

https://dentonrc.com/news/denton/denton-parks-and-rec-school-district-consider-collaborations-to-benefit-whole-community/article_12d6d328-a17b-5134-a22c-1855f5c762fb.html

FEATURED

Denton Parks and Rec, school district consider collaborations to benefit whole community

By Lucinda Breeding-Gonzales Staff Writer cbreeding@dentonrc.com

Nov 29, 2022

Lucinda Breeding-Gonzales

Education reporter

Denton ISD leaders and the City Council and staff worked through a stacked agenda Tuesday morning, but it was the final report that promises payoff for students and the neighborhoods surrounding selected campuses.



Denton City Council member Brian Beck asks how the city can better consider Denton's public schools as it makes policies during Tuesday's joint meeting of the council and school board. Pictured, from left, are Mia Price, Denton school board president; Beck; school board member Sheryl English; Jamie Wilson, Denton ISD superintendent; and Sara Hensley, Denton city manager.

Lucinda Breeding-Gonzales/DRC

Among the upcoming projects was a nugget that could put LaGrone Academy students to work for the sorts of things locals — and tourists — see as they make their way around town.

"We had a meeting out there a couple of weeks ago, and I really didn't understand the magnitude of opportunities, whether it's future employees, artwork, welding projects that needed organization and maintenance, or just better signage for the park system. We had a

joint meeting that was fantastic. They cranked it up really fast,” Denton Parks and Recreation Director Gary Packan told the school and city leaders assembled for the meeting.

Packan said his department discovered that the school district’s vocational–technological complex, which is now a school of choice (meaning it accepts high school students from outside of Denton ISD), has both the technology and the talent to put students to work.

Specifically, Packan cited the possibility of having students assist in operating plasma cutters to make park benches, signs and artwork. LaGrone students could also be tapped to design wraps, which are special applications on stationary structures that could punctuate the local landscape with artwork covering up unsightly mechanical and structural objects, in the downtown cultural arts district.

 Watch and learn: Families get a closer look at LaGrone Academy's vocational programs

Packan was particularly pleased that the department could potentially hire LaGrone students and graduates.

“So we were so excited going out there, and we’re looking forward to going back out next week to take our HR team out there,” Packan said. “We want to start figuring out when we can go out there with all our departments to discuss job opportunities, whether it’s seasonal, summer or full time.”

The LaGrone Academy has enjoyed a growing public profile as the national discussion and legislation on student debt relief has brought the trades back into the forefront. The district’s advanced technology campus offers the long–standing trade education programs for future auto mechanics, welders and hairstylists, but the complex is also preparing the next generation of first responders and attorneys, robotics engineers, health care workers, culinary workers, architects, photographers, designers and teachers.

Partnerships that put students on the path to jobs also help tick boxes for the school district, which is working to increase the number of students who are ready for jobs, college or the military when they graduate.

On the campus level, Packan said, the city is looking for ways to serve residents in partnership with schools. The Parks and Recreation Department is feeling the surge in population along with the school district.

"We've had a number of discussions and meetings with all levels of leadership, from the city manager on down city staff to [Denton ISD Superintendent] Dr. [Jamie] Wilson and school principals in regards to what we're trying to get to so that we can take advantage of programming opportunities, facility opportunities to expand, keep up with the growth we're having. We're having some of the same challenges you are. We had as many children active in summer camps as we had on waiting lists."

Packan said Denton ISD and the parks department are looking ahead to using Calhoun Middle School and Evers Park Elementary School as sites for summer camps and summer meals, among other programming. The old Denton High School will be a site for the Special Olympics summer track program, with the football, soccer and softball areas and tennis courts being used for general programming and events. The two entities are eyeing the new Denton High School as a future site for a possible neighborhood park and hiking and biking trails used in partnership with the district's mountain bike club.

The parks department gave a report on other projects that pair Denton students and residents:

- The department gave an update on the aquatics master plan: A kickoff event on Sept. 29 included partner representatives from Texas Woman's University, the University of North Texas, Denton ISD and the city, and each group discussed needs and goals. The parks department assessed facility needs with consultants and drew public input during community events, surveys and a public meeting on Nov. 10. The department reviewed its findings and completed the plan for board and council approval.
- The aquatics center (which includes the Denton Natatorium) will accommodate expanded meet and tournament schedules for Denton ISD swimmers, and the addition of University Interscholastic League water polo leagues. The center is scheduled for a \$470 million capital maintenance program, as well as salary adjustments to attract aquatics staff to pre-pandemic levels. The center has added seasonal and part-time positions and added an aquatics technician back to the staff after the pandemic.
- The parks department reported it is working on an amendment to add amenities to the completed McMath Middle School agreement.
- The department completed the Borman Elementary School easement, which connects the new Eagle Creek neighborhood to Denia Park.

LUCINDA BREEDING-GONZALES can be reached at 940-566-6877 and via Twitter at @LBreedingDRC.