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Pictured above is an aerial photo of the ongoing construction of the new Marion County Middle/High School.

New school construction in Marion County could be done *this* year

Other school news: First Baptist Church to establish new music program

By RICHARD HARRIS

The Marion County Board of Education has begun the process of attempting to sell the existing middle/high school as construction of the new school clips along at a steady pace. School Board members recently discussed the existing school and the school-to-be, along with a variety of other topics, in their official meetings.

As the aerial photo accompanying this article shows, the campus of the future Marion County Middle/High School is coming along nicely. The school building and the rest of the campus, including the athletic fields, is on pace to be totally finished by this coming December. Of course inclement weather and other unforeseen factors could push the end date back, but it currently looks like the school will be in place by around Christmas of 2011.

If that completion date holds steady, there would be a window of opportunity to go ahead and have the last half of the next school year (2011-2012) in the new school. However, while no official vote has been taken on the subject, the School Board officials seem to be leaning strongly toward waiting until the start of the 2012-13 school

The Board of Education has also started the process of attempting to find buyer for the 'old' school.

year.

The most likely scenario is that some of the sports facilities (baseball, tennis, track) may use the new facilities in the spring of 2012, but classes won't open in the new school until the fall of 2012.

As for the sale of the existing school, the BOE has simply given the superintendent formal permission to begin the process of advertising for a potential buyer.

New Music Program: Other recent news includes the approval of a new public/private partnership to help bring some music back into the school system. While the music program, due to budget cuts, has largely been cut out in recent years, officials believe that it would be good to include music offerings to students. Therefore, they were pleased to learn of a proposal by First Baptist Church of Buena Vista and the ROC (Recreational Outreach Center) to start a program of music education and appreciation at

L.K. Moss Elementary School. The program will be offered to fifth grade students and will be limited to 30 participants. It will be an afterschool choir program that gives students an opportunity to learn more about singing and to also go and perform. Rev. Chris Hess of First Baptist will lead the choir, which will not be funded by the school system.

New Buses: The BOE approved the purchase of two new school buses during a recent meeting. These two 2012 Blue Bird Vision buses, which are valued at \$88,587, will cost the local system only \$12,295 each, as state funding has been approved for the rest of the amount.

Pre-K Cut: Due to changes in the Georgia Lottery funded programs, it looks like the Pre-K program will be cut by 20 days next year (from 180 to 160 days). This is due to the State Legislature passing reforms because they believe funds from the Lottery cannot pay for the system as it currently exists. (There have also been changes

in the HOPE Scholarship.)

Other Items

Other recent actions taken by the School Board include:

* Making plans for the school system to be represented (along with other local agencies) in an upcoming trip to Fort Knox (which is in the process of being relocated as a part of nearby Fort Benning). Officials will give soldiers and their families an overview of Marion County.

* Approval of up to \$30,000 for an additional well at the site of the new school. This well (which was already included in the total construction price) will be used for irrigation for the school grounds and athletic fields.

* The hiring for the next school year of Courtney Hall (high school math, coming from Columbus High) and Wayne Johnson (special education teacher who will also help as a coach in various areas).

* The hiring of Doris Wilson as a substitute teacher.

* The tentative approval of a calendar for the next school year.

* The extension of the superintendent's contract for another year (through June, 2014).