

School District holds meeting to discuss Immokalee Career Center

Center to open in January 2009 at the intersection of Immokalee Drive and North Ninth Street

By [Katherine Lewis](#)

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When Dorin Oxender came to Immokalee as a career education teacher in 1995, he had a dream.

Tuesday night, he told a small group of Immokalee High School Advisory Council members that his dream was closer to coming true.

“I see the Immokalee Career Center as a beacon of hope to the community,” said Oxender, the Immokalee Career Center’s principal. “It is not only going to make Immokalee proud, but the state as well. We look at this as a national model.”

The Collier County School District held a meeting Tuesday night in Immokalee to inform residents about the Immokalee Career Center, which will open in January 2009 at the intersection of Immokalee Drive and North Ninth Street.

Oxender said the Immokalee Career Center will have programs that will allow students to develop skills needed in Southwest Florida. Those programs include child care, automotive, culinary arts, carpentry and computer drafting.

Oxender said the district has plans to infuse the classes with business alliances. He said the career center will have site-based businesses that will allow students to have real-world training.

The proposed storefronts include a bakery, a cyber cafe, a medical clinic, bank, automotive service center and a cosmetology center.

“We’re going for the big ships,” Oxender said, telling the SAC members that he has approached Starbucks and Paul Mitchell about opening storefronts.

The career center will also host community education programs such as cooking classes and GED courses.

Oxender said Immokalee High School students will be able to take classes at the career center, provided they have room in their schedules.

“There is the potential a student could graduate as a senior with their licensed practical nursing certificate,” he said. “It might give students an incentive to stay in school, if they are thinking about leaving.”

Oxender said once the new career center is open, he hopes the number of students will grow from 225 during the day and 275 at night to about 650 students during the day and 600 at night.

Oxender said the plan is to put a chain link fence around the current Learning Center, which occupies the land, June 11. He said the district will spend two weeks removing asbestos from the building. In July, the district will begin a demolition of the Learning Center, and construction will begin in September.

“Construction will take 13 months when it starts,” he said. Programs should begin by January 2009, he said.

Gary Krueger with Schenkel Shultz Architects said the 90,000-square-foot facility has an interesting concept. The building is designed so that the community can access programs such as the automotive center and separates those programs from the classrooms.

The complex will consist of one three-story building and two one-story buildings, Krueger said. The three-story building will include the administration for the Immokalee Career Center and academic classrooms and labs like business technology and nursing. One of the smaller buildings will host the culinary arts classrooms, kitchen and a dining facility. The other small building will hold the trades with shops for electricians, carpentry and automotive trades.

The three buildings will be constructed around a central courtyard, which will be used for outdoor activities and shared instruction, Krueger said.

The site, because it will host adult education, will have a more civic-looking structure.

“The career center is going to look different than a school,” Oxender said.

Oxender said the last true hurdle for the Immokalee Career Center to cross will be getting a variance to build the third floor of the building. The district will ask the county for a variance to increase the height of the building from two floors to three.

SAC committee members were concerned about the lack of a traffic light at the intersection of the Immokalee Career Center, which shares the intersection with Immokalee High School and Immokalee Middle School. The intersection is currently a four-way stop.

“You are talking about thousands of students who will be walking through that intersection within 45 minutes to an hour of being released,” said Wendy Gallegos, an Immokalee Middle School teacher. “There are going to be a lot of cars traveling through there.”

Oxender said the school district will address the issue of putting a traffic light at the intersection.