



# The HIGHLANDS Report

Northern Highlands Regional High School District • Allendale, Upper Saddle River, Ho-Ho-Kus • January 2002

## Extending Excellence

*By Dr. Robert M. McGuire, Superintendent*

Last May we invited Allendale and Upper Saddle River residents to serve on a committee with members of the faculty and administration to study our facilities and make recommendations to our board of education. We were fortunate to attract numerous interested, diligent and talented individuals, including both mayors. Since that time we have met frequently, as a whole committee or in subcommittees, and made recommendations that were accepted by the board of education on January 14, 2002. As a result, we are seeking permission from the New Jersey Department of Education to conduct a referendum in April for approximately 18.5 million dollars, with an estimated 3.4 million being paid by the state and 15.1 million representing the local share.

Of particular help in the early stages was a subcommittee led by local architects, builders, engineers and insurance specialists. It was led by Modeste Sobolta and Donald DiNallo from Allendale and E. Hart Rasmussen and Tom Fallon from Upper Saddle River. On this subcommittee's recommendation, Ronald Schmidt and Associates were recommended to the board of education as architects for the project. They were approved on October 8, 2001.

Since that time the project architects have worked closely with our committee, our administrators, and our faculty and staff to formulate the plan we are presenting. Three new areas are proposed: a science addition with 15 labs and five classrooms, two additional girls' locker rooms, and an additional lunchroom. At the same time, we plan to renovate existing space in the building in ways that will enable us to maintain the excellence of our curriculum as our enrollment swells.

When the Ramapo/Indian Hills Regional High School District passed its referendum more than a year ago, it received more than 30% of the project cost from the state, which has set aside funds to help schools upgrade their facilities. This past fall Northern Valley Regional High School District received 19% from the state. The downward trend in this funding and the general economic woes of New Jersey have led us to conclude that

we must move quickly to secure our share of the dedicated state funds. To not act now seems shortsighted; delay might mean we'd need to undertake the same project in the future for more money and with no assistance from the state.

People move to our communities because of our educational excellence at both the elementary levels and Northern Highlands. Recently our K-8 districts upgraded their facilities in an effort to sustain their exemplary programs. We at Highlands must do likewise to extend our excellence long into the future.

In this newsletter you will find four related articles about specific aspects of the project:

1. The Need for New Science Facilities, by Judith Dayner, Science Supervisor
2. Necessary Renovations of Existing Space, by John Keenan, Principal
3. The History of Northern Highlands' Building Projects, by Margo Winning, Board of Education President
4. The Impact of Tuition Students, by Gary Lane, School Business Administrator



# The History of Northern Highlands' Building Projects

*By Margo Winning, Board of Education President*

Almost 40 years ago, the citizens of Allendale and Upper Saddle River joined together to create an extraordinary secondary educational facility for their children. They hired top architects and contractors, and with tremendous community enthusiasm and spirit Northern Highlands Regional High School opened its very modern and beautiful doors in 1965. A tradition of educational excellence was about to begin.

In the 1970s enrollment increased and a building addition was approved by the citizens. The new building, completed in 1974, melded with the existing one in such a seamless way that most of us are not even aware that our current facility has two wings built nine years apart.

In 1993, almost 20 years after the addition, the public was asked to support a \$1,834,000 bond to provide for maintenance. The majority of the funds were used for roof replacement, with the balance used to upgrade security, remove underground storage tanks, convert to natural gas, and replace the gym bleachers to conform with the new federal Americans with Disabilities Act.

As you are all aware, computer technology surged to new levels in the late 1990s. Budget caps and the high cost of equipment, coupled with the incredible advancements in technology's role in education, left Highlands sorely behind in this area. So in April 1997 the community approved a bond issue of \$2,650,000, the majority of which was dedicated to technology upgrades. The balance was used for women's locker room improvements, auditorium enhancements, and a new track.

Last year, when students were polled about what was "special" about Highlands, many replied "the facilities." The administration and Board were pleased that the students appreciated their surroundings but, despite the modern appearance of our building, our 1965 classrooms can no longer provide for the educational excellence we value.

Particularly inadequate are our science rooms. Mrs. Dayner explains in this newsletter, our programs can neither keep pace nor meet minimum safety requirements. Also, changes in the mandated graduation requirements and the State's core curriculum standards have forced us to expand our course offerings in many areas that require unique classrooms and a specialized use of space. We need to remedy the disparity between the number of boys' locker rooms and the number of girls' locker rooms and to expand our cafeteria because our existing space is simply too small for our anticipated enrollment.

Very few of us on the Board of Education and very few of the volunteers on the Citizens Committee, who worked to develop these plans, have children who will benefit directly from this project. But we all believe that to maintain the tradition of educational excellence that our towns have come to expect from Northern Highlands, this plan must come to fruition. We will be offering tours of the building so you can see our needs first hand. We encourage you to take one of these tours, and welcome your comments or questions. Mostly we hope we can count on your continued support of educational excellence at Northern Highlands.

## *Special Tour Dates*

*February 27th - 11 am*

*February 27th - 12 noon*

*February 27th - 7 pm*

*March 7th - 11 am*

*March 7th - 12 noon*

*March 7th - 7 pm*

## *The Need for New Science Facilities*

*By Judith Dayner, Science Department Supervisor*

When students entered the classrooms of our new school in 1965, the science wing had six rooms, a small greenhouse, and an unusual feature for a high school, a state-of-the-art planetarium. The small enrollment guaranteed small classes and individual attention. By the early 1970s increased student population demanded an addition to the original building, including science classrooms and a science lecture hall-but the additional rooms were still small. Teachers lectured, wrote notes, and drew sketches on the board. Students were not expected to move about the classroom.

Flash ahead to 2002. The Learning Center, a hall for multimedia presentations used by all disciplines, has replaced the science lecture hall. Since students learn best by doing, not by listening, lectures are rare; overhead projectors and computer monitors have replaced chalkboards. Although today's classes are not small, students still use our small 35-year-old classrooms. Six clusters of four students each use each classroom computer, attaching probes from laboratory equipment so



*Continued on page 3*



*Continued from page 2*

they can collect and analyze data. They visit Internet sites to download information, confer with scientists, learn through interactive programs, and post data relating to Real Time experiments all over the globe. The real experiments help students work cooperatively to solve problems and have replaced the limited, "cookbook" labs of the 1960s.

The National Science Teachers' Association and the State of New Jersey recently provided guidelines for science education that validate our approach. Highlands' students build bridges, construct trebuchets, prepare and run DNA fingerprinting gels, conduct seatbelt crash tests, devise chemical procedures, and perform a host of other inductive and deductive procedures. The business world of the 2000s demands that employees work cooperatively on projects; Highlands' students get that experience. But classrooms built in the early 60s do not reflect the way we now integrate technology into our curriculum. Inquiry-based learning simply requires much more room than lecture/note-taking lessons.

Because of the changes in science education, state requirements for classroom size and safety have changed drastically. Our old 900 square-foot labs are well below today's state standard of 1200 square feet. In our labs today student backpacks litter the floor and students climb over desks to move from one side of the room to the other to gather supplies. Experiments and projects are piled high because of the limited workspace for each class. Supplies and chemicals, which belong in a controlled chemical storeroom, crowd our prep rooms. Highlands' students currently work back-to-back at lab stations, though such a setup is prohibited as a safety hazard in new labs. Current state regulations also insist that lab-station layout allows teachers a clear view of all students; our layout does not, and thus does not permit constant personal contact between teacher and student. Nor are our classrooms accessible for disabled students; wheelchairs can't move through our aisles or fit at lab tables, so teachers try to set up chemicals, microscopes,

and other lab supplies on temporary tables for disabled students.

Historically, our graduates have benefited from a strong science curriculum and from creative, inspired teachers who have upgraded their teaching strategies constantly to reflect international trends in technology and education. This is one reason our students have high acceptance rates at competitive colleges. But the physical restrictions of our lab space now limit our ability to upgrade our curriculum. Other comparable districts, even those not experiencing increasing enrollment, have already planned or are in the process of planning new science facilities: Ridgewood, Ramsey, Ramapo, Indian Hills, Old Tappan, and Demarest high schools are all preparing for the future. Student enrollment at Highlands has reached a critical stage; we cannot continue giving each student an outstanding science education unless we expand our facilities and increase technology integration. Students and teachers alike look forward to working and learning in spacious, safe classrooms that will allow them to incorporate state-of-the-art technology in their lessons.





# Necessary Renovations of Existing Space

By John Keenan, Principal

Changes in education since our building opened, in 1965, have forced both our curriculum and our use of the building to change in many ways. Today the State requires four years of English, physical education, and health, three years each of science and mathematics, two years each of social studies, world languages, practical arts, and visual and performing arts. And many of our students take more than these minimums.

But our enrollment has lately grown so much that we have had to turn some students away from classes they want to take, especially in elective areas like practical, visual, and performing arts. If we are to continue preparing our graduates well for college, the workplace, and an ever-changing world, we must take steps to enlarge and renovate our facilities.

In addition to the science labs (discussed elsewhere in this newsletter), the following areas are in need of upgrades:

## Computer-Aided Drafting (CAD) Lab

Many of our graduates pursue architecture and engineering in college. This program allows students to learn technical drawing at both introductory and advanced levels. The lab needs to be redesigned to integrate the manual drawing boards with the computer necessary to run the program AutoCAD 2000.

## World-Languages Lab

Although the state requires two years of foreign-language study, almost all of our students take three years, and 65% study a language other than their own for four years. Colleges encourage students to continue their language study, realizing that fluency in another language will add to their success. Our language lab, containing tape recorders installed in 1965, must be replaced with an interactive, multi-media computer lab. The Ramapo-Indian Hills district added this upgrade to both high schools three years ago. Our teachers have visited those labs and are already prepared to use the new equipment, changing the way our students learn new languages.

## Art and Photography Rooms

Here again, our program has outgrown the facility. Our current photography darkroom does not meet ADA and OSHA specifications; the upgraded facility will. The addition of a new art room will enable the program to expand as our enrollment increases.

## Girls' Physical Education Locker Rooms

Currently our boys have four locker rooms, our girls only two. The law (Title IX) requires equity, and increased enrollment will make our need for two more girls' locker rooms urgent.

## Physical Education, Health, and Driver Education Rooms

The physical education and health program has changed a great deal since 1965. Today the emphasis is on teaching students concepts and skills that will promote participation in whole-

some physical activities throughout life. At the moment three classrooms in different areas of the building are dedicated to weight training and cardiovascular equipment. The upgrade would provide one central area for cardiovascular instruction. This reconfigured area will accommodate the larger classes customary in physical education. Dedicated health classrooms will also give us the space necessary to certify our students in CPR and in the use of an automated external defibrillator.

## Family and Consumer Sciences Classrooms

Since the 2000-2001 school year our kitchen has operated eight out of eight periods, and we have had to turn students away from cooking classes. The addition of a second instructional kitchen will allow us to double the enrollment.

## Music and Performing Arts Rooms

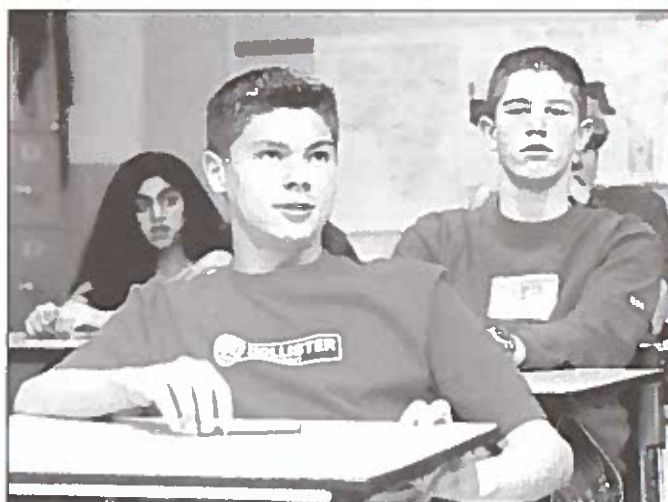
Our band outgrew its 1965 room three years ago. In-house renovation of an old metal shop has provided additional space. But the combination of a successful program with growing enrollment has produced the need for still more floor space. Expansion into the room next door will allow the entire band to practice together in an appropriate and safe area.

## Woodworking Room

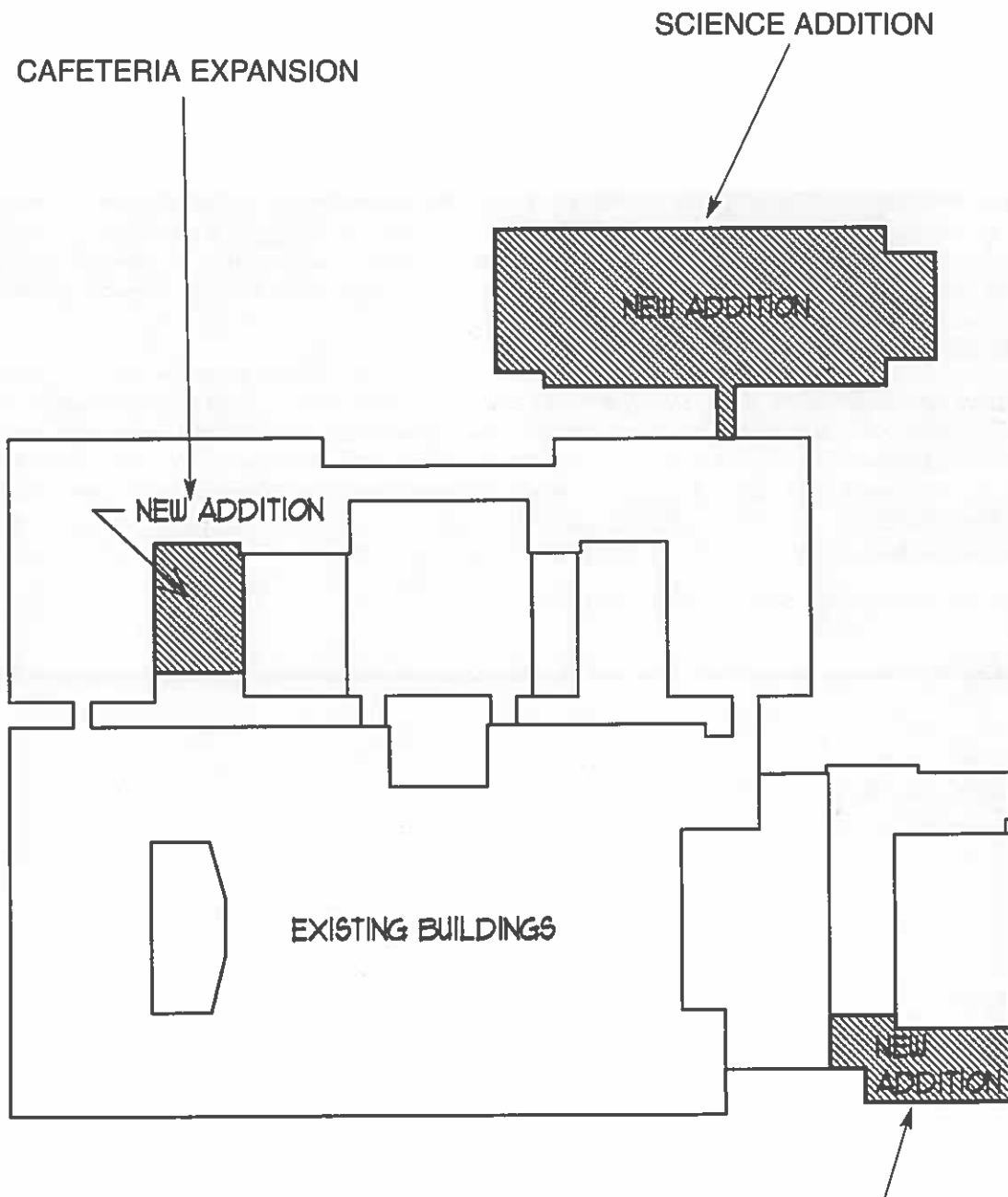
Woodshop is alive and well. Since the 2000-2001 school year, we have been operating the woodshop eight out of eight periods, and turning some students away. This is one of our most popular and useful electives, giving students lifelong skills. Providing a larger space will enable us to accommodate more students.

## Television Production Studio

The original design of the school allowed for a television studio, which we have upgraded through the years, adding new equipment when necessary. What we have not been able to provide is a room large enough for both filming and editing. A simple move to a larger space, requiring minimal renovation, will improve this program significantly.



# Proposed Expansion



- 15 Science Labs
- 7 Science Prep Rooms
- Cafeteria Expansion
- 2 New Girls' Locker Rooms

GIRLS' LOCKER ROOM ADDITION

# How Do Tuition Students Benefit Northern Highlands?

By Gary S. Lane, RSBA, Business Administrator/Board Secretary



Accepting students from Ho-Ho-Kus and Saddle River has enabled us to maintain and in some cases expand course offerings, to populate a wide variety of after-school clubs, and to field stronger athletic teams. And, the attendant tuition payments have helped offset the local tax levy. Sometimes these benefits have come at no cost at all: tuition students have simply taken up otherwise empty seats in established classes. At other times we have incurred the additional cost of hiring new staff, however, the tuition revenue has more than paid for this expense. In fact, the district experiences a positive cash flow each year from the presence of Ho-Ho-Kus and Saddle River students. Over the past several years this has enabled us to keep the school taxes in Allendale and Upper Saddle River lower than they would otherwise have been.

Despite the clear advantages of our sending-receiving relationships with these two towns, there are bound to be questions now that we're talking about expansion: Would the proposed renovation be necessary at all if the high school served only Allendale and Upper Saddle River? And are the taxpayers of Ho-Ho-Kus and Saddle River really pulling their own weight?

Actually, we wouldn't have the option of dropping our

tuition students even if we wanted to; especially considering the lengths to which both Northern Highlands and Ho-Ho-Kus went to bring about this union, the State wouldn't allow us to renege on our agreement now. But the fact is that we would need many of the proposed renovations even without the increased enrollment that these students represent. No matter how many students are in the school, we must bring our science labs up to date. No matter how many students are in the school we must remedy the disparity between our boys' and girls' locker rooms. The proposed improvements are educationally and programmatically driven. Are they pulling their own weight? I would argue yes, in that the tuition received not only pays for their presence but also provides additional revenue that is applied against the cost of operating and maintaining the district.

Over the past several years, the State has changed funding laws and many districts faced difficult financial issues. During these times, while other districts experienced budget cutbacks and have had to reduce curriculum offerings, Northern Highlands has been able to maintain its educational excellence - thanks, in no small part, to the tuition students among us. We have many reasons to be glad that Ho-Ho-Kus and Saddle River have joined us.

**Northern Highlands Regional High School District**  
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