



# QUAKERTOWN COMMUNITY SCHOOL BOARD SPRING NEWSLETTER

May, 2018

## With community voices heard, Board supports Neidig plans, 8-0

After a process that began in December with the development of design plans for a Neidig Elementary School renovation, the Quakertown Community School Board voted 8-0 May 10th on what became known as Option D.

That choice was heavily favored by neighbors of the school, and emerged after residents were included in several feedback sessions with the architect, David Schrader of Schrader Group Architecture, and a district design team.

"We've done a good job including the community in the process," said Board President Steaven Klein. "All constituents have had a voice, and seem most pleased with this choice, especially the closest neighbors. This is an integral part of our education plan moving forward."

David Ochmanowicz Jr., the Board's newly elected vice president, said "After talking with many community members and parents that look forward to seeing the Neidig Construction proceed, I believe the overall community support for the building improvements is positive. The long overdue renovations and the much needed addition will reinvigorate a dated facility and provide positive improvements to our district infrastructure."

Neidig Principal Scott Godshalk, speaking before the Board prior to its vote, described the plans as "the product of all the stakeholders in the Neidig community. There has been teacher feedback, parent feedback, some student feedback, Facilities Department feedback and community feedback."

"The Neidig community is excited about this work. Our mission at Neidig is to build a community of leaders who inspire greatness. We do that every day, and we can't wait to see what type of additional, creative, inspirational actions our



**More than 30 nearby neighbors of Neidig Elementary gave their thoughts on renovation options at an April 24 meeting. It was one of several meetings where the school's future was discussed.**

### QCSD Mission

**Our mission is to prepare all students with the knowledge, habits and skills they need to graduate ready for college or career and for engaged citizenship, all at the best value to our community.**

students will take once they have access to a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Facility.

"Current Neidig students love their school. However, the last structural project at our school was over 30 years ago. This results in daily concerns. Pipes bursting, hallways being flooded, sinks overflowing, leaks, structural flaws, and it gets hot. We

do not have AC in most of the building."

Renovating Neidig has its challenges, as the 14-acre site is located in both Quakertown and Richland, and the township portion sits in a floodplain. Richland, however, has agreed to cede approval to Quakertown, allowing district representatives to seek building permits in one municipality.

Some key points in Option D include:

- Minimizing development on Richland portion of proper-

**See NEIDIG RENOVATIONS on Page 3**

## In search of civility: Board to enforce public speaking policy

***"We have different views on things, and that's okay to not agree. ... The unhealthy part is when it becomes a personal attack."***



**Keith  
Micucci**

With a lack of decorum on display in comments made by speakers addressing the Quakertown Community School Board and Directors themselves, members are calling for enforcement of Board policy to elevate the conversation.

"We have different views on things, and that's okay to not agree," said Keith Micucci. "And we can debate. And we can argue

about that. And there's nothing wrong with that. The unhealthy part is when it becomes a personal attack."

And there's been plenty of that in recent meetings as public comments have devolved into personal attacks concerning issues such as furloughs, budget priorities and student achievement.

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## POLICY

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Board Policy 903, Public Participation in Board Meetings, addresses etiquette, though President Steaven Klein admitted "I need to do a better job" in enforcing the policy.

"There have been a couple of instances recently where people have gone outside of these rules," Klein said. "They've addressed different board members. I need to do a better job in - I'm not going to say policing - but reminding people of the rules, so everybody stays to the rules."

"People tonight said the kids are watching, and I agree. I think we need to get along, even if we have different opinions about things. There's no reason we can't all be civil to each other. There just isn't."

Director Kaylyn Mitchell, who as a community member frequently challenged sitting Board members during the debate

over the closing of Milford Middle School a year ago, said "Words matter."

They matter, especially coming from a platform that we're

privileged to have. ... I am very passionate (about) protecting First Amendment rights, so I'm somewhat torn. I do think people should be able to speak freely as they see fit. However, I also feel like we need to have a certain level of civility."

She encouraged Klein to publicly read the Board's policy, which he did. Director Ron Jackson asked that one section be highlighted:

"All statements shall be directed to the presiding officer; no participant may address or question Board members individually."

Said Jackson, "There is a fine line between valid criticism and state-

ment of your opinions about everybody up here, the administration plans and that line of personal attacks. So we do have to be willing to allow public speakers to express criticism, even criticism of our personal actions, but be capable of stopping them when they cross that line. Which is not a defined line."

"And I hope the members of the audience understand that at times you may be offended when the board says 'Okay, we've had enough, please sit down.' It's not because we don't care about what you're saying or don't want to hear. We've got a meeting up here to run and public comment is a small part of that."

After the meeting, David Ochmanowicz Jr., the newly elected Board vice president, reacted to a community member's statement that 'the children are watching' by discussing the Rev. Edward Pinkney, who said "... we have to stop talking about who we can't work with" and how his message of the "Importance of Unity" is transcending.

"There is always room for more improvement, and we owe it to the kids and the community to show everyone how we can all work together," Ochmanowicz said. "I have hopes this is reflective of how Quakertown's

own "team of 10," can lead our students by example."

Micucci said it seems the "appalling" statewide and national political rhetoric has found its way to Quakertown.

"I think there's a lot more common ground that people share than there are gaps in what people feel," he said. "I believe (as a Board) we're even better than what we displayed last week. I'm excited to kind of move forward in a productive way on behalf of not only our kids, the Board, the Administration, but the people of our community. I hope we all can live by that."



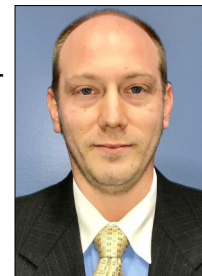
Ron Jackson

**"So we do have to be willing to allow public speakers to express criticism, even criticism of our personal actions, but be capable of stopping them when they cross that line."**

## Ochmanowicz Jr. named Board VP

It's not surprising that David Ochmanowicz Jr. is the new vice president of the Quakertown Community School Board.

What is surprising is that he was nominated by a member of the previous Board, whose four members are often at odds on a variety of issues with the four directors elected last November. And Ochmanowicz was elected in a 7-1 vote, with Mitch Anderson the lone dissenting voice.



David Ochmanowicz Jr.

"It was an honor to receive a nomination and then support from virtually all of my fellow board members for QCSD Vice President," Ochmanowicz said following the May 10th School Board meeting. "It was at first unexpected, then humbling. I look forward to continuing to serve our community in this new role and will continue to do my best as a diligent steward and further our district's established goals by continuing to build on our school district's countless successes."

Ron Jackson nominated Ochmanowicz for the position of leadership following the Board's unanimous acceptance of Dr. Austin Sedicum's resignation.

"I believe fully that forces from the community who do not like the previous Board went out of their way to find reasons to unseat one or all of the previous Board," he said. "Having succeeded in doing, that it would be inappropriate of us to force back one of our own members into the VP role. The idea now is to move forward and to build a sense of camaraderie of Board members. So I think it was right thing to do."

Five votes were needed for a new VP to be named, though solicitor Jeffrey Garton said the Board could operate without one in place.

Both Jackson and Kaylyn Mitchell were nominated for the VP post. Those attempts failed among familiar 4-4 lines, with Anderson, Jackson, Jonathan Kern and Board President Steaven Klein on one side and Keith Micucci, Mitchell, Ochmanowicz and Jennifer Weed on the other.

Jackson nominated Micucci prior to the Ochmanowicz nomination, but he declined the seat.

Said Ochmanowicz, "I feel that in such a seemingly polarized or contentious atmosphere, my independent voice might be able to help bridge a gap. We might not all agree all the time, but working together and having a healthy mutual respect for one another's needs and opinions goes a long way toward progress and a common good."



## NEIDIG RENOVATIONS

From Page 1

ty, behind the school.

- Minimizing parent drop-off traffic backup onto Penrose Street.
- Locating the Administrative area directly adjacent to parent drop-off.
- Clustering the core/community components around main parking entry/Administrative areas.
- Significantly minimizing impact on the floodplains.

Ted Wassmer, an Erie Road neighbor to Neidig who has attended several meetings, said Option D is “overwhelmingly the most popular option.” He said it “would enhance the borough” to have this newer school on the East side of Route 309. “I think it would be really good for the community as a whole,” he said, adding that his expectation is for property values to rise when work is completed in August, 2021.

Colleen Miller, president of Neidig’s parent teacher organization, said she was very pleased with the community input and the reaction at the April 24 Neidig meeting. She said Option D “Meets and addresses all the points.”

Since mid-December, a design team created by Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner was tasked with putting the 60-year-old facility on par with Pfaff Elementary School, which was built in 2005. “We want functional areas, like Pfaff, at the best price,” Harner said in his directions to the team.

Currently, Neidig, a 45,700 square-foot building, has 400



**Residents of Neidig Elementary School look over different plans for a renovation and addition of the school, built in 1958.**

students. Pfaff, with 85,000 square feet, currently has 440 students, and separate rooms for a gymnasium, art and music, among other benefits. Neidig doesn’t have those separate spaces.

When the new Neidig opens, it will have a capacity of 600 students, equal to that of Pfaff.

The design team, which has met approximately every two weeks since mid-December, includes Harner, Assistant Superintendent Nancianne Edwards, Chief Operating Officer Zach Schoch, Neidig Principal Scott Godshalk, Facilities Director Kelly Harper, Technology Director Joe Kuzo, David Schrader and Danielle V. Hoffer of Schrader Group Architecture, and Kris Reiss of Boucher & James engineering.

Renovations to Neidig were recommended last year by a parent-led [Elementary Reassignment Committee](#). The recommendation was tied to the closure of Tohickon Valley Elementary School, which is part of a two-year budget plan to curtail a \$4.7 million structural budget deficit. Last summer’s closing of Milford Middle School is part of that budget strategy, which maintains student programs and follows the School Board’s direction for the Administration to get the district’s “fiscal house in order.”

The committee’s recommendation fell in line with a 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.

## Opening on Board as Sedicum resigns

At its May 10th meeting, the Quakertown Community School Board accepted the resignation of Dr. Austin Sedicum

Board President Steaven Klein said Dr. Sedicum, the Board’s vice president and chairman of the Finance Committee, “was a valued member of our School Board. His leadership on the Finance Committee will be missed. We thank him for his service.”

According to the 910-page [Pennsylvania School Code](#), the School Board has 30 days to fill his seat from the acceptance of his resignation. The information on Chapter 315, Filling of Vacancies, can be found on Page 105.

The Pennsylvania School Code can be found here: <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/WU01/LI/LI/US/PDF/1949/0/0014..PDF>

The Board has advertised for a new member, and is accepting applications for the open seat in Region 2 until May 23. Residents of Milford Township and Trumbauersville may apply. Please drop off applications at the District Services Center, 100 Commerce Drive, Quakertown, PA, or email them to [abishop@qcsd.org](mailto:abishop@qcsd.org).

# Harner, Board praise Peiffer, new Strayer leadership

Strayer Middle School Principal Derek Peiffer received a standing ovation from the Quakertown Community School Board, Administration, teachers and members of the public as the Board accepted his resignation on May 10th.

"Words can't express what everyone thinks of Derek other than what you saw right there," Superintendent Dr. Bill Harner said. "Thank you, Derek, for your service. Thanks for your counsel to me over the last four-plus years, and we wish you the very best in work with your church school. I know they will really welcome you in their arms as the three schools you have worked in here received you before."

Peiffer, an administrator in the district for 18 years, is leaving on June 29 to become principal at St. Thomas More School in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Allentown.

"This is a great school district and a great community," said Peiffer, principal at Strayer Middle School for the last four years. "We have amazing parents and students that do great things for this community and beyond. I've never worked with a more dedicated and professional group of people than our teachers, ever."

"I have mixed emotions about leaving, but this is the right opportunity for me. It is my calling at this point in my life to give back to the church community."

Over the years, Msgr. John Murphy has recruited Peiffer to lead the K-8 school, and finally accomplished his goal.

"When he wants something, he's very persistent," Peiffer said of Murphy. "Very nice, but very persistent."

Peiffer said the ability to "share my faith with students" is a "dream job at this point in my career."

Peiffer spent four years as assistant principal at Quakertown Community High School. In 2004, he became principal at Milford Middle School, before leading Strayer for the last four years.



**Strayer Middle School Principal Derek Peiffer is leaving at the end of the school year to become principal at St. Thomas More School in Allentown. Assistant Principal Dr. Jennifer Bubser, left, will replace Peiffer while Kim Finnerty, a Teacher on Special Assignment, has been named vice principal.**

Assistant Principal Dr. Jennifer Bubser and Kim Finnerty, Teacher On Special Assignment, will form the new leadership team of principal and assistant principal, respectively.

"There's nothing better than when the folks doing a lot of the work behind the scenes move up to being in the front," Harner said. "We're grateful for both of them."

Addressing Peiffer, Board President Steaven Klein said, "It's awesome that you're following your passion. Good luck, sir. And thank you for all the hard work and dedication that you've given to this school district."

"It's been an honor," Peiffer said.

Director Jennifer Weed said her daughter spent "some of the best" years of her life at Milford when Peiffer was principal. "She loved that school."

## About this newsletter

The Quakertown Community School Board plans to issue a quarterly newsletter to inform residents of important issues in the district. The Board meets at the District Services Center, 100 Commerce Drive, at 7 p.m. on the second and fourth Thursday of each month — with the exception of July. Members can be reached at [board@qcsd.org](mailto:board@qcsd.org). Stories in this newsletter were written by Gary Weckselbklatt, the district's director of communications. He can be reached at 215-529-2028 or [gweckselblatt@qcsd.org](mailto:gweckselblatt@qcsd.org).