

## Moving forward with Merino Elementary

### Community meeting gives residents chance to see design of new school

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MERINO — In a little less than a year, there will be a new building in Merino, and Tuesday night residents of this small town had their first glance at what it will look like.



*David Kurtz, architect for Neenan Archistruction, discusses some of the features in the new Merino Elementary School. A community meeting was held to allow residents a chance to give their input. The school should be finished by January 2009. (Callie Jones/Journal-Advocate)*

In November, a bond passed allowing the RE-4J Buffalo School District to construct a completely new elementary school.

Last night, a special meeting was held to give residents of Merino an opportunity to get a look at the design for the new school.

David Kurtz, architect for Neenan Archistruction, the company building the new facility, was on hand to answer questions from those in attendance. Kurtz has already met with district administrators a few times, as well as teachers, to get input.

This new school will be built adjacent to the junior/high school, next to the gym.

"The elementary is completely separate, yet it will be attached to the high school," Kurtz said.

This building will be about 22,000 square feet, compared to the current building, which is 19,000 square feet. So they will be getting a slightly larger facility.

Nathan Lightle, superintendent of RE-4J, said they have already implemented some things the public previously brought up as concerns. These implementations include separate restrooms for kindergarten, first through third grade, and fourth through sixth grade.

Another idea that was implemented involved safety concerns. Lightle said people will have to enter past the secretary before they can go all the way in the building. This will allow school officials to see who is coming into the building.

Lightle said the biggest piece that has been added is part of the Title I and special education rooms were broken down into smaller rooms. These rooms will be the meeting place for smaller groups.

He was also excited to announce they were able to add 60 more square feet to the classrooms. Each classroom, except for the kindergarten room, will be 900 square feet. They were able to do this by reducing the amount of storage space for the custodian.

After Lightle spoke of some of the changes to the original plan, Kurtz discussed the layout of the new building.

When people walk through the entryway, one of the first things they will see are the administration offices.



*David Kurtz (front), architect for Neenan Architecture, answers people's questions about the design of the new Merino Elementary School after a special meeting. The meeting was held to allow people to voice their opinions on the new school. (Callie Jones/Journal-Advocate)*

Opposite the administration area will be a multi-purpose room, which could be used as a community room. With the kitchen right beside this room, it will also function as the cafeteria for elementary and junior/senior high school students.

The room will also be used as a gym for the elementary school. Kurtz said it will be a very flexible space.

Also on the main corridor will be the library. Kurtz said there will be a book area and a computer area. He also said this library is quite a bit larger than the current one.

In addition, on one side of the building the fourth, fifth and sixth grade classrooms will be clustered together. Meanwhile, kindergarten, first, second and third grade classrooms will be clustered together at the other end.

Kurtz said they tried to put as many rooms as possible on the north and south sides of the building to control the light. Rooms on the east and west sides of the building will get more direct sunlight, which may be too bright and cause glare.

Across from the sixth grade classroom will be the art room. This room may be used for additional classes besides art. If another class needs to use the room, the art teacher may still have to take her cart to different rooms.

There are no plans for a music room; the elementary students will have to use the one at the junior/senior high school.

The roof of the building will slope to the south, and Kurtz said they're talking about having a slightly higher roof in the multi-purpose room.

Outside the building, Lightle said they are talking about using the money that would be spent on playground equipment on the facility. Then they could apply for a GOCO grant to get playground equipment. Kurtz said the playground area will have two entrances and a six-foot-tall fence.

While most of the people in attendance seemed to be satisfied with the building plan, there were some concerns.

One of the main concerns was parking. It appears there will be less parking available at the new site. However, there will be more people because the junior/senior high school will be sharing the available parking.

Along with parking comes the concern of where pick-up and drop-off would be. Lightle said the school board has been discussing this. Where this area goes could depend on where the bus barn is.

Lightle said they talked about moving the bus barn, which would cost about \$145,000. They also talked about building a new bus barn, which would cost about \$75,000. If the bus barn were moved or a new facility built, it would be about 30 feet from the school.

The school board hasn't made any decisions regarding this issue, they wanted to wait and get input from the public during this meeting.

With the elementary school now right next to the junior/senior high school, Lightle said they would most likely let high school students leave first. Then, after about five minutes or longer the elementary students would be released. This would allow for slightly less traffic.

Plans are moving along for the new school building. Lightle said there would be another community meeting soon, so people could give their input, but he didn't know the exact date.

He said they still plan to have the new school ready by January 2009.

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