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Malta High to be elementary school in '04

By John Kelleher - Managing Editor

DeKALB -- The old Malta High School will soon get a face-lift, a new purpose and a new name.

The DeKalb School Board plans to open the vacant school in August 2004 to ease crowding in elementary



Chronicle photo DON VAUGHAN DeKalb City Council Chambers

schools. It should cost roughly \$1 million to get the building in working order, but school officials think many DeKalb parents would bristle if their children were assigned to the school at the district's far western end. School officials are thus trying to establish a curriculum that would lure students from the more populous portions of the district.

School board members are considering a variety of innovative programs they think would attract students.

School Superintendent Brian Ali said school officials also are mulling a number of names for the building, which ceased being a high school when the old Malta district merged with the DeKalb School District in 2000. He didn't list any of the names.

The changes at Malta are part of a redistricting of school boundary lines set to take place in August 2004, Ali said. The superintendent said a task force of parents, administrators and school employees will be appointed later this month to begin the complex and controversial task of redrawing the lines.

He said the school's leadership team has brainstormed several uses for the old Malta High. Principals were assigned the task of researching the possibilities. Ali said the options allowed students to learn in ways best suited to them.

"We talk about expanding the marketplace for our community," he said. "This does that."

"One size does not fit all," he said of the educational process.

The principals reported to the school board Monday night.

The options include:

-- A professional development school: Under this plan, a partnership would be developed with

Northern Illinois University. Professors and student teachers would work with parents and students to develop alternative methods of learning.

-- An extended day program: Before-school and after-school programs would be developed to provide students with additional tutoring and other learning experiences.

-- Multi-age classrooms: Under this plan, two grades would be grouped in the same classroom. For instance, a class would consist of first- and second-graders. The students would have the same teacher for two years, and the first and second-grade curriculums would be taught over two years.

-- Looping: Under this program, students would have the same teacher for two or three years, though the students would all be the same age.

-- All-day kindergarten: The district is in the minority of school systems nationwide in that it offers only half-day kindergarten. Under this program, parents wanting their children to attend full-day kindergarten would send them to Malta.

-- Magnet school: The school would offer enhanced programs in certain subjects -- ranging from technology to music.

Andy Small, co-chair of the district's Finance and Facilities Advisory Committee, said his panel has determined that it will cost \$800,000 to bring the old high school up to standard. That is about \$300,000 less than the district has set aside. He asked the board to decide if the \$300,000 should be spent to provide academic enhancements to the building or if the money should be spent elsewhere in the district.

School board members said they would decide within two weeks.

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