Consolidation receives high marks

The creation of a Sixth Grade Center with 7th and 8th graders at Strayer has been “more successful than any of us thought it would be,” one parent said.

By Gary Weckselblatt

Two months into the school year, the idea of placing sixth-grade students into a school just for themselves is receiving rave reviews.

“It’s really helped us ease into middle school as opposed to being thrown in,” said Julia Witte, one of several students relishing her new “home.”

Fellow sixth grader Brooke Alsante added “When you’re a younger student, things can be really hard. Eighth graders can really bully on sixth graders.”

“This is a less stressful environment as young people are growing into adulthood,” said Riley Mann, president of the SGC student government. “Middle school is a very tough transition. A school environment can be intimidating at times. The teachers have done an excellent job allowing us to express ourselves. It’s been a very accepting environment.”

Formerly the Freshman Center, the newly named Sixth Grade Center houses students who previously would have attended Milford and Strayer middle schools. When the School Board voted last July to close Milford, parents on the Community Facilities Study Committee believed shifting sixth graders to their own school would benefit the youngsters in both the SGC and Strayer. And since the newly renovated Quakertown Community High School could handle the addition of ninth graders, the Board agreed with the committee’s consolidation plans.

“It’s been more successful than any of us thought it would be,” said Amy Harwick, a committee member who pushed for the SGC. “It’s such a vital year. The kids are coming together earlier with a chance to widen that circle of friends they can make. And they can take that with them as they move forward. I’ve spoken to a lot of parents, and they all seem to agree that their kids are flourishing. Everyone’s getting the same education, the same opportunities. That’s something that’s nice about it. Kids won’t be slipping through...
"This is a less stressful environment as young people are growing into adulthood. Middle school is a very tough transition. A school environment can be intimidating at times. The teachers have done an excellent job allowing us to express ourselves. It's been a very accepting environment."

Riley Mann, Sixth Grade Center student government president

We're connecting more on a grade level than we ever did before. I think that by making us one school, it'll make us better people. Stuff like this happens and you just have to make the best of it.

Gabby Casey, a seventh grader, said "We're one community now." Strayer Principal Derek Peiffer, who spent 10 years in the same position at Milford, said one benefit of the consolidation is the loss of the Milford-Strayer rivalry.

"Everyone had to come together in high school at one point," he said. "Now they're coming together sooner and building a class camaraderie. And this is a great opportunity to build something new. Kids now have an exciting opportunity to build their legacy."

Gary Weckselblatt, 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.