

# Steel Center reveals plans for \$29M renovation

*Officials said the investment reflects a strong commitment for the future education of students while supporting local and regional economic development.*

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The school districts that support Steel Center have made a big investment in the career and technical education school in Jefferson Hills.

Steel Center for Career and Technical Education Executive Director Kevin E. Rice announced Wednesday that the 11 school districts from southern Allegheny County have jointly issued a bond worth more than \$29 million.

With that money, Steel Center for CTE will undergo a building rehabilitation and expansion project.

Rice said the investment will make a direct and positive impact for the school districts, businesses and communities of Allegheny County's Mid-Mon Valley and South Hills.

Since 1964, Steel Center, which is located on North Lewis Run Road (off of Route 51), has provided learning opportunities for high school students in grades 10, 11, and 12 to begin their career preparation. Through a special partnership, the Baldwin-Whitehall, Bethel Park, Brentwood Borough, Clairton City, Duquesne City, Elizabeth Forward, South Allegheny, South Park, Steel Valley, West Jefferson Hills and West Mifflin Area school districts own and operate Steel Center.

Currently, the school has 860 students enrolled in eighteen different career preparation programs of

study.

"This renovation demonstrates our member school districts' firm commitment to current and future students as well as their investment in the local and regional economy," Rice said.

Representatives from local and regional business and industry, community leaders, school board members and school superintendents from Steel Center's 11 partner school districts were on hand for the announcement Wednesday night.

Steel Center hopes to have the project completed by December 2024, but first needs to get land development plan approval from Jefferson Hills Borough Council.

The school hopes that can be accomplished by February 2023, and once it does, the project can be put out to bid.

After a presentation, guests of Wednesday's event were invited to a former computer lab area where boards displayed the timeline and specifications of the project.

The project was designed by Matt Franz and the team at HHSDR.

From a physical standpoint, the project will mean upgrades to the building HVAC system at a cost of around \$7.6 million. There will also be improvements to make the building more ADA compliant. Classroom and learning spaces will also see upgrades, in addition to other improvements.

Rice gave a presentation showing that \$2 million will be used to expand the diesel tech program and \$1 million will be used to enhance culinary arts and baking/pastry arts programs.

The school will use \$595,000 to enhance its cosmetology program and create a salon that will be

open to outside customers.

The crowd heard Wednesday from West Jefferson Hills Superintendent Dr. Janet Sardon and David Schaap, president of the Steel Center for CTE Joint Operating Committee.

Sardon has worked in various capacities at multiple school districts that are stakeholders of Steel Center for CTE and has seen hundreds of students complete its programs.

"Students at Steel Center are provided with amazing learning opportunities that not only prepare them for their future careers, but the school also has a robust student services program to ensure that we educate the whole child," she said.

Sardon said the various district superintendents, Steel Centers Joint Operating Committee, students, staff and the community worked together to envision the project and make plans for it.

"You're going to see expanded labs for diesel technology, HVAC and the medical professions program," Sardon said. "You're going to see new retail spaces for our bakery program, our culinary arts and our cosmetology program, so you're going to see us developing and continuing to develop those entrepreneurial skills that are so important for those different programs. And then you're going to see development of work spaces to consider with our readiness skills."

The expansion of the building means the school will have space for two new programs, which are to be decided, according to Rice.

He said that "Steel Center is always evolving" and that the renovation plan "accounts for that."

"I'll work closely with our

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superintendents and board when it comes time to make those decisions on what new programs we're going to imagine down the road," Rice said.

Schaap has been on the Steel Center board for nearly 16 years. He said "a lot of good" is going to come out of the project.

"I am proud of the work that we do here for our students," Schaap said. "Steel Center has an excellent and dedicated faculty, staff, and administration who, along with our board, really care about kids."

Rice asked two former students of the career and technical education school to talk about how they benefited from an education through Steel Center.

Karuna Rai recently graduated from Steel Center and is attending Duquesne University to study nursing — continuing on the education she got at Steel Center in the health assistant program.

She said her studies at Steel Center gave her a leg up in her studies at Duquesne University's BSN program.

She encouraged other area students to consider a career and technical school.

"One of the best decisions I have ever made was to attend Steel Center," she said. "Because of my decision, I have gained a lot of experience and a foundation to where I want to be in the future."

She said the school has supportive teachers who have real-world experience, and that she made "great friends" at Steel Center.

Richard Ford of Clairton talked about how the name of Steel Center may have changed over time, but the school has continued to offer students a chance to start a career or be prepared for further education when they graduate.

Ford studied electronics at the school in the 1960s back when it was known as Steel Valley Area Technical School. After serving in the U.S. military, he enjoyed a long career as a Journeyman electronics technician for U.S. Steel.

He encouraged young people to consider a career and technical school.

He said the school "is where I got my start" and the education he got there "is what I fell back on when I came out of the military."



Jeff Stitt / Mon Valley Independent

Steel Center for CTE on Wednesday celebrated the announcement of a rehabilitation project that will cost more than \$29 million. Seen from left are Steel Center for CTE Executive Director Kevin Rice, school alumni Karuna Rai and Richard Ford, board president David Schaap and West Jefferson Hills School District Superintendent Dr. Janet Sardon.