

Gulph and Caley elementary schools unveiled

By Gary Puleo gpuleo@21st-centurymedia.com @MustangMan48 on Twitter Aug 31, 2018



From left, Upper Merion Area School Board member Dr. Gary Ledebur, Caley Road School Principal Steven Van Mater, School Board President Alice Budno Hope, board member Maggie Philips, board member Maura Buri, Upper Merion Director of Operations Fred Remelius, Superintendent Dr. John Toleno, board member Robyn Briggs and board member Eric Elvanian cut the ribbon at the new Caley Road Elementary School, Wednesday, Aug. 29.

Photo courtesy of Upper Merion Area School District

UPPER MERION--Their eyes widened as parents entered the cafeteria of Gulph Road Elementary School on Thursday evening and got their first look at the sparkling new building at 650 S. Henderson Road in King of Prussia.

A similar ribbon cutting and open house had been held the night before at Caley Elementary School, the Upper Merion School District's other new state-of-the-art educational facility.

"It's beautiful ... this is super exciting," one parent was overheard saying.

Those faces beaming with approval were all that Superintendent of Schools Dr. John A. Toleno needed to know that the big unveiling was the success he'd hoped for.

"I've opened a number of buildings in my career and it's always nice to see parents' faces when they see a new structure like this," he had said privately before a brief ceremony.

Following a musical prelude by Upper Merion Area High School Chamber Strings and a few remarks by Toleno and Gulph Elementary School principal Dr. Carole Hoy, the crowd was set free to explore every nook and cranny of the school, which was the real purpose of the event, Toleno said.

“It’s not about speeches tonight We’re not here to hear people speak, that’s not the focus,” he allowed. “We’re here to let people roam through the building. Go explore. We want people to see the experiences we created for children. It’s about the kids and it’s about the community seeing something special. This is a building that is owned by the community, and we’ll have kids in here starting Tuesday morning and what we want to do is build that excitement for the families. We’re kind of turning this over now and saying 'look what we did.' We want you to see this tonight because when your kids get here next Tuesday we’re going to be educating your kids.”

Prior to the week’s events, which drew several hundred people each night, the Caley and Gulph interiors had been off limits to the public, Toleno noted.

“We took control of both buildings on Aug. 15 and the only people who were allowed in were staff members,” he said, explaining that the buildings, which were built at a combined cost of \$64 million, were mirror images of each other.

“They’re the exact same building. The Gulph School has a couple more classrooms because of a few specialized programs we’re doing here. When you build buildings at the same time you can save architectural and engineering fees, so we knew we didn’t want to design two separate buildings because it becomes a lot more costly. One of the reasons we built the two buildings is that we can finally offer full day kindergarten here at Upper Merion, and we’re very excited about that,” Toleno said.

"The community has been waiting for this long before I came to the district six years ago," said Caley Elementary Principal Steven Van Mater at Wednesday's event. "I know that many of the parents in those families went to the school and they live in the community, and what an amazing opportunity to send their children to a 21st century building."

"The things we’re going to be able to do here, we weren't able to do in the other building so we’re really excited about creating new opportunities for kids to learn and grow."

According to the King of Prussia Historical Society, the original Gulph Elementary School was built in 1953, nestled behind the Junior-Senior High off of Henderson Road, and was designed with a fallout shelter in the basement. It was converted to a senior high in 1958 due to overcrowding at the Junior-Senior High, and then converted back to an elementary school upon the opening of the new senior high on Crossfield Road. It continued as an elementary school until its closure in 1982 due to falling enrollment. In 2008, with overcrowding in the elementary schools, it became the consolidated home of the district's extended day program. With enrollment on the rise again, the school was demolished in 2016 to make way for the new Gulph Elementary School.

The original Caley Road Elementary School, which was built in 1967 and hadn’t been operational for decades, was demolished in June to make way for the modern version at 725 Caley Road, King of Prussia.

With 30 classrooms in each building, the Gulph and Caley schools will ultimately each house 500 to 525 students, Toleno said.

“Our enrollment projection shows that it is growing so we needed to build the schools to free up space in some of our other elementary schools. It’s a whole balancing act.”

In addition to the two new schools, the district includes Candlebrook, Roberts and Bridgeport elementary schools.

“So we’ll have five elementary schools, K through 4, and then fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth graders go to our middle school, and 9 through 12 go to the high school,” Toleno said. “We redistricted the entire district to populate Gulph, so kids will be coming here from Candlebrooks, Roberts and Bridgeport.”

Overseen by Skepton Construction, Inc., each building employed the same construction crews, noted Toleno, who said he tends to be a hands-on kind of guy himself.

“I’ve done over \$250 million of school construction in my 18-year career, so I like to be involved in it.”

Although Caley and Gulph may look the same, each will operate with its own distinctive personality, Toleno said.

“I think Caley already has a personality because it’s been a building for years. The staff simply moved from one old building to a new building.

When we staffed this building we didn’t just hire all new staff members to come to the Gulph school, it was a mix of some new staff members and some veteran staff members that transferred,” he explained. “We wanted to make sure the culture of what we have here at Upper Merion stays alive and well. Caley might be a little ahead on the personality side. Although Gulph school might not have a personality yet, I don’t think it’s going to take long for it to have a personality.”

https://www.timesherald.com/news/gulph-and-caley-elementary-schools-unveiled/article_5fac53d2-ad31-11e8-b046-cbaccf37f033.html



Families and students gather in the gym for the official opening of the new Gulph school.

Submitted Photo



Officials perform the ceremonial ribbon cutting for the new Caley Elementary School

Submitted Photo



A look at the exterior of the new Caley Road School from the rear playground.

Oscar Gamble