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Charter school to move to new building

Leopold gives \$250,000 to Chesapeake Science Point

By ELISABETH HULETTE, Staff Writer

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Although Chesapeake Science Point is putting its plans to add a ninth grade on hold, the north county charter school will still move into a new building next year with help from \$250,000 from County Executive John R. Leopold.

Neither school Superintendent Kevin M. Maxwell nor the county Board of

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Education requested the contribution in their budgets, so the school's leaders went straight to Leopold, a known advocate for charter schools.

"When they approached us on this, we looked at the pros and the cons," said Bob Leib, the county executive's liaison to the school board. "We believe Chesapeake Science Point is a valuable addition to our public school system."

Charter schools are run privately with public money and are subject to oversight by their local school system. In Maryland - under a law Leopold helped write - they receive public funds for operating expenses, but are on their own to find and fund facilities.

The gated, red-brick office building scouted by Chesapeake Science Point is just a few miles from the school's current location in Hanover. It will have space for a library, a gymnasium and a cafeteria - all amenities the old facility lacks, Principal Fatih Kandil said.

It also has space for a high school. Chesapeake Science Point is currently a middle school, and parents had hoped to add a ninth grade next year. That idea has been nixed, and now the plan is to wait until the 2010-11 school year, and then add grades 9 and 10.

The renovation needed to turn the new building into a school will cost \$1.7 million, but the landlord, Doug Legum, has agreed to pay \$1.2 million, said Spear Lancaster, a spokesman for Chesapeake Science Point. The \$250,000 from Leopold will pay for half the remainder, and the school's board will come up with the rest, Lancaster said.

"When you start factoring it in, it makes a heckuva lot of sense to move now," Lancaster said.

The county school board still has to approve the lease, and is set to vote May 20.

But Kathy Lane, director of alternative education for county schools, pointed out that at its old facility, Chesapeake Science Point is in the first year of a three-year lease. And the rent at that facility? It's also \$250,000 a year.

"I'm not saying they're not planning to use the county executive's money for their new facility, because maybe they are, but they also have to pay for their current facility," Lane said. "We don't have a problem with them moving, but it's our responsibility to make sure they're doing it in a fiscally responsible fashion."

Lancaster said the school is getting the landlord's permission to sublet the old building and wouldn't even have signed a three-year lease if county school officials hadn't required it.

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Chesapeake Science Point, which has about 200 students, has experienced turbulence over the last few years. It landed in hot water for some management and bookkeeping problems, and will come off probation with the school system at the end of this school year.

It isn't the first county charter school to hit facility trouble. Two years ago, KIPP Harbor Academy closed after failing to find a new building. It tried to move into the empty space at Annapolis Middle School, but the proposal was denied by school officials. Leib said by the time Leopold tried to step in, he was too late.

"That's something he remembers. We remember," Leib said.

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"In Maryland - under a law Leopold helped write - they receive public funds for operating expenses, but are on their own to find and fund facilities." Yesterday people he hired stood up for him and now this act of self-promotion is taking place. It is all so Utopian and sweet.

Ok Leopold, I will tell you what my friend, get this Gambrills Park pushed through and started, and I will call off the wolves. Deal ?

Leopold lives in a world of his own making. A little bubble of happiness and mutual back scratching.

reggie schmoenberg - annapolis, md - Karma: Terrible



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CSP - May 16, 2009

It's about time, our students deserve a better building. Not mentioned in the article is on how much our students are achieving especially in the Math, Science, and Technology fields. We need this school to continue into a high school or our students would be bored going into the regular local public schools. They need to be challenged and grow into the future scientists and mathematicians that our society needs.

Terri M. - Linthicum, - Karma: Neutral

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