Neidig’s renovation offers ‘limitless possibilities’

At a ceremonial groundbreaking, school officials and students spoke of the new 21st century educational facility creating “more opportunities to inspire greatness.”

By Gary Weckselblatt

After a year-and-a-half of planning, Neidig Elementary School celebrated its future on a warm Wednesday morning with a groundbreaking ceremony that highlighted how the school’s great tradition will continue in a new 21st century educational facility 15 months from now.

“The traditions from the past, and everything that made Neidig Elementary School the great school that it is today are all coming with us as we start this renovation and addition project,” Principal Scott Godshalk said. “We honor those traditions from Neidig’s past, and we look forward to the limitless possibilities our updated 21st century school will provide.”

Mr. Godshalk emceed a marvelous event that included all 400 Neidig students and teachers, District officials, School Directors and visiting dignitaries.

Once the school year ends on June 14, Neidig will undergo a major addition and renovation project during the 2019-20 school year. The cur-
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rent 45,000-square-foot, 1950s-era building will be transformed into an 83,373-square-foot facility.

The current fifth-grade wing will be demolished, and a new two-story classroom wing will take its place. The current primary wing (kindergarten through second grade) will remain and receive a complete renovation. While the current school can hold 400 students, the new Neidig will fit 600 students.

The building will have equitable spaces that students and teachers have in Pfaff Elementary School: a standalone cafeteria, gym, music and art classrooms, office spaces and air conditioning, an item mentioned by several speakers. The project will break ground shortly with the building of a new bus loop behind the school.

The work is expected to cost $27.1 million, with a $1.9 million contingency set aside. In the meantime, in 2019-20, students will attend the former Tohickon Valley Elementary School, which the district closed last year, and has since been sold to Faith Christian Academy. The district is leasing TVES back from Faith Christian at no cost.

Following the four-year high school renovation project, the renovation of Neidig, and with the creation

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of a Capital Reserve Fund for building maintenance, handling the needs of eight schools should be more manageable into the future.

Shifting to Tohickon Valley for one year while the renovation took place was a safety, time and money savings idea inspired by James P. Lynch, a principal at D’Huy Engineering, the project’s construction manager. He made the recommendation to the School Board, which supported the plan.

“Part of the vision we have in Quakertown is to get our schools in better shape for you guys,” School Board President Steaven Klein said. “It’s going to be a really long 15 months, but you will be awed by what you are going to see.”

Fellow Director Kaylyn Mitchell, chair of the Facilities Committee, was a hit with the students as she went over “The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People,” which Neidig students learn as part of their leadership education.

“The decision to renovate Neidig was a proactive step

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to keep our facilities in great condition,” said Mrs. Mitchell, whose son Nick is a fourth-grader at Neidig. Younger son Christian is a future Neidig student. “We had to begin with the end in mind and make decisions early that would set us up for success.”

She said she was proud of the community partnership that was part of the process.

Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner called the planning a “total community collaboration,” including at the municipal level with Quakertown Borough and Richland Township. The 14-acre Neidig property resides in both municipalities.

“The work of a lot of people went into this day,” Dr. Harner said. “In 15 months we will have a new building, and it will be awesome.”

Mr. Godshalk, who set up meetings for Neidig’s neighbors to learn about the project, also created a document on Neidig’s web page for parents to give feedback, and held frequent meetings with teachers to get their thoughts.

At the May 29 groundbreaking, he had Mrs. Bruno, co-president of People Aiding Learning, Neidig’s parent-teacher organization, speak. He also gave the microphone to two third-graders, Keira Tenney and Jace Walsh. The third-graders will be the first graduates of the new Neidig.

Jace said he attended kindergarten at Tohickon Valley and “everybody will like it there. I’m really excited for the change that is coming.”

Keira said she is no longer “sad or nervous” about the temporary shift but is “excited and happy.”

For the ceremony, Mr. Godshalk placed a portrait of Dr. Joseph S. Neidig in front of the podium. Dr. Neidig was QCSD’s superintendent from 1924 to 1958. “He was an inspiring leader, and he did so much for children and for Quakertown,” Mr. Godshalk said. “I am sure if Dr. Neidig were here today, he would be happy with what happens within the walls of the school that carries his name.

“When we return to Neidig, there will be new spaces for students to create. There will be new spaces for students to collaborate. There will be new spaces for students and teachers to communicate, and there will be updated spaces for students to sharpen their critical thinking skills. Neidig has always been great. This project provides our teachers, our students, and our Neidig families with even more opportunities to inspire greatness. I am so incredibly excited for this project to begin.”

Gary Weckselblatt, QCSD Director of Communications, writes about the people and the programs that impact the Quakertown Community School District. He can be reached at 215-529-2028 or gweckselblatt@qcsd.org.