

The entire Eagle Hill School community is eagerly awaiting the grand opening of the school's new living and learning center (i.e., dormitory). I was both excited and proud to offer many of our students and families a sneak preview of the dormitory over fall family weekend in October. Without exception, the response was simply, "Wow!" I am pleased to share with you the most frequently asked questions about the dormitory, as well as the corresponding answers. However, I encourage you to visit campus to truly understand and appreciate the magnitude and importance of this new facility to the entire EHS community.

When will the dormitory open and how many people will it accommodate?

The dormitory will be ready for occupancy upon the students' return from the winter vacation on January 4, 2004. There are 105 single student dormitory rooms, five resident counselor apartments, and three weekend apartments. Additionally, the front entry is now home to the student life offices of Mr. Baglio, Mrs. Riendeau, Ms. Ward, and Mrs. McFaul. The building itself is just over 40,000 square feet.

What is the difference between a dormitory and a living and learning center?

While we are comfortable using the terms interchangeably now that the building is nearing completion, the term living and learning center served as our internal guidepost as we endeavored to design and construct a building that would support the specific academic, social, and personal needs of our students. Using that guidepost, every single decision we made had to pass the following two-pronged test: "Does this decision support and uphold the integrity of our mission and philosophy?" and "Will this decision benefit our students?"

Why did you decide to provide each student with his or her own room?

The decision to provide each student with his or her own dormitory room was unquestionably the single most significant decision that we made. We spent countless hours weighing the benefits of single rooms (personal privacy, quiet study area, time for "decompression," etc.) versus the merits of having a roommate (socialization, learning to share/compromise, etc.). In typical EHS fashion, we found wisdom in both sides and decided not to view this as an either/or proposition. Rather, we set forth to design a living space that would meet all of the needs of our students—and thus we conceived of the suite-style dormitory with single rooms.

What does "suite-style" mean?

The dormitory is designed in groups of six individual rooms, each of which shares a common entry/exit and bathroom (two showers, two toilets, and two sinks per six students). Of course, this allows us to group students in the dormitory with the same level of care and consistency that we do in the classroom (age, social skill level, etc.).

What type of precautions have you taken given that it houses both boys and girls?

We are extremely pleased that both boys and girls will be able to enjoy this state-of-the-art facility and even more pleased that they will do so separately from each other. The dorm is designed to be two buildings under one roof (one for boys and one for girls), with no access between buildings. Moreover, the separate male and female entrances that flank the residential offices give us more control over the comings and goings of our students than we enjoy today.

What size are the student rooms and what amenities will they have?

The dimensions of the rooms are nine feet by eleven feet, with nine-foot ceilings throughout the building. Each room will come standard with new furniture, an individual telephone (with voice mail), and an Internet connection (with parent permission). The dorm itself has large common lounges on each floor, is fully air-conditioned, and has a pressurized sprinkler system in every room in the building.

Who will live in the new dormitory?

Upon completion of the new dormitory, we will have a total of three dorms that will accommodate our students. As a general rule, underclassman boys will live in Dana Hall and underclassman girls will live in Prescott Hall. Again as a general rule, all other students will live in the new dormitory. It is important to note that both Dana Hall and Prescott Hall will also be outfitted with phones and Internet service.

Who paid for this new building?

Eagle Hill School took advantage of the historic interest rate lows and partnered with the Town of Hardwick on a landmark tax-exempt bond that proved to be a significant economic benefit for all involved. Moreover, by constructing a conservative financial model taking into account our carefully researched and moderate enrollment growth plan (ultimate boarding enrollment of 140), the school will be able to absorb the bond repayment obligation into its annual operating budget without compromising the integrity of the program. Not surprisingly, however, future building projects will need to be supported by fundraising as opposed to additional leveraging of the school's assets.

How does this dorm fit into our strategic plan?

The new dormitory aligns perfectly with the objectives outlined in the school's strategic plan. First and foremost, it accomplishes one of our five major objectives by providing the perfect living and learning environment for our students. Second, it furthers our faculty housing initiative by adding five beautiful faculty apartments to the three new faculty homes built this summer with the auction proceeds. Third, the new dormitory allowed us to renovate formerly occupied space for a new health center that is four times larger than the current space. Lastly, the new dormitory will allow us to host conferences and events during the weeks between the summer and school year programs.

What is the fate of Quabbin Hall (formerly the White Dorm for our alumni)?

The master campus plan calls for Quabbin Hall to become faculty townhouses at some point in the future. However, after a thorough structural analysis by an independent consulting firm, it has been determined that it will be more cost effective to start from scratch than to retrofit the existing building. It is likely that Quabbin Hall will be demolished in the coming year.