

# Muhlenberg board agrees on bids

Work on the district's \$13 million middle school renovation and expansion project is expected to start in the middle of next month.

**By Greta Cuyler**  
Reading Eagle

The Muhlenberg School Board has unanimously agreed to award contracts for the \$13 million middle school renovation and expansion project.

The winning construction bids, plus recommended upgrades to the HVAC and electrical system and new school lockers, total about \$10.72 million.

Related fees such as furnishings, permits and project management account for the remainder of the projects costs.

The agreement on the bids came at the board's meeting Wednesday night.

The board also agreed unanimously to pay Reynolds Construction Management, Harris-

burg, \$392,800 to manage the 16-month middle school project.

Construction of the 14-classroom addition is expected to begin in mid-February and should be finished in spring 2010, said John R. Hill of Muhlenberg Greene Architects, the Reading company working on the project.

The middle school will remain open during construction, which will be done in phases.

The project will add 22,000 squarefeettothe145,000-square-foot building, including classrooms and a cafeteria addition.

The renovations in the existing building will include upgrading bathrooms and science classrooms, painting and installing new carpeting, ceiling

tiles and lighting, Hill said.

The board agreed to award the contracts to five different contractors — one each for general construction, plumbing, HVAC, electrical and hazardous materials abatement.

It did so despite having taken the state Department of Education to court to defend the district's option to use a single prime contractor.

In the end, the board learned the single prime contractor would have cost the district nearly \$200,000 more than the multiple contractors.

School Board President Otto W. Voit III said he didn't regret the board's decision to challenge the Education Department.

"Everybody should have the option," Voit said Thursday. "We saw everything side by side and we were able to make an informed decision for the best of the taxpayers."

This building project will be

the district's second major one recently.

The C.E. Cole Intermediate School, which had been closed for a decade, reopened in the fall after a \$17 million renovation.

The school serves fifth- and sixth-graders, freeing up space in the elementary center and middle school, because both have one fewer grade.

The middle school addition will have a similar benefit for the high school. When it is done, ninth-graders will move from the high school to the middle school.

The C.E. Cole project also was managed by Reynolds Construction Management.

"We're extremely pleased with how the (intermediate school) project was managed and how the ultimate costs came out to the district," Voit said.

Contact reporter Greta Cuyler at 610-371-5042 or gcuyler@readingeagle.com.