

Career Pathways Institute has latest technology

By Harold Reutter

harold.reutter@theindependent.com | Posted: Saturday, August 3, 2013 10:57 pm

When consultant George Copa was working with the 40-member design team that worked for a full school year on planning the new Career Pathways Institute-Adams Street Campus, he kept telling people the new building should have a “wow” factor.

Copa said the wow factor was a necessary component because it would immediately let students know they were enrolled in a special program. He said students — as well as their parents — should feel proud they are enrolled in a Career Pathways Institute course of study.

Copa also cautioned the new Career Pathways Institute would only have one opportunity to make a good first impression. He said if the school district simply transferred its existing career and technical education program to a new site and did not put real effort into doing a major upgrade on curriculum, everybody would immediately recognize that fact.

This past Friday, Dan Petsch, Grand Island Public Schools director of buildings and operations, gave a tour of the new Career Pathways Institute-Adams Street Campus and said he believes the new building has achieved the desired wow factor.

Students will learn

Superintendent Rob Winter, who took the tour with Petsch, said the Grand Island career and technical education teaching staff has been working the past year to design a curriculum that is just as up-to-date as the building.

When educators talk about purely academic subjects, they often talk about the need for rigor, which means the curriculum is challenging enough so students who master it will be ready to take the next step into college or into a career, Winter said.

He said the key to design that rigorous career and technical education curriculum has been the use of industry advisory councils who have been telling teaching staff the skills that are needed by people who are working in construction, manufacturing, automotive and information technology, which are the four curriculum offerings at the Career Pathways Institute-Adams Street Campus.

Winter said another phrase for describing rigor in career and technical education courses is “career readiness.” He said students who master the curriculum should be ready to get further education at Central Community College or they should be ready to step into a job with a local employer, using the skills they’ve learned at the Career Pathways Institute.

“They certainly should have a leg up on the person who walks in cold off the street (with no specialized training) and applies for a job,” Winter said.

Only juniors and seniors will be allowed to take classes at the Career Pathways Institute-Adams Street Campus. However, freshmen and sophomores at Senior High can take career and technical courses that will serve as prerequisites for being admitted to a particular career pathway.

Winter said another key for the new program is that industry advisory groups have also been telling Grand Island Public Schools staff the type of equipment they are using in their own places of business. The school district has purchased identical equipment for the Career Pathways Institute building so students will be learning on the same equipment they would be using on the job with a local employer.

While standing in the manufacturing area of the new Career Pathways Institute, Winter noted the space could look very different five years into the future.

“We could move the equipment — or some of the equipment — out of here because employers tell us they are no longer using this kind of machinery,” he said.

Petsch said he is still totaling up the cost, but he believes the school district has moved about \$1 million of equipment into the Career Pathways Institute. Winter said one feature of the building will be a board that will list the names of donors who helped financially with the Career Pathways Institute.

Entering the building

The entrance to the Career Pathways Institute is designed to provide students with some of the desired wow factor even before they enter the building, Petsch said. Students will park on the east side of the building, then walk through the entrance on the building’s south side.

Petsch said because students are being prepared for the world of work, each student will be supplied with a “swipe card” that will unlock the door and allow them to walk into the Career Pathways Institute. He said that system will be similar to employees clocking in with time cards at their place of work.

The green railing on the south side of the building that supports the words “Grand Island Public Schools Career Pathways Institute” has a practical purpose as well as a decorative one, Petsch said. The railing serves as a window shade to prevent too much heat from entering the building on warm, sunny days.

Petsch said the Career Pathways Institute has a number of “green” aspects. He noted the conference room is lighted by LED lights, which both saves energy and means the lights last longer.

After a student enters the Career Pathways Institute from the south, immediately to the right will be the office for Daniel Phillips, coordinator for the school.

Just past that office is the area that will be used to teach students about the construction industry and farther down the hallway, students will be able to see the manufacturing area. Automotive is the third career area on the right hand side of the long hallway. The floor for that hallway is dominated by a green-and-blue color scheme that reflects the blue and green colors on the outside of the building.

To the student’s immediate left is an elevated, open commons area, Petsch said. He said commons area can be used for student instruction. However, on many days, the commons area will be used by students to eat lunch between class periods.

Just to the west of the commons area will be the instructional area for information technology. Petsch said one feature of this area will be a separate IT workroom, where students will be allowed to physically work with switches, servers and other aspects of information technology.

One room in the new building will be used by students learning computer-aided drafting, Petsch said. The computer-aided drafting area may be used by students in either the construction pathway or the manufacturing pathway.

A school, but also a workplace

Each pathway area will have offices for the teaching staff. They also will have lockers for the students, Petsch said. Each pathway area also will have a classroom. Winter and Petsch said the teaching staff for the manufacturing pathway will not only include Grand Island Senior High teachers, but also an instructor from Central Community College.

Petsch said Career Pathways Institute classrooms with computers will allow instructors to do “rear teaching.” Instead of standing in the front of the classroom to teach students, instructors will stand in the back of the room and give students their instructions. That will allow the teacher to see all the students’ computer screens and know that the students have screen images that are in synch with his instruction.

As part of career readiness, students must wear clothing appropriate for their pathway area, Petsch said. If an employer does not allow employees to wear short pants on the job site, then students will not be allowed to wear short pants for either the classroom or the hands-on learning area.

As of last Friday, work was still being done on some of the building’s floors. While most of the building’s furnishings had been moved in, there were still a few classrooms that needed to have the final pieces of furniture moved in, with chairs often being the missing piece of furniture.

However, construction is close enough to completion that Petsch said he was beginning to work through the punch list of tasks the construction crews needed to do before they turn the building over to the school district. Petsch said he will continue to go through the punch list this coming week, with the goal of getting city personnel into the Career Pathways Institute to do the final inspections so the district can receive its certificate of occupancy.