

# DISTRICT TO BUILD A NEW KERR SCHOOL

*Work to Start in Spring 2018*

The Fox Chapel Area School Board voted on May 8 to begin preparations to build a new Kerr Elementary School on the current Kerr School property. Following careful and thoughtful consideration and research, the administration and Board determined that Kerr is becoming inadequate, both structurally and programmatically, to continue to serve the diverse needs of its students. The new construction will provide critical updates that will bring Kerr to the same standards as the other district elementary schools. The cost for construction of a new Kerr is estimated between \$19-\$21 million. The School Board authorized a new bond issue to fund construction and renovation work at its May 2017 meeting for projects in process and in the planning stages at Kerr, as well as at Dorseyville Middle School and Fairview and O'Hara elementaries. The district administration held a community meeting prior to the School Board bond issue vote to discuss the plans for a new Kerr.

**Brief History:** Built in the late 1920s, Kerr is the oldest school in the district and the building has undergone several construction and renovation projects since it opened. A study of district facilities that began a few years ago identified a number of major deficiencies and the need for upgrades in the nearly 90-year-old building.

Areas of the school in definite need of attention include the roof, the HVAC system, the small cafeteria, the narrow school corridors, the antiquated electrical wiring and plumbing, and the limited access from one side of the building to the other on the first floor. Additionally, a new entrance would enhance safety and security.

**Renovations Considered:** The district considered renovating Kerr, but determined that due to the age of the building, that would only serve as a short-term fix as the need for ongoing improvements and additional renovations would continue to emerge. A major renovation to address the current inadequacies of the existing Kerr School would cost between \$9-\$11 million in the short term, with continuous piecemeal renovations and improvements actually costing the district more money in the long run. A new building will not only address current deficiencies, but would include new spaces to enhance the overall learning environment of Kerr. Plus, students would not be displaced during the construction process. Additionally, there is no plan to redistrict the boundaries of the elementary schools. The district may also be eligible for PlanCon funds that would result in some reimbursement of construction costs from the state.

The project will tentatively go out to bid by late winter of 2018, with construction beginning that spring. Completion is targeted

for the summer of 2019, and Kerr students should be able to begin the 2019-2020 school year in their brand-new school.

**New Programs Being Considered:** One of the highlights of the new school will be the inclusion of a collaboratory cluster. This space will allow for a large, central area where students will come together to work on projects, conduct research, collaborate, and plan. Included in the collaboratory cluster will be a makerspace, a SMALLab, and a computer science and robotics lab classroom, as well as the library. The space could also be available for use by students in other schools in the district.

Another highlight of the new construction is the possibility of a language immersion program. This program would allow students to be taught in both English and Spanish for the entire school day. Research has shown that students who engage in a dual-immersion program outperform their peers in standardized assessments as well as in other measures. During its first year, Kerr will host one class of students in grade one in the immersion program and students from all four elementary schools will be offered the opportunity to enroll. If more students apply than can be accommodated, a lottery system could be used to choose program participants. The next year, the immersion program will expand to include a grade two class, and will continue until there is one class for each grade level, one through five.

Other features of the new Kerr may include space for a pre-kindergarten program to help students better prepare for school, as well as more open areas outside of the building that would be designated for instructional purposes. Finally, the school will include the capability to use more advanced technologies to enhance student learning.

**Other School Renovations:** Building a new Kerr Elementary School will be the final in a string of recent and upcoming renovations to the schools. Extensive renovations at the high school were completed in 2016 and included the addition of a new natatorium and a new front entrance to the building, as well as a major renovation and upgrade of the commons area, library, cafeteria, and auditorium. The roof at Dorseyville Middle School has already been replaced and other major work will be completed by the end of this summer including a new makerspace, a new main office, HVAC system and gym upgrades, and a new driveway. Upgrades to Fairview and O'Hara elementary schools include a new roof at both buildings, as well as HVAC system and hallway upgrades and new office areas. Additional upgrades at O'Hara will include a makerspace and three special education rooms and a renovation of the library.



The Kerr Elementary School collaboratory cluster will include a central makerspace surrounded by a SMALLab, a computer science and robotics lab classroom, as well as the library.