



Port Townsend students say goodbye to Grant Street Elementary School on Friday, the last day of classes. In September, school will be held at Salish Coast Elementary School, just up the hill from the current location. Grant Street Principal Lisa Condran, right, said the school has seen 61 years of children pass through its doors. (Jeannie McMacken/Peninsula Daily News)

Grant Street Elementary students say farewell to school building

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By Jeannie McMacken

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PORT TOWNSEND — Port Townsend students have ended the school year with memories, hugs and tears of leaving their classmates behind until September when they meet again in a new classroom.

Students at Grant Street Elementary at 1637 Grant St., said goodbye, too, not only to their teachers and classmates, but also to the building, Friday.

Their new classrooms literally will be brand-new.

After 61 years and millions of footsteps running through the halls, Grant Street is closing its doors and will be demolished, making room for a playground, once a replacement school is built.

Nearby, Salish Coast Elementary School, home of the Eagles, is under construction. The \$28.1 million, 68,000-square-foot building — twice the size of the Grant Street school — will welcome its first students in September.

Principal Lisa Condran reminisced on the last day of school in the well-loved facility.

“Every year is a fresh start and every year comes to this place of closure,” Condran said. “It’s even more true this year with going into a new school.

“Today is June 15, the last day of 61 years of education, fun and community happening in this building,” she continued. “It has served the Port Townsend community very well. There are a lot of great memories here. It’s a big part of our history and we’re looking forward toward a future up on the hill above us at Salish Coast Elementary.

“This place will always stay dear in our hearts and we’re excited to be getting a building that will aesthetically match the beautiful things that have happened here in the last 61 years.”

Ann Raymond, assistant principal of Grant Street Elementary School, is retiring this year. Her last day was particularly poignant.

“Elementary schools provide a unique place in a small community,” Raymond said. “There is a legacy here that people who have stayed in the community stay connected through the elementary school.

“This building has been longer lived than many buildings in many communities. You have generations of children who have grown up coming through these halls.”

Connie Welch, who is currently a Port Townsend School Board member, was in the first grade of the new Grant Street Elementary School in 1958.

“My parents moved here in the spring and I was enrolled in the school. Everyone was happy that it was the first time all the students in grades 1-6 were in the same building,” Welch recalled.

She said being in a new school was quite exciting for the students back then. Welch graduated from Port Townsend High School and was a teacher at Grant Street, Mountain View Elementary and Blue Heron Middle School.

According to Raymond, a kindergarten teacher was also in the first class and has taught at the school the longer than any other educator, she said.

Both of the school’s secretaries, the custodian, and some of the para-educators attended Grant Street as well, she said.

Condran said 470 students will be enrolled in September in kindergarten through fifth grades. The number also includes those in the preschool program, Early Head Start, Head Start, and a developmental program for 3-4 year olds.

The new school’s capacity is 600 students.

Pieces of the old will be incorporated into the new.

Outdoor Native American-themed art that was done in collaboration with students will be on display at the new location. Some interior artwork also will be preserved, officials said, adding that a wooden sign may go in the garden with an addition of the dates 1957-2018.

Funds for the new school come primarily from a \$40.9 million bond voters approved in February to fund construction of the new elementary school and make improvements to Port Townsend High.

The new school's expansion through the fifth grades will allow Blue Heron Middle School to adopt a traditional model of students in grades 6-8.

To keep things as normal as possible, Condran said the staff celebrated the last day of school as they have in the past.

“We had a flash mob dance party this morning. Our PE teacher led a dance that the children have been practicing. On Wednesday, we had our last assembly and presented a slide show that shows every child and teacher. We also sang Happy Birthday to everyone who has a birthday over the summer.”

Students painted their palms and gave the building a high-five on the front of the building. The colorful outdoor mural will remain until the building is demolished.

At precisely 12:25 the buses lined up to collect their precious cargo. The entire staff lined the sidewalk, waved goodbye to the children, and wished them a fond farewell and a wonderful summer.

“The next school year begins Sept. 4,” said Condran.” Buses will roll up, the kids will get out, and staff will make the students feel like home. It will be a brand new experience, but the environment we create for them will be quite familiar.”

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