


Construction at Cunniff School Nearing Completion, See Photos Inside New Building

By Charlie Breitrose  | 21 hours ago



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Light pours into the cafeteria at the new Cunniff Elementary School. The room has a stage as well as a full kitchen to prepare lunch for students.

Watertown officials who got an inside look at the new Cunniff Elementary School gazed around in amazement at the nearly completed school building on Tuesday afternoon.

Watertown Public School officials [broke ground on the school \(https://www.watertownmanews.com/2020/06/26/officials-celebrate-groundbreaking-for-construction-of-2-watertown-schools/\)](https://www.watertownmanews.com/2020/06/26/officials-celebrate-groundbreaking-for-construction-of-2-watertown-schools/) on Warren Street on June 24, 2020, and the school is expected to open in mid-October 2021.



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A view of the length of the new Cunniff Elementary School, with the cafetorium/gym entrance extending out at the end.

The tour included Town Councilors, members of the School Building Committee, the Planning Board, Town administrators and representatives from Hill International, the owner's project manager firm.



The group of Watertown officials that toured Cunniff School look around a classroom in the new school.

Town Council President Mark Sideris, who chairs the School Building Committee, recalls how the project began as a remodel and expansion, but when the committee saw the cost it decided it made sense to build a new school.

“Once we looked at what it cost with the renovation and expansion, the difference (between a new school) was \$17 million,” Sideris said. “And we get a brand new building.”



A look inside the Learning Commons, where large groups of students can gather and collaborate.

Town Council Vice President Vincent Piccirilli, who serves on the School Building Committee, said the school has been transformed since he last looked inside. “The last time I saw it they were putting up sheetrock,” Piccirilli said. “Now, they are in the final stages of construction.”



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A two-story tall Cunniff sign on the wall in the entryway to the cafetorium and gymnasium at the nearly complete elementary school.

Tables have been placed right in the middle of the hallways between some of the classrooms.

“The idea is kids can come out and work on projects here,” Piccirilli said.

The three story building features large classrooms with lots of natural light, and which are color coded by grade levels. For instance, on the third floor, the blue rooms are for second and third grades, and fourth and fifth grade classrooms are orange.



A table in the hallway at Cunniff Elementary School, where students will work on group projects.

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On the end of the school farthest from the street the gymnasium and cafetorium sit next to each other. While inside the gym, one member of the tour noted “This is much bigger than the old one.”

Sideris said the school was designed to have an entrance near the gym and cafetorium so they can be used by the public in the evenings and on weekends.



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The art room at the new Cunniff School has plenty of light and colorful walls and ceilings.

Other spacious new facilities include the art room, which has cathedral ceilings with large windows, the library/media center, and the learning commons — a room where large group activities can take place.



The new gymnasium at Cunniff Elementary School.

Long gull-winged structures have been erected in the parking lot, and along the border with the Ridgelawn Cemetery, which hold solar photovoltaic panels. Along with PV panels on the roof, they will provide enough electricity to power the entire school.

“The biggest operating expense for a school is utilities,” Piccirilli said. “With zero net energy it pays for itself.”



The spider-shaped play structure at the playground outside the new Cunniff Elementary School.

The Cunniff will be the first of the Building for the Future projects to be completed. The program includes construction at three elementary schools in Watertown and a new high school. In February of 2022, students are scheduled to move into the new Hosmer Elementary School. Then the Lowell Elementary School will be renovated and expanded. School officials are also in the planning stages for a new Watertown High School.



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Words are carved into the wall of a nook where students can sit inside the new Cunniff Elementary School.
