

Site work to begin on new Gerrardstown Middle School in next month

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GERRARDSTOWN - Driving down W.Va. 51 in Gerrardstown, hundreds of acres of orchards can be seen, along with a view of Mountain Ridge Intermediate School. The road that enters the school's property and wraps around to the back will soon extend between the play fields into a driveway for Gerrardstown Middle School.

Several years ago Berkeley County Schools purchased 50 acres of land from International Fruits. The area surrounding the school-owned property was bought by a developer who had plans to build 1,100 homes on the site. According to Berkeley County Schools Superintendent Manny Arvon, those plans have been put on hold. The plans for the middle school, however, are in full swing.

"I strongly believe the school represents the historical sense of the community. The outside of all the new schools is very traditional," Arvon said, adding that his design ideas are based on buildings that Thomas Jefferson designed, such as the University of Virginia.

Article Photos



Journal photo by Michelle Horst

Berkeley County Schools Superintendent Manny Arvon looks over the orchard property that will soon become the new Gerrardstown Middle School.

"The guts of the schools are 21st century, and this, the inside and outside, serves as the bridge between the past and the future. I think it fits the community," Arvon said.

When the county first began to look at designs for new schools, it sent the teachers to historical places in the surrounding areas in Maryland and Virginia to look at colleges and universities. Arvon said that because the teachers are the ones using the facility, they need to be able to help design it. The architect, Arvon and staff helped to develop new designs. Each time a new school is built, the designs are reviewed and updated.

"I had a large committee of 55 people working on the (Gerrardstown Middle School). Bankers and attorneys working on financing. Realtors working on the property. Educators, parents and students working on the curriculum. That's how all this starts," Arvon said.

The new middle school in Gerrardstown will host 700 students that will be coming from Mountain Ridge Intermediate.

"What's important is that the students won't be going to Musselman Middle," Arvon said.

Designed for 900 students when it opened, Musselman Middle School now has more than 1,200 students and has the largest middle school student population in the state. Until Gerrardstown Middle School is built, Musselman Middle will remain the only middle school in the southern part of Berkeley County.

As for the possibility of a new high school to aid in the number of students attending Musselman High School, Arvon said it is only a matter of time - when and where it will happen, he could not say. The county works on 10-year planning schedules, and Arvon said it is not a plan that is made and just put on a shelf to collect dust.

"Our 10-year plan is our guideline and reference. Everything we do is according to that plan. It deals with demographic projections, educational philosophy, curriculum and the types of schools we need. For instance, back in the late 1990s we decided that instead of having K-5 buildings, we were going to have K-2 buildings. That was a programmatic change. You have to know what you're going to offer educationally before you start planning your building," Arvon said.

Site work for the new middle school will begin within the next four weeks, and building construction is projected to begin in November. In August 2014, the new school will open for students. When Gerrardstown Middle School is finished there will be approximately 10 acres of land left over.

"It could be a primary school, it could be a satellite transportation center or maybe a maintenance center. But it's back there for the future," Arvon said.

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