



CHARLOTTE COUNTY
Economic Development

WEEKEND WAVE

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Friday Economic Roundup

Learning on the ranch - Babcock school accepting applications

By ANNE EASKER STAFF WRITER Charlotte Sun

This time next year, Babcock Ranch will be transformed from a construction site to a front-porch neighborhood, complete with children learning and exploring at the new Babcock Neighborhood School.

After receiving approval from the Charlotte County School Board in September, the new public charter school soon will be accepting applications online.

Located within Babcock Ranch, the nation's first solar-powered town off State Road 31 in Charlotte County, the school will be open to all students in kindergarten through eighth grade, including out-of-district students who can request admission under Florida's new open enrollment law.

The school's curriculum is referred to as "greenSTEAM" - green for the eco-focus and STEAM for science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. The curriculum will also be "place-based," focusing on local landscape, history, culture and context.

"Embedded in that ecosystem, it's a perfect opportunity for the whole neighborhood to be part of things the kids discover," said Robert Kenny, a member of the school's governing board, as well as chair and associate professor in the Department of Leadership, Technology and Research at Florida Gulf Coast University.

Kenny said the curriculum will focus on problem-solving skills, training students to look at problems the way an engineer might, integrating perspectives from all the facets of a STEAM education. The arts aspect, unique from the more typical STEM programs, will take shape through design.

"You can have a solution, but it also has to be designed well," Kenny said, referring to a story about the Hoover Dam being designed as a trapezoid through trial and error.

Though it's too early to comment on many specifics of the curriculum, the school's location in the 18,000-acre site - half of which will be preserved in lakes, parks, green spaces, community gardens, forests and trails - will allow for projects focusing on water diversion or preservation of species in the ecosystem.

The solar facilities and innovative technologies also provide a "living laboratory" for students. "BNS fosters physical, mental and emotional growth by providing students with an environment that encourages interactions with and exploration of the world around them," states a press release from developer Kitson & Partners.

The first Babcock residents are expected to move in early next year, and the school will serve the needs of young families, since no other public schools exist within 10 miles of the Babcock Ranch downtown district. In the master plan, additional neighborhood schools will follow this one, with a central middle and high school campus added as the town's population grows.

The search for a principal will take place in January and February.

The board hopes to find someone with experience opening charter schools, and they plan to make a selection by March.

The number of students will depend on how many residents have moved into Babcock by next year, but officials estimate 90 to 120. Once complete, the projected population of Babcock Ranch is 50,000 people.

To find out more information or apply to the school, visit www.babcockranch.com/school. Online applications begin the week of Nov. 21.

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