

Committee: Neidig upgrades critical to recommendation, district's future

By Gary Weckselblatt

Parents on the Elementary Reassignment Committee had a big "If" in their unanimous recommendation on how to proceed if the Quakertown Community School Board votes to close Tohickon Valley Elementary School.

An immediate renovation and addition to Neidig Elementary School must be part of the package if the committee's best plan is adopted by the Board. TVES students would then be reassigned, by neighborhood, to Neidig, Pfaff, Quakertown and Trumbauersville elementaries.

This recommendation falls in line with the 2016 Facilities Study, which cites the Neidig upgrades as a key step toward investing in repairs and upgrades of district facilities. That's a commitment shared by the Board and Administration after years of neglect to its buildings.

The closing of TVES would mean an annual savings of \$1.77 million. There would also be an \$8.4 million cost avoidance identified in the Facilities Plan. In addition, sale of the property could mean a \$1.5 million infusion for the district.

Neidig, built in 1958, was partially renovated in 1987. A new renovation, to bring the school into compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act, and an addition is estimated to cost as much as \$20 million.

If those upgrades, originally recommended by the Community Facilities Study Committee, would begin next summer, it would be the "least disruptive" plan of action, the committee decided, and would not include "temporary costs," for things such as modular classrooms.

"The two are married," said Stephanie Zajkowski, a parent and committee member. "If you are not going to renovate, we would be making a different recommendation. We chose this because it has the least impact. There's no impact on curriculum. There's no wasting money."

Colleen Miller, also a parent on the committee, said "There would be huge long-term gains if we can address that facilities plan."

The committee, made up of parents and representatives of each elementary school, in addition to principals Orathia T. Bradley of Tohickon Valley and K. Eric



Members of the Elementary Reassignment Committee following their presentation to the Quakertown Community School Board.

Thompson of Pfaff, was facilitated by Nancianne Edwards, the district's assistant superintendent.

She praised the committee for "really digging into this to get you the best information to help you make your decision."

The positives include:

- Keeping neighborhoods together
- Reassigning only TVES students
- Most cost-effective option
- Maintaining the current grade structure
- Staying on target with the Facilities plan

The negatives include:

- Short-term elementary crowding for two to three years as Neidig is renovated
- TVES students are divided among four schools
- Bus routes would be longer for some students

Should the Board move forward with the committee recommendation, elementary class size would temporarily increase from an average of 21.4 students to 23.4 per class. Once the Neidig renovation is complete, however, class sizes would return to their current numbers. Future plans for the eventual construction of a new elementary school on district property along Pumping Station Road, could

also potentially lower class size.

If the Board chose not to make improvements to Neidig, the committee recommended a configuration of K-4 in all elementary schools and adding fifth graders to the Sixth Grade Center.

That plan, however, would mean between eight and 10 modular classrooms on Ninth Street, outside the SGC. The estimated costs for each modular is \$120,000 per year.

"The use of modulators was definitely a very important thing to stay away from," said Diane Ricchino, a parent on the committee. She said the committee's recommendation "will help us get back to that facilities plan and move forward."

The issue will be proposed to School Directors for a vote at the Dec. 7 Board meeting to allow for financial consideration in the development of a preliminary budget, which the Board will need to vote on in January. Edwards has offered to meet with the four new members, who will be sworn in on Dec. 7, to help get them up to speed with the committee's work.

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