

From the Burlington County Times: Burlington County Alternative School students move in to new \$5.5 million building

By Brian Woods, Staff Writer



MOUNT LAUREL — Burlington County opened its new Alternative School building to students last Tuesday, moving it down the street at a cost of about \$6 million.

County employees spent the spring and summer renovating much of the 20,000-square-foot building on Briggs Road, near Rowan College at Burlington County, to make room for over 100 students. The county bought the building for about \$5.5 million in April.

To get the building ready for the second half of the school year, the county spent just over \$700,000 making "in-house" upgrades with its staff, according to county spokesman Eric Arpert.

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Construction costs were originally anticipated for under \$1 million.

The upgrades included adding a computer lab, technology lounge, science lab, kitchen and cafeteria, fitness room, 10 classrooms and nurse's office.

In March, the county authorized up to \$6.55 million to be used on the project, issuing \$6.22 million in bonds and using \$327,500 from its budget. The project came in under budget at about \$6.2 million.

The Alternative School educates high school and middle school students and is for those who, for a variety of reasons, struggle at traditional high schools. The county's Special Services School District assumed responsibility in the summer of 2014.

The school will use a little less than two thirds of the building, county officials have said. One of the tenants, Agilence Inc., will remain until at least April 2018.

The school previously was in a 9,300-square-foot building on Briggs Road. That facility was renovated and opened in October 2014, with the school spending only two years there. Last year, RCBC bought the building for \$7 million to house health and science programs by 2017.

The Alternative School had been in Pemberton Township since 1993.

The new building was purchased to "meet the explosive demand for the Alternative School program, which services Burlington County districts and beyond," Special Services Superintendent Christopher Nagy said recently.

It is designed to accommodate up to 150 students. Last year, the school had an average of 90 students, but at midpoint this year there were a little more than 100, with a number of intake students pending, Nagy said.

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"The number of intakes indicates the demand, and we anticipate that the building will be at capacity within a year," he said.

Nagy attributed the expected growth to the school's ability to provide a solution for students who need an alternative setting such as individualized instruction, adaptive behavior modification, smaller class sizes, and group instruction and support.

The school gives students the opportunity to graduate quicker as well as access to enroll in RCBC courses.

"The school is also attractive because it not only advocates for a culture of nonviolence, but integrates tenets of mindfulness and character education," Nagy said.

Tuition is about \$20,000 per year for high school students and about \$22,000 for middle school students. It is paid to the county school district by each student's home or sending public district.