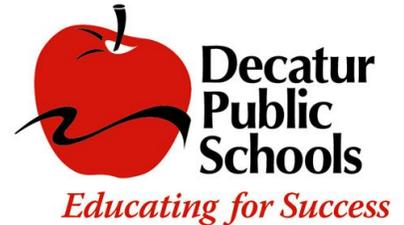


For Immediate Release

February 6, 2019



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Student and Teachers Test Drive Prototype Classrooms at Stephen Decatur Middle School

Decatur, IL – When the new Stephen Decatur High School opened nearly a half century ago, no one envisioned its exciting future implementing best practices in middle school curriculum and instruction 45 years later. On Wednesday, February 6, 2019, middle school students and teachers participated in hands-on experience with that future and provided valuable input on the manner in which new educational programs and spaces will be offered next school year.

“The middle school years are among the most important to students,” commented Tom Beller, middle school science teacher. “And what is happening at Stephen Decatur Middle School is going to be great for students and enable our teachers to provide the best in middle school instruction possible.”

Beginning the 2019-20 school year, Decatur Public Schools’ (DPS) middle school program will be consolidated at Stephen Decatur Middle School and will offer students a new educational experience. During the summer, the building will be renovated to accompany some exciting curriculum changes being offered in the middle school education.

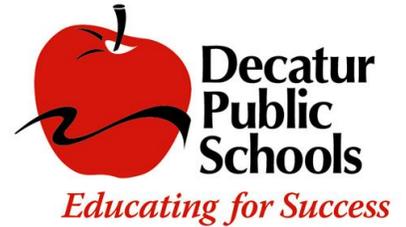
But before that renovation occurs, model classrooms or prototypes of future learning spaces will be set up inside the school. Teachers will begin using these “hacked spaces” with their students and will provide feedback to enhance final designs for the renovations. Students and their teachers will experience and evaluate three prototypes of instructional classrooms: (1) maker space; (2) working café; and (3) project-based learning.

“What a great opportunity this is for students and teachers to experience new spaces in a hands-on manner prior to renovation of the building,” added Amy Edrington, Library Media Coordinator for the District. “I loved watching the students’ faces as they walked through the prototypes. When parents understand what we are planning for our middle school, they’re going to want this type of educational experience for their kids. And when out-of-district parents consider moving to Decatur, the exciting education program at our middle school will help promote our city to new families.”

“We’re going to have a very busy spring and summer,” commented Matt Fraas, Middle School Principal. “While we have worked for a long time designing this exciting middle school program at

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Stephen Decatur, it is vitally important that we receive input from students and teachers prior to completing that work. Every single comment we receive will be processed and evaluated for both the content of our curriculum and also how to best renovate our building to enhance our program. It is difficult to overstate how much I'm looking forward to our next school year."

"The community is really fortunate to have the Stephen Decatur building," according to Sam Johnson, a principal at BLDD Architects, a firm that has worked with Decatur Schools on previous projects and a leader in innovative educational design in Illinois. "Even though it is 45 years old, it is in great shape and has lots of flexible spaces that can accommodate best practices in middle school instruction. While the building has been underutilized in previous years, that ends next year with what I think will be an amazingly exciting educational program. People from all over the state are going to be watching what is happening here in Decatur with middle school instruction."

Evaluation of the prototypes by students and teachers starts this week. But that's not the only step. Later in this school year, all Decatur residents will have an opportunity to provide input on this program at forums to be offered sometime in April or early May.

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