

Licking Heights topping ceremony marks new school construction milestone

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Licking Heights marked another milestone in the construction of its new high school on Columbus Day.

A special “topping ceremony” held Oct. 14 celebrated completion of the new high school building's structural steel work.

Prior to the setting of the last girder, construction managers, iron workers from the Local Union 172, school officials and a handful of students who will study within the new school when it launches next fall signed the final steel beam with a black Sharpie.

Ryan Felumlee, superintendent for Robertson Construction, told those assembled before the girder—mounted with a pine tree that will eventually be planted on school grounds – “A lot of work has gone into what’s been done so far. There is a lot of work ahead... We’re now turning from the construction to the architectural phase.”

Licking Heights School Superintendent Dr. Philip Wagner said, “We’re really thankful for the team and what they’ve done. This is something important to the community’s future.”

With that, a crane lifted the beam and positioned it for attachment, officially completing the steel work phase of construction, which began about 11 months ago, according to Felumlee.

Built for more potential growth

The new high school, which measures 275,000 square feet, according to officials is on track to meet its deadline of being open in time for the 2020-21 school year.

When it goes online, the present high school will then be re-purposed as a district middle school.

The new school also includes what has been described as “innovative and structurally flexible design (that) will meet trends in student population,” according to a recent news release.

The Licking Heights district, along with neighboring Southwest Licking Local Schools, which is also currently building a new high school, is experiencing aggressive student population growth driving the need for new schools.

According to Philadelphia-based Hill International, Inc., “With regard to its structural flexibility, this is a trend in Ohio’s school design per demographic flux; it’s also one of the largest examples of its kind.”

According to Holly McLean, project manager on the construction, that boils down to building the new high school in a manner that will allow it to be expandable to more than the number of students currently planned for the new building.

According to McLean, larger areas such as gymnasiums are being constructed to accommodate up to 1,800 students.

Academic areas in the new school are scaled for 1,500 students, but with room for an additional wing, McLean said the school could be expanded to incorporate new classrooms for up to more than 300 additional students.

The current high school, she noted, is currently housing about 1,200 students in a building constructed for 900.

In the new school, academic and administrative spaces are concentrated on the south side of the new structure, McLean said.

Community spaces that are harder to adjust or change later—including two gymnasiums, cafeteria and auditorium—are on the north side of the structure. In between those two wings is a media center/library area, locker bays and similar more open-space areas.

She noted this build has been made more challenging as a result of delays, including some litigation with the city that created a demand for an accelerated construction cycle in order to meet the coming school year.

“The ‘construction triangle,’” McLean said, “consists of time, money and quality. If you pull on one of those threads, you have to pull on the others.”

That said, presently, the school is fully on target to meet its deadline for use next autumn, she confirmed.