

Construction underway on Cumberland's \$70 million technical high school

Posted: Wednesday, September 17, 2014 8:15 pm

By THOMAS BARLAS Staff Writer

Government officials thrust shovels into a pile of dirt on Wednesday during groundbreaking ceremonies for the centerpiece of Cumberland County's more than \$85 million economic development program.

The ceremony marked the unofficial start of construction of a \$70 million, full-time county technical high school on the Cumberland County College campus.

The school is scheduled to open in the fall of 2016 with a freshman class of about 220 students. Enrollment will grow annually, reaching about 900 students in four years.

Officials said Wednesday that their endeavor — nicknamed the “Campus of Success” — will give those students the education and job-training skills to help turn around a county with one of the worst economies in the state.

The new high school will partner with CCC and a \$7.7 million Cumberland County Center for Workforce and Economic Development facility, which is under construction on the CCC campus. County officials said they can use that new setup to not only train students, but also as an economic marketing tool to attract new businesses by offering those businesses a tailor-made workforce.

“The one thing that is going to help this county move forward is education,” said Cumberland County Freeholder Director Joe Derella. “You cannot change the past. We react to the present. But ... we can shape the future.

“Every day is a great day,” he said. “Some days are greater than others. This is one of those days.”

The new high school will replace the existing facility in Deerfield Township. That facility currently takes students from Bridgeton, Millville, Vineland and Cumberland Regional high schools on a part-time basis. County officials said that setup leaves students spending too much time riding buses and not enough time to meet state educational requirements.

Guidance counselors at that school said they welcome the new education tools the new school will provide.

“This will provide more opportunities for the students,” said Sharon Gates, who has worked as a guidance counselor for about 10 years.

Bonnie Moran, a guidance counselor for about five years, said students will benefit by spending their entire school day in one building. That will make it easier to learn, she said.

County officials admit they have a large economic obstacle to overcome.

The state Department of Labor and Workforce Development reported Cumberland County's June unemployment rate at 9.3 percent. Only Atlantic County had a higher unemployment rate that month, the statistics show.

Cumberland County's median household income averaged \$51,530 from 2008 through 2012, about \$21,100 less than the statewide figure, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. The Census showed that 16.1 percent of the county's residents lived below the poverty level during that time.

Census figures also show that 77 percent of county residents age 25 or older held at least a high school diploma for the 2008-2012 time period. The state average for that time period was 88 percent.

The new Cumberland County Technical Education Center is being built on about 10 acres on the CCC campus in Vineland and Millville.

The high school will be a two-story, 200,000-square-foot facility. The building will have classrooms, a media center, technical laboratories, a greenhouse and other amenities.

The facility is being financed with the help of \$48 million in state funds.

Work on the project's first phase — which involves construction of two soccer fields that will replace the fields on which part of the high school will be built — is underway. The project's second phase — construction of the high school — goes out for public bidding next month.

Another part of the county's economic development plan involves an estimated \$7 million CCC building in downtown Millville. CCC plans to move its full arts curriculum into the building, which would be located at High and Pine streets.

Project proponents say the center would help bolster Millville's downtown arts and business district in part by attracting about 500 students per semester, along with CCC employees and visitors, to High Street. That project is still in the developmental stage, with officials seeking ways to fund its construction.

Still another part of the plan involves construction of a county office building in downtown Bridgeton. That project is also in its developmental stages.



Many staff and supporters gathered for the ground breaking ceremony for the Cumberland County Technical Education Center Full time High School held at Cumberland County Collage in Vineland. Photo/Dave Griffin