

New charter school begins construction at SCLA

Students to learn martial arts, aircraft mechanics

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December 19, 2008

VICTORVILLE • Gary Wilkins wants to open a charter school where the students have a say in almost everything — right down to padded chairs for comfort.

“We’re starting with the students and building the school around them,” said Wilkins, one of five partners planning for a new charter school at Southern California Logistics Airport.

Wilkins surveyed more than 1,000 High Desert students, parents and teachers five years ago about what makes a great school, and he’s using those results along with more recent student feedback to design the new school. Construction of its \$8.5 million campus on 10 acres will begin in January.

Southern California Charter Schools is a middle and high school slated to open in July. Its curriculum has been developed around six small learning communities — Aviation & Space, Business, Culinary Arts, Medical, Multimedia or Teaching.

The school will partner with local companies for internships and mentorships required for students in their junior and senior years, Wilkins said.

For example, a student in the aviation and space academy could work with Emery-Riddle University to prepare to earn a private pilot license and fly in small aircraft.

“It’s a rigorous way of applying the state standards to the real-world community and real-world problems,” said Georgette Phillips, who formerly worked as the small learning community coordinator at Silverado High School and will oversee the SLCs at the new charter school. “I don’t really believe that there is a school in the High Desert that’s using this concept — the small learning communities combined with the career academies.”

The school will try to enroll about 800 students in seventh through 12th grades by 2012. Each student will be issued a laptop computer to access textbooks and complete assignments at school and at home.

“Our kids are digital natives, and we need to prepare them for careers in technology using that technology,” Wilkins said.

In addition to a focus on math and science, students will participate in four years of nontraditional physical education classes, with emphasis on martial arts along with other activities such as gymnastics, swimming and yoga.

“We know education is very important, but at the same time character development is equally important,” said Ji Mahn Nam, headmaster at Victorville Tae Kwon Do school and the future athletic director at Southern California Charter School. “You need to know how to persevere and not give up. Martial arts is a great tool for discipline, confidence and leadership.”

Wilkins submitted the petition for the charter school to the Victor Valley Union High School District earlier this week, and the petition will be up for approval at a district board meeting in early February.

Wilkins said the construction will begin because all building permits have been approved, and he does not anticipate any delays in the opening.

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