

# TEXAS CITY INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## **Valero to fund STEM lab at new Blocker Middle School in TCISD**

TEXAS CITY – With a focus on Science Technology Engineering and Math (STEM) growing in the state of Texas, the new Blocker Middle School will have the first STEM laboratory in Texas City ISD. Valero is fully funding the installation and implementation of the STEM SmartLab program at \$201,559.

Pricing includes a five-year Curriculum and Support Agreement to ensure that the new SmartLab continues to perform at its peak performance with technical and pedagogical support, enhancements, replacement parts, access to updates and additions, and additional onsite professional development. The initial cost of the lab is a one-time investment that will benefit Texas City ISD students for years to come. Development plans are currently also being made to expand this program to Texas City High School to give students an even greater knowledge of STEM and the SmartLab approach to learning.

The STEM SmartLab will provide a unique opportunity for the 7th and 8th grade students at Blocker Middle School, providing hands-on, relevant, and engaging STEM related activities for years to come. The new Blocker Middle School (currently under construction and scheduled to open in August 2014) is designed to bring 21st Century Learning to our community. The SmartLab has been incorporated into the Blocker Middle School design from the onset of the design process.

This turnkey learning environment features fully integrated systems of hardware, software, furniture, curriculum, educational kits, manipulatives, professional development, assessment tools and ongoing support. Technology is integrated with core academic subjects in a unique project-based approach to learning. It empowers both teachers and students to develop and explore areas of personal interest – while conforming to state and national standards. Students have numerous opportunities to apply principles of math, science, language arts and other academic disciplines in engaging relevant ways. As they create and present portfolios of their work, they develop communication skills vital to scholastic and professional success.

The principles that guide the custom design of each learning environment are based on leading-edge research into how students learn. Educational theories of constructivism, brain-based learning and multiple intelligences are combined with over 20 years of field testing, research, development and program refinement. The result is a powerful learning environment that engages learners of all abilities and opens new doors to academic and personal success.

Implementation will begin immediately upon the opening of the new Blocker campus for the 2014/2015 school year. About 350 students will initially be able to access the lab during the school year selecting it as a semester elective twice a year. Additional plans include opening the lab for students after school so that additional time can be offered for students that are working on projects in the SmartLab.

The SmartLab is comprised of flexible work-learning stations called “islands”. Each island is a collection of furniture and equipment that will accommodate up to six students at a time. Four islands will be installed to accommodate a regular classroom of 24 students.

Every aspect of the SmartLab environment is carefully designed and integrated to foster development of higher order thinking skills and 21st century competencies. Problem solving, self-direction, analysis and synthesis, creativity, project management, collaboration and communication skills are among the critical abilities students are expected to gain from their SmartLab experience.

Accordingly, the SmartLab environment is provisioned with curriculum resources to support, guide, and enhance this journey. Careful attention has been given to developing resources that provide support and direction within what is, at its core, a learner-centered environment. Each of the curriculum resources noted below work in concert with the environment design, equipment and learning apparatus, and professional development to motivate, engage and inspire learners of all ability levels.

A team of TCISD staff administrators will design the island labs that most fit the needs of students at Blocker Middle School. They will have many curriculum resources to choose from, including alternative a renewable energy, computer graphics, science and data acquisition, robotics and control technology, circuitry, publishing/multimedia, computer simulation, mechanics and structures.

Facilitator training and professional development is a critical element in the success of the SmartLab environment. Included in the SmartLab budget is a total of four (4) days of on-site facilitator training and professional development services. This training and development program is intended for those educators who will be directly involved in the day-to-day activities in the SmartLab (including up to four educators designated as alternate SmartLab facilitators). Technical concepts as well as good facilitation techniques will be discussed and practiced.

Texas City ISD is committed to the long-term success of this program and will budget \$5,000 in each year to the Blocker Middle School budget for the ongoing yearly maintenance. The district IT Department Technology Plan will also include equipment needs in its refresh plans on a rotating basis so that costs can be managed accordingly by the district.