

New Las Cruces school will pave way for study of health sciences

LAS CRUCES — New Mexico's first medical and allied health care early college high school was born Wednesday as Las Cruces educators and state officials turned shovels during groundbreaking ceremonies.

The campus will be an expansion to Arrowhead Park Early College High School, at the southeast end of the New Mexico State University campus.

"This is a great day for our school district ...and our state," said Connie Phillips, president of the Las Cruces school board. "We are grateful for the governor's support of this project."

Gov. Susana Martinez was among the dignitaries who participated in the groundbreaking of what will become the second early college high school in the Las Cruces school district, the third early college high school in Doña Ana County, and the fourth in the state. Arrowhead Park Early College High School, which focuses on science, technology, engineering, physical education and mathematics, opened in 2010, and another early college high school is in the Gadsden school district.

The fourth early college high school is in Rio Rancho, and Martinez — who also spoke Wednesday at the 58th Transportation Engineering Conference in Las Cruces — told participants that five more early college high schools are expected to open in the state.

"The Las Cruces Public Schools have done much to expand early college high schools here in Las Cruces and New Mexico," Martinez said at the groundbreaking. "Days like this don't happen by accident,

they happen with a strong commitment and that's what's been shown here.

"Right now, there is a fifth grade, sixth grade student who will soon need to decide what to make of their career path. She and thousands of others will benefit from your dedication."

Early college high school provides students the opportunity to receive a high school diploma and an associate degree, or as much as two years of college credit. Students take a mixture of high school and college classes in order to obtain their high school diploma and associate's degree.

The new school will enroll about 250 students, about 60 per each of the four grade levels taught there. The school could also offer dentistry classes. LCPS officials are still deciding if the school will grow from ninth grade on, or will open in August 2014 with all four grades.

The three-building campus will be located next to Arrowhead Park Early College High School. Construction is anticipated to begin in June, and classes at the new school will start in August 2014.

The two early college high schools will likely share a principal and bus-ing and may share teachers, but the students will not move from one campus to the other for classes.

Admission to the new school will likely be based on a lottery system, so it would not solely be for students already bound for college.

The new early college high school campus will include a medical class-room area with possible cadaver, observation and simulation rooms. It could also be a beta test site for medical equipment and furniture.

The school could also be a site for current health professionals to meet their continuing education requirements, providing a possible source of income for the school.

Martinez praised the collaboration of Las Cruces Public Schools, New Mexico State University, health-care officials at Memorial Medical Center, MountainView Regional Medical Center, Advanced Care Hospital of Southern New Mexico, Rehabilitation Hospital of Southern New Mexico, Doña Ana Community College, The Bridge of Southern New Mexico, and numerous business leaders in Las Cruces and southern New Mexico to make the new early college high school a reality.

"It will change education in a way we have never seen before," Martinez said.

State Education Secretary designate Hanna Skandera pointed out the health care and social assistance sector is expected to add 5.6 million workers through 2020. Those are jobs that are in short supply, and the need to fill them is great.

"Early college high school has really changed the bar," Skandera said. "It is about a need for our kids, and it is a need we will deliver. This one (school) will be a national model. ...It is a proud and humble moment to see this community support and commitment come together."

Margie Huerta, Doña Ana Community College president, said the shared vision to make the medical and allied health care early college high school a reality was impressive.

"We couldn't have done it ...without this shared vision," Huerta said. "We worked together to bring us to this moment."

Stan Rounds, LCPS superintendent, added, "It is so that the students, the children of Doña Ana County, can realize their dreams is the reason why we're here today."

Sun-News reporter Lindsey Anderson contributed to this story.

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Early College High School

— A medical and allied health care early college high school will be built just north of Arrowhead Park Early College High School, 3600 Arrowhead Drive

— Construction of the approximately 45,000-square-foot school is anticipated to start in June, with classes beginning in August 2014

— The school will be built on 3.4 acres and will cost about \$15.5 million

— Gencon Corporation of Las Cruces is the contractor.