additional locker rooms, space for more lockers and kitchen and cafeteria expansion. An estimated cost has not yet been determined.

Giving way to classroom space, the school district will move to an office building at 3020 Willow Knolls Drive, Peoria. It will occupy half of the building currently occupied by Chapin & Russell Associates, a counseling office. The district has a three-year lease on the space, which is in Peoria but within the Dunlap school district boundaries.

"It's not ideal because we are somewhat removed from the central campus where we are now," said Superintendent Jay Marino. "It will be a change and can be a challenge, but we think we will make the adjustment. Hopefully, we can get a more central location after the lease is up. Get through the high school expansion, the grade school referendum, catch our breath a little and then see central district needs."

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