

Hawaii News

Oahu school clears way for younger crowd

By Dominique Times - dtimes@staradvertiser.com

August 8, 2016



BRUCE ASATO / BASATO@STARADVERTISER.COM

David Gaudi, head of school at Saint Mark Lutheran School, shows a proposed design of the new early learning center.



STAR-ADVERTISER

An artist's rendering of the proposed Saint Mark Lutheran School early learning center.

Within the next two years, Saint Mark Lutheran School in Kaneohe will expand both its campus and curriculum with the addition of a new preschool learning center.

Construction of a two-story, 10,000-square-foot building at the front of the school's campus alongside Saint Mark Lutheran Church is expected to begin next summer. The \$3 million structure will house three preschool classrooms, administrative offices, a library, a tech center and a health room. Behind the building a new playground will be built specifically for the preschool students.

The head of school, David Gaudi, said he's hopeful construction will be completed by the fall semester in 2018.

The preschool center will sit on the land facing the school's parking lot currently occupied by the administrative office building and kindergarten classroom — two of the oldest buildings on campus — which will be demolished. Gaudi said the beams and windows from the old buildings will be sent to Re-Use Hawaii.

During construction the kindergarten class will be permanently relocated to another room on campus, and administrative offices will move temporarily to the multipurpose room or a portable space.

Savings, grants and donations from the church and community will cover project expenses.

According to Gaudi, Saint Mark Lutheran faculty and board members have been discussing the creation of an early childhood development center for nearly a decade. The K-8 school originally planned to add a preschool with the construction of its gymnasium, which was completed in 2002, but project costs forced them to shelve the idea.

In 2008 Gaudi and other board members drew preliminary plans for a preschool again, but the economic downturn threw a wrench into the plans.

Gaudi said the idea was resurrected in 2013, and the board began drawing up plans and gathering community support. He said requests from parents and community members as well as increasing enrollment in nearby schools inspired them to add early education to the curriculum.

“We looked at enrollments at the current preschools in our neighborhood and realized that most of the schools around us are full or almost at capacity,” Gaudi said. “And every year we get numerous requests for a preschool, so after listening to that we decided to take action.”

The new classrooms will be constructed to hold 20 students per class, potentially expanding the school's enrollment to 260 from 200 students. Three preschool teachers, three full-time aides and an early education director will be added to the faculty as well.

Most of Saint Mark Lutheran's 2.5-acre campus will not undergo construction: The elementary and middle school buildings will remain in place as well as the gymnasium, outdoor basketball court and field area. The thoroughfare running between the current kindergarten and office building will also be incorporated into the new design.

Gaudi said he's looking forward to modernizing the campus and meeting a need in the community.

"We'll have an integrated, collaborative learning space, which we don't currently have, and we'll provide the community with additional early learning opportunities," he said. "It's a fun project, exciting project, but it's also needed."