

Discovery, Starr will merge

Officials hope move will boost enrollment in both programs

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Discovery School will merge with Starr Elementary next fall to become the Elizabeth Starr Academy for Young Entrepreneurs.

The Richmond Community Schools Board of School Trustees on Wednesday unanimously approved the move, which school officials say will boost enrollment for both programs.

"What we all know about successful change and transformation, it has to come from the inside out," board member Pat Heiny said, commending the staff from both schools for proposing the change. "This is a terribly exciting project from that point of view."

The merger will allow Starr, which has as many as three empty classrooms, to operate at capacity -- about 330 students -- and build a new curriculum, based on Discovery's hands-on approach to teaching civics and entrepreneurship.

"One of those skills that we'd really want to address is the idea of teamwork," Discovery Teacher Beth Makovic said. "Because we would be creating small businesses, and a small community within each classroom."

Two years ago, Discovery School hired Microsociety, a Philadelphia-based non-profit organization, to transform the school into a student-run society that teaches its students how school prepares them for the real world. Discovery's mini-society is called Kid City. And every week, students develop businesses, sell products, run a newspaper and create rules to keep order.

"We need to have kids that are creative where they're able to think outside of the box," Makovic said. "And they need to know all those basic skills. But they also need to know how to take those basic skills and do something more with that."

School officials say transportation will be provided for students -- wherever they live in Richmond -- who enroll in the school.

School officials said parents have been invited to attend information sessions about the merger since it was proposed in January. Additional meetings are being planned.

"I think I speak for Stephanie (Starr Principal Stephanie Quinn) in saying that we really appreciate the opportunity," Discovery Principal Gwinn Gibbs said. "We both care very much about our schools. We've done a lot of thinking ... This may look like a quick process, but it's been on our hearts and minds for awhile -- for what would be the best thing for our kids."