



The new Quakertown Community School Board, from left to right, includes Ron Jackson, Keith Micucci, Dwight Anderson, Jennifer Weed, President Steaven Klein, Kaylyn Mitchell, David Ochmanowicz, Jonathan Kern and Vice President Austin Sedicum.

## Board votes to close Tohickon Valley at end of school year

By Gary Weckselblatt

In a 5-4 vote that illustrated a split between the new Directors and those elected prior to the November election, the Quakertown Community School Board on Dec. 7 voted to close Tohickon Valley Elementary School.

Board President Steaven Klein, Vice President Austin Sedicum, and members Dwight Anderson, Ron Jackson and Jonathan Kern favored closing Tohickon Valley at the end of the school year, and accepted the Elementary Reassignment Committee's recommendation to renovate Neidig Elementary School and reassign TVES students, by neighborhood, to Neidig, Pfaff, Quakertown and Trumbauersville elementaries.

New members Keith Micucci, Kaylyn Mitchell, David Ochmanowicz and Jennifer Weed, who were sworn in earlier in the evening by Magisterial District Justice Robert Roth, voted against the measure, citing the need for more time and information to consider it.

Mitchell made a motion that the vote be tabled. Her request was defeated 5-4.

She said it was "inappropriate" to have to vote on such a critical issue in her first meeting.

Weed agreed "wholeheartedly" and cited the Board's closing of Milford Middle School. "The decision to close Milford was done very poorly and very quickly, and a lot of the people in the public felt that way, too," she said.

When the new members said they needed more information on a variety of topics, Jackson said it's been on the District website in the "Reports" section for several months.

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**Steaven Klein,  
Board President**

Board since the decision to close Milford, every single news article about the situation, and many other detailed reports about the closure" have been accessible to the public for several months, he said. "This information is not hidden. ... If you say you didn't see it, it's because you didn't look."

After the meeting, Klein acknowledged the differences between the Directors. "The existing board comes in with its philosophy and the four new members come in with their philosophy," he said. "It's important for me to find common ground, build consensus and get things done. It's all about giving the kids the best education they can get."

Last year the Board directed the Administration to develop a plan to balance the budget, which had a \$4.7 million structural deficit, without using Act 1 exceptions and without cuts to student programs. Closing Milford and Tohickon Valley is part of that strategy.

Sedicum, who became Vice President in a 5-4 vote, said the closures of Milford and Tohickon Valley would produce an institutional savings of \$3 million that "carry on from year to year."

The reassignment committee's 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 means an annual savings of \$1.77 million. There is also an \$8.4 million cost avoidance identified in the Facilities Plan. In addition, sale of the property could bring a \$1.5 million infusion to 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.

The reassignment committee, made up of parent representatives from each elementary school, in addition to principals Orathia T. Bradley of Tohickon Valley and K. Eric Thompson of Pfaff, was facilitated by Nancianne Edwards, the district's assistant superintendent.

Elementary class size is projected to 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.

Micucci said the numbers are a concern as elementary school is "the most vulnerable time in a kid's education."

"It's not about the building," he said. "It's about, for me, the student-teacher ratio."

The plans recommended by the committee expect to meet district space needs for at least five years. Future plans for the eventual construction of a new elementary school on district property along Pumping Station Road, could also potentially lower class size.

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