

Discovery Starts Here!


Benchmark Breaks Ground for State-of-the-Art Innovation Space

On Friday, March 16, the temperature was just above freezing, but there were warm smiles all around as students, staff, alumni, and parents joined Benchmark trustees, local government officials, and the Innovation Space design build team for a rousing Groundbreaking Ceremony on the playground in front of the Dorrance H. Hamilton Middle School building. The large crowd was exuberant as all 181 students crowded onto the field wearing yellow hard hats, and everyone listened enthusiastically to inspiring words from Trustee Chair Beth Goodhart and Head of School Robb Gaskins.

The \$2 million project will continue Benchmark's legacy of serving as leaders in innovative, research-based education for students who learn differently. The architects behind the Innovation Space are twin brothers and Benchmark alumni Bill and Chris Sharples ('77) who are principals in the world-renowned SHoP Architects based in New York City. Bill and Chris, designers of such distinguished projects as Google offices in California and The Barclays Center in Brooklyn, chose to design the Innovation Space to show their gratitude for the positive impact Benchmark had on their lives. "Benchmark taught us that we all have our own unique way of learning. The school gave us the tools to grow and build our confidence to do things we thought impossible," Chris said.

The Benchmark Innovation Space will provide an ideal environment for our students to learn to thrive in a complex and ever-changing world. It will present our students with a dynamic, hands-on and interdisciplinary learning environment filled with a rich assortment of digital and physical tools, from duct tape to robots and 3D printers, to explore, design, and create, while honing their skills related to critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creative problem solving and leadership.

The Innovation Space will house two main areas, one for lower school students and one for middle school students. The middle school space will be built on the area known as Atterbury Plaza, which is the patio next to the A. Palmer West Performing Arts Center. The lower school space will be built below the middle school space, staying within the building's current footprint.

Benchmark is halfway to its goal of \$2 million to fund the project! We look forward to members of the greater Benchmark community helping us make that goal a reality. 



1: Head of School Robb Gaskins stands with Benchmark students on March 16 at the exciting groundbreaking ceremony for the school's state-of-the-art Innovation Space.

2: The Benchmark School Innovation Space Groundbreaking Ceremony featured a number of notable guests, including (front row, L-R) Chris Harder, Jennifer Clay, and Bill Cumby, Jr., all from W.S. Cumby Builders & Construction Managers; Rosella Harvey, NorthStar Owners Representation; Bill Cumby, Sr.; PA State Senator Tom McGarrigle; Trustee Chair Beth Goodhart, Head of School Robb Gaskins; Trustees Jim Viner and Wendi Chase; BPA President Suzanne Heckendorn; and (back row, L-R) Daryn Edwards, Cicada Architects; Tim Broadhurst, Chairman of Upper Providence Township Commissioners; Delaware County Councilman Kevin Madden; and Kurt Raymond, Cicada Architects.

3: An architectural rendering by SHoP Architects of the Benchmark School Innovation Space middle school area.