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## Editorial: Sounds of progress at educational centers in Hadley, Amherst

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Building projects in Amherst and Hadley that garnered headlines this week will take vibrant educational ventures to the next level. Both the Hitchcock Center for the Environment in Amherst and the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School in Hadley are poised for growth and change that will better serve thousands of families in the Valley.

These institutions couldn't be planning to grow so radically without public support, in the form of taxpayer support and private donations. It falls to them now to earn that backing by embracing their missions — helping people understand subtleties of the natural world, for one, and preparing young people to compete in a global economy, for the other.

This week, officials with the charter school gathered to celebrate the start of construction of a four-story addition to the 317 Russell St. school that will more than double space available, as the institution adds classes on its way to becoming a kindergarten through Grade 12 school by 2018. The project is relying in part on a \$10.6 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The school's executive director this week saluted the department's Rural Development division not only for the latest mortgage assistance, but earlier backing to buy and renovate its home in the former Kidsports complex on Route 9.

Without more bricks and mortar, figuratively speaking, the charter school could not realize its goal of taking students all the way to proficiency in Mandarin at the time of high school graduation. With an added 38,400 square feet of space, the school will be able to expand its enrollment from 320 today to 584 by 2018.

The suitability of federal "rural development" money may seem like a stretch for a charter school, but by national standards, our region is rural. The funding is designed to act as a kind of economic stimulus, and that isn't far-fetched. Construction will provide a healthy bump for the construction trades here. The bigger the school, the more it can serve families who want their children to be able to gain language skills that will enable them, if they choose, to be part in deepening relations between the U.S. and China.

As they benefit again from public funding, the charter school's leaders should make

every effort to involve surrounding communities in their operations and set an open-door policy.

Meantime, shovels aren't quite ready to break ground on the Hitchcock Center's next home on the Hampshire College campus. But the nonprofit Amherst center is closing the gap on its fundraising goal of \$5.8 million. Last week, it gathered supporters, including U.S. Rep. James McGovern and former U.S. Rep. John Olver, to celebrate the fact that it just secured a \$600,000 matching grant from the state's Cultural Facilities Fund. The money brings it to \$3.6 million of its capital campaign.

Just as the charter school is outgrowing its space, the Hitchcock Center, located for four decades in a carriage house at the Larch Hill Conservation Area off South Pleasant Street, needs more room to serve the roughly 8,000 people who participate in its programs every year.

When work begins early next year, the center aims to create a new breed of building. Since "environment" is in the group's name, it's only fitting that it be in its bones as well.

The project will be able to serve as a living example of how to erect a structure that adds to, rather than detract from, its surroundings. The sun's energy will power it; rainfall will be captured and reused. By taking what's known as the Living Building Challenge, the center will operate in its next home without drawing on outside energy or water supplies, or discharging septic waste.

There's quite a lesson in that, and Hitchcock's educators will be able to show they practice what they preach.