Transformation of Loveland’s Stansberry school into early childhood center underway

Asbestos abatement will kick off next month at Van Buren

Jon Spruill uses a mini excavator to remove an old storm drain on Tuesday, June 11, 2019, at Stansberry Elementary School in Loveland. The school closed down and is now being renovated to become an early childhood center. (Jenny Sparks/Loveland Reporter-Herald)

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The inside of Stansberry no longer looks like an active, busy school. Flooring has been ripped up. Walls are bare of colorful learning aids. Library shelves are empty. Construction crews are digging a trench outside.

But officials with the Thompson School District, architectural firm Cunningham Group and contractor Saunders Heath have a vision of what the building will look like by the end of summer when it is transformed into an early childhood education center.

“We’re going to bring the fun into it,” Tammie Knauer, bond director, said during a visit to the former elementary school last week, about a week into demolition inside the school. “What we can do is make it inviting.”

Stansberry is one of two elementary schools that the district closed at the end of the school year in late May due to low enrollment. The Thompson School District is remodeling Stansberry into an early childhood education center and the other school, Van Buren Elementary, into a career and technical education center.

Extensive community input and research has gone into creating the plans for the two schools with suggestions from businesses, students, administrators, teachers and the community as a whole via a survey, working groups and several public meetings.
Crews have hit the ground running with Stansberry because the first five classes for the early childhood education center will open with the new school year in the fall, and administration for the program will move into Stansberry by that time, too.

The staff who finished out the year at the school helped pack, and district employees moved everything out of the school over Memorial Day weekend.

Without them, Knauer said, construction crews would not have been able to get moving so quickly on demolition inside the school.

“We’re on day six of demolition, construction, retrofitting and we really haven’t had time to think of anything but go,” Eric Oberg, construction superintendent, said on Tuesday.

Plans for the early childhood center — like plans for the career and technical education center — are still in the conceptual phase and will be firming up over the next few months.

The first five classrooms to open will be on the front side of the building as will the administration, and the school will install new playground equipment for the
Plans are to keep the large windows and natural light that shine into the library area as well as much of the exposed wood within the school. Eventually, bathrooms will be added to every classroom and the new early childhood education center, complete with offices and shared space, will take shape.

“We’ve got some really good bones to work with,” said Zach Chambers, bond project manager for the Thompson School District.

Not all of the details have been worked out. Planners are still deciding what to do with the gym, for example. It could become an indoor play area or one of a list of other options, depending on what is feasible, and the entryway and office space plans also are not yet firmed up.

Students will fill five classrooms in the fall, expanding the early childhood program, and as the school year progresses, crews will continue to remodel the remainder of the school for another five preschool classrooms as well as space for the district’s infant and toddler program, explained Knauer. Construction will occur alongside education.

Saunders Heath, the contractor, will minimize that impact on the students with sound walls and dust barriers, by timing deliveries separately from pick-up and drop-off areas and by doing the loudest work when school is not in session.

“We do it in hospitals all the time,” said Oberg, explaining his vast experience with construction while a building is occupied. “There’s no such thing as silent construction, but we try.”
Although the district does not know the exact name of the new early childhood education center, it will retain the name Stansberry in some form, said Todd Piccone, the district’s chief operations officer.

That was very important to members of the Stansberry family, they said in April at a celebration of the school. Mary Stansberry, the widow of Claude Stansberry, the former superintendent after whom the school is named, stressed that both she and her children are positive that Claude Stansberry would be happy with the positive way the district is using the school that bears his name and in which he volunteered even after his retirement.

“He believed in education,” said Mary Stansberry, now 90. “That was his goal in life.”

District officials have said there is a demand for early childhood classrooms, and those early interventions will help more students succeed throughout their school years. It is key to improving success and graduation rate, they said, and to helping students prepare for the future.

And this new piece will start with the remodel that is underway with the first phase complete in just six weeks, in time for a new batch of students — albeit younger — to walk through the doors for the 2019-20 school year.

**Van Buren changes**

While Stansberry is being remodeled for preschool students, Van Buren will be turned into a career and technical education center (CTE) for high school students as well as the new site for Ferguson High, the district’s alternative high school. The district plans to add 20,000 square feet to the overall site, though the final configuration is still being fine tuned.

Like Stansberry, the remodeling of Van Buren is in the conceptual stage where things can and will change as the process continues. The early designs, created by DLR Group, show the existing school will be remodeled into Ferguson High School, and the addition and a student parking lot will be built in a field that parallels Van Buren Avenue to the west.
The Thompson School District included this conceptual plan for the configuration of a Career and Technica Center and Ferguson High School at the site of Van Buren Elementary School, which closed at the end of last year. Design is still in the beginning stages, but the front doors to both would be moved to the west side of Van Buren Avenue instead of the existing doors to the south off 15th Street. The architect for the project is Denver-based DLR Group. (Thompson School District)

The two buildings will make an L-shape, attached by an assembly space on the southwest corner. And the main access to both will be from Van Buren Avenue instead of 15th Street.

“This is the plan, and we will fine tune it and align it with the budget,” Piccone said.

The district may include a playground on site, which is something community members asked for as Van Buren had been a community play site, Piccone said. But that all depends upon whether officials can make it fit in logistically, financially and safely with the new use for the building.
The Thompson School District presented to the school board this conceptual plan for the configuration of a Technical Education Center and Ferguson High School at the site of Van Buren Elementary School, which end of this school year. Design is still in the beginning stages by the Denver-based DLR Group. (Thompson District)

For Van Buren, crews will begin asbestos abatement in July to complete that piece before any demolition or remodeling can begin, Chambers explained. The remodeling and new construction likely will begin in August and September and continue over the next school year.

In 2020, students should begin attending classes at the new Ferguson High School as well as the career and technical education center. The existing Ferguson school will close, and the district will sell the building to help offset the cost.

Initial offerings at the CTE will fall into four main categories — health care, construction, computer science and advanced manufacturing.

The district knows what the buildings will look like generally and what the offerings will be, but they do not yet have an official name for the new venture. Piccone said the district will go through a naming process, which includes public suggestions, for the CTE.
“That’s exciting,” said Lori Hvizda Ward, president of the board. “I really like the professional look of the CTE.”

Project costs:

$16.5 million to remodel Van Buren school and add another 20,000 square feet to create a career and technical education center and the new Ferguson High School.

$4.475 million to remodel Stansberry school into an early childhood education center.

$10.8 million of the combined costs will come from bond premium money, which are profits earned off the sale of $149 million in bonds. The rest will come from bond maintenance money set aside for the two schools and the sale of existing buildings, including the current Ferguson High School and a facilities buildings, as well as grants and efficiency savings.

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