

Work progresses on state's first two-county consolidated school

by Roger Adkins Staff Writer | Posted: Saturday, November 2, 2013 11:36 pm

LINN — Construction of the new Leading Creek Elementary School building is expected to begin this week as site preparation work comes to a close.

The school will consolidate Alum Bridge Elementary in Lewis County and Troy Elementary in Gilmer County, said Steve Casto, office administrator for Lewis County Schools.

The new school will be the first-ever consolidation of schools from separate counties in West Virginia, said Dr. Joseph Mace, Lewis County superintendent of schools.

The parking lots and entrance road to the school have been completed, Casto said. Crews from City Construction of Clarksburg can begin digging the footers.

Crews plan to work on the building as much as possible this winter when weather permits, Casto said.

“The game plan is they’ll work through the winter. As long as it doesn’t get too cold or we get too much precipitation, they’ll keep going,” Casto said

“If it gets too bad, what they’ll do is they may not walk completely away. They’ll watch and see if they have an opportunity to come back and work. We’re going to be driven by the weather,” he said.

The tentative completion date is Dec. 29, 2014. Students, staff and faculty won’t move into the school until the fall of the 2015-2016 school year, Casto said.

“That’s an aggressive date,” Casto said.

“We’ve been working on the site since early spring. This is big now that we’re going to start moving toward the construction phase of the building,” he added.

The new school represents a \$10,457,800 million investment in education in Lewis and Gilmer counties, Casto said. The project is being funded by the West Virginia School Building Authority with local contributions from the two participating boards of education.

It’s exciting to have two counties partnering together for the first time in West Virginia for a consolidated school that will benefit both communities, Mace said.

The new building will sit on the county line and will be located minutes away from the old schools. The upshot of that is students shouldn’t have to endure long bus rides, Mace said.

“We get to keep the neighborhood school concept,” he said.

The school will serve about 240 students, Casto said.

It will be a model for consolidating schools from separate counties in the future, Mace added.

“The memorandum of understanding we worked out with the counties has guidelines that will be followed in the future. We did a lot of things for the first time,” Mace said.

It could have cost each county nearly as much to build its own separate school. Building one school is a great savings, Casto said.

“The biggest benefit is you’re getting a brand-new facility for two counties that could not afford to build new schools on their own. And you’re getting a modern, up-to-date, energy-efficient school,” he said.

Administrators do not expect any job losses as a result of the consolidation, Mace said.

Faculty and staff members from both schools were on a committee to name the new school, and they involved the students in the process. They decided on the name Leading Creek, after a stream that starts in Lewis County and flows through Gilmer County, Mace said.

The community seems excited about the project, Mace said. The excitement will continue to build as work progresses, Casto added.

“When you walk into that new building on the first day, that’s when it really hits you,” Casto said.

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