

## Brillion Middle School enhancing STEM area

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BRILLION – There will soon be a renovated and upgraded STEM area inside of Brillion Middle School.

The existing science, technical, engineering and mathematics area in the middle school is approximately 3,000-square feet.

“It’s basically going to be gutting that whole area, adding a lot more natural light and then we’re kind of redesigning it so there’s more work-space and a lot more storage space,” Madison said.

The new design will be better, Madison said, and will have a mezzanine area.

“Similar to like the elementary (STEM Center) so that we can do some work with aerodynamics and gravity and that kind of thing,” Madison said.

Madison says that the elementary and high school STEM areas have a



A rendering outside of the Brillion Elementary/Middle School building shows what the revamped STEM area in the building will look like for middle school students. The district expects the project construction to be complete by December or January. (David Nordby/BN)

“certain vibe,” and they are working to create something that fits the middle school ages well.

“We built the high school one and we built the elementary one. We renovated this one about 10 years ago but never really created that vibe for our middle school kids like we did everybody else,” Madison said.

The building will have a new color scheme and graphics.

“Just kind of make it a special place for those middle grades, those kids, those early adolescents. They’re not quite into the total shop scene yet but they like to design, and they like to work and create things, so that was really what we went for there,” Madison said.

Most of the funding for the physical construction is left over from the

Phase III referendum project in the elementary/middle school building.

“We did get a gift from Ariens Company. They’re basically helping us make all the ... graphics, helping make it get that vibe,” Madison said.

Better utilizing the middle school STEM area has been on the district’s mind.

“We knew that was something that we needed to have happen,” Madison said. “We kind of had money set aside to do some of that in that referendum budget, but we wanted to keep that money, because it’s a taxpayer thing ... we wanted to make sure everything else happened first.”

Once the Phase III project was complete, they looked further at remaining funds.

“It worked out. We did some savings,” Madison said.

Madison said the district is still trying to plan for the future with things like the middle school STEM space while simultaneously keeping

school safely open during the pandemic.

“We also want to keep really moving forward in the areas that we’ve kind of had a history of being progressive in,” Madison said.

Students will likely be using the space as soon as December or January, assuming the school year remains in-person.

“I would say in about eight weeks it’s going to be pretty much done,” Madison said.

Some furniture and equipment for the space could take a year or two.

“We wanted to make sure we had enough money to at least finish the construction first because you always get surprises with that,” Madison said.

With the state-of-the-art elementary STEM Center complete in 2017, and the high school STEM area previously polished, the middle school space had fallen behind.

“We took that space and upgrad-

ed it quite a bit in 2010, but we didn’t upgrade it this much,” Madison said.

“That was an innovative thing to do was to really create a space for elementary STEM because elementary schools don’t have that. Once we did that, it was like this middle school space is really not the vibe they get everywhere else, so we knew we had to upgrade that.”

Upgrading different spaces allows the district to keep progressing, Madison said.

“Something looks bad and something looks ok, well then you fix the bad thing, and the ok thing looks bad. It’s like it’s this constant moving,” Madison said.

The goal, Madison says, is to keep students engaged with a problem-solving approach through different materials and processes in STEM.

“What that looks like for an elementary kid versus a middle school kid versus a high school kid, probably part of it is the machines get

bigger ... and better,” Madison said. “You’re making paper airplanes in elementary school, you’re designing a high-mileage vehicle in high school, and it kind of just progresses up through that.”

“As they get older, they can just solve bigger problems and make bigger solutions, but that still is the same concept from kindergarten all the way to 12th grade. It’s all about identifying a problem, designing a solution and building a solution to that problem, and incorporating probably some career components to that,” Madison said.

The history of the middle school space goes back decades. It has always been the technical education, shop or STEM area.

“It’s been, like, the shop since the 1950s, so that’s always been the place where there’s shop class then it was middle school technical education and now it’s really going to be more of a STEM center,” Madison said.