

MINEOLA UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT  
MINEOLA, NY

**Special Hearing MINUTES**

*The Mission of the Mineola Union Free School District is to inspire each student to be a life-long learner, pursue excellence, exhibit strength of character and contribute positively to a global society.*

\*\*\*\*\*

**Board Goals – 2008-2009**

- ***Educational Expectations and Improvement***
- ***School Quality***
- ***Operations***
- ***Fiscal Management/Stability***

\*\*\*\*\*

**November 10, 2008**  
**Mineola High School**  
**7:00 p.m. Auditorium**

**Board of Education**

Stephen Siwinski, President  
Laraine Salvatore, Vice President  
John McGrath  
William Hornberger  
Terence Hale

**Central Office**

Dr. Lorenzo Licopoli, Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Michael Nagler, Deputy Superintendent  
Sherri Goffman, Asst. Supt. of Curr. & Inst.  
John Waters, Asst. Supt. of Finance & Oper.  
Janice Patterson, Director of Pupil Services  
Donna Martillo, District Clerk

**A. Call to Order**

At 7:11 p.m. the hearing was called to order by President Siwinski.

**B. Pledge of Allegiance**

**C. Reading of Mission – Stephen Siwinski**

**D. Moment of Silent Meditation**

**E. Dais & Visitor Introductions**

**F. Superintendent's Reports**

1. **Overview - Grade Configuration Report**

The Superintendent of Schools briefly summarized the history of contracting with a consultant to analyze Grade Configuration at the recommendation of the Finance Committee. The objective of the study was to ascertain if the budget and per pupil cost could be reduced with a re-configuration of the schools. Community input was obtained through a survey mailed to community households for input as to ranking configuration options. This topic will also be discussed by the Board at the November 20, 2008 Business Meeting.

The Superintendent of Schools stated that an exercise in cost savings values incorporated in the community is also captured in the Study. In order to reduce

expenses and have costs more in line with the County average, 4 to 5 years ago the school district undertook a very aggressive approach to reducing expenses and labor cost reductions in order to preserve small neighborhood schools.

Drs. Fowler and Beni explained the charge given to them by the Board of Education. There were 3 elements involved in the Study: (1) looking at future uses of school buildings; (2) ascertain future student enrollment; (3) improve an increase of program offerings for students.

Dr. Fowler also discussed the following: a student enrollment projection performed by Western/Suffolk BOCES for a 5 and 10 year period; current use of classrooms; current program needs; outcome of focus groups; cost savings available with various options; survey sent to the community (1412 respondents) with their input.

Dr. Beni discussed the following: how the options were developed; cost factors with each of the 6 options, which also included maintain the current configuration; bulk of savings coming from staff reductions; school class sizes; transportation factors; implementation date would differ with each option; estimated savings for each option.

Dr. Beni reviewed the options and discussed the following: schools with the largest capacity for growth; ascertained the projected enrollment by school for capacity of each building.

President Siwinski now opened up the Hearing to questions from the audience.

## 2. Public Comments Regarding the Grade Configuration Report

Q: What were the results of the survey? What is the capacity of the MS and HS?

R: Dr. Fowler stated that this information was shared with the Board and he listed the options receiving the highest ranking in order:

- Option 4
- Option 3
- Option 6
- Option 1
- Option 2
- Option 5

R: Dr. Beni responded that there is no real way to schedule MS and HS at 100% capacity due to the movement of students and need for specific classes. Using a factor of 95% utilization to give crystallization the MS capacity is a little more than 800 and the HS a little more than 1400.

Q: Why do enrollment total numbers disagree with total projected enrollment? Why in Option 2 weren't the scenarios 1-2, 3-5, 6-8, and 9-12? What prevented that from being a scenario?

R: Dr. Fowler responded that the enrollment numbers vary based on the grade configuration.

R: Mr. Siwinski clarified the question as: how did the split occur in option 2? How did the options come about?

R: Dr. Fowler responded that these are the original options, but the individual schools at that time were not identified.

- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the number of classrooms and square footage were used to identify schools.
- Q: How would the children's psychology be affected with 7<sup>th</sup> graders being in with 12<sup>th</sup> graders?
- R: Dr. Fowler responded that the issue was addressed in a number of focus groups with staff that work with the children. Size of school research about what average sizes are, how large a school could be, and impact of staff on students. Someone noted that not one of the options was to take all K-5 and put into single school, Middle School would be large enough. The issue of the number of times a child has to change schools and get into a new configuration. In any of these you may be able to maintain program offerings because you have enough staff. The school district has to decide weighing the pros and cons what the impact is going to be on the students. We factored in and reported to the Board a lot of these comments that came from the community that dealt with the issue you are addressing.
- R: Dr. Beni responded that this is the reason the Board has given this opportunity tonight. We advised the Board that around the State and Nassau County there are High Schools 7 to 12, and 8 to 12 as well as a variety of Middle Schools depend on how the staff enables it to happen. Very good staff here very concerned about the children. There are 8<sup>th</sup> graders in many schools, if brought to the High School there would be a need to set up a separate program and wing. Usually change happens in a series of events and the staff plans to ensure that children's issues are addressed. What the district has done here is very tough, economic factors to deal with. They tried to show district some options to consider. Class size may improve. School aid cuts can devastate a program. Staff are ready, principals are ready and children are ready. Keep children fully apprised as to what is going to happen. 8<sup>th</sup> grade in High School, staff has to make sure to enable children to take advantage of programs. Much more than the numbers, the Board's values are in the proposal. Any changes made, depends on how they are handled with the children being the most critical part. Explore and look at the financial aspect to advance and maintain the program. Middle School teachers ensure that 8<sup>th</sup> grade kids going to the High School, their teachers would go with them. A lot of thought has gone into the process, and timing of the decision is very critical for the district in that your teaching staff is successful. Building staff needs to happen in a thoughtful and well planned, so when September comes around school is ready.
- Q: How can we have staff cuts and still have a sufficient staff?
- R: Dr. Beni responded in a perfect school if you have 160 children 40 40 40 40, and a class size policy of 20 kids in a class, 8 teachers is fine. But life doesn't work that way and 160 children 50 here 30 there, 28 in a grade you really are probably going to have 2 additional teachers. But if they were combined you may not need an additional teacher, or possibly 2.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded it was a good example. At Willis 11 sections of K translate, under the current configuration, to 12 13 sections in grade 1. Job here is not to advocate a particular option. Collect information and try to capture what the community values as well as some of the efficiencies that seemed relevant to today's economy that were identified by the Finance Committee 2 or 3 years ago. And insist that the values of neighborhood schools cannot be abandoned. In August/September state economy from Governor and State legislators are challenging. This is going

to be a very challenging time for the Board to ascertain how to bring forward, and maintain programs and favorable class sizes.

- Q: Closing 2 to 3 buildings? What is the proposal, when? Lease the buildings to who? Possibility of buildings being vacant for years.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools stated there are a couple of options and the leasing of buildings is very great. The Superintendent of Schools stated we have buildings that are all renovated and there is interest from private school providers.
- Q: Where are you going to put the kids in the High School from 8<sup>th</sup> grade? Why not cut administrative staff? He is for keeping the neighborhood schools, transitions are not good. A lot of kids will be bussed.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools stated that transportation issues were factored into the estimates. At one time the High School had 1,600 kids.
- Q: First presentation Drs. Fowler and Beni stated no separate area in the HS for 7 and/or 8<sup>th</sup> graders to go? Do we have cost estimates for maintaining buildings that are not leased? Was a cost per pupil factored in with these scenarios?
- R: Dr. Beni responded that utility costs were factored in, which will be the same. High School principal and staff would have to do some work in preparing a wing. Right now gym, theater, and cafeteria careful planning is needed for that. Keeping the 8<sup>th</sup> grade concept separate from the High School. Core classes could remain as a team and with careful scheduling students can be sent to other areas. They would arrive at High School and leave, major factor to consider. Dr. Fowler stated the cost per pupil varies from \$1,000 per student or less. The Superintendent of Schools stated that our cost now is \$29,000 per student estimate annual savings of 3.9 million they have 2,700 students and subtract that from \$29,000.
- C: We are about to crack the \$30,000 per student mark. The Governor is begging Washington to bailout the state. The community is looking at double digit tax levy next year. There is no projection of revenue for these buildings.
- Q: Did the district project revenue for each of these buildings? Why was it not included?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that until we actually have a bid to lease a building, projecting \$16 to \$20 a square foot leasing revenue it can't be factored. Last year the district was contacted by 2 different agencies to consider leasing space to them if available. If you lease 10 classrooms at 1000 square feet that would be your leasing contract year. Negotiate amount of utilities, pay for maintenance of buildings. If our staff is to maintain the building they would have to pay for that as well. Schools around Nassau County lease, like BOCES, or a day school provider. If we were to lease an elementary school, it would be best suited for a school type organization.
- Q: When these gentlemen met the last time, they said BOCES was a viable lessee?
- C: Most people here want status quo, but look at the economy. He doesn't think business as usual is going to cut it this year and people voting on the budget are not stakeholders, it's the people on fixed incomes. Something has to be done. Estimated per square foot value could be included with savings under each option with a foot note combining revenue with savings.
- C: Has some concern about classroom configuration
- Q: How serious is the savings 3.9 million or 2.9 million to the average homeowner in the district?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools asked Mr. Waters what would the effect be for the Mineola homeowner?

- R: Mr. Waters responded that if 3 million dollars was reduced on the expense side and applied that 3 million directly to total tax levy this year, 69 million dollars on a 78 million dollar budget, it's about a 4% decrease in the levy. There are other factors; most of the tax parameters are residential or commercial 94% of 100%. Just take 4% decrease in tax levy apply it to the average Mineola taxpayer, Nassau County average tax of Mineola is \$5200 apply 4% and that would be your reduction. Savings of about \$220 per year divided by 12 months, \$17 or \$18 a month.
- C: That would be at 3 million dollar level, it is unfortunate the savings isn't more because the options are scary.
- R: Dr. Fowler responded that when you talk about savings against tax levy there may be no savings. But there may be a significant State Aid reduction, or change in assessment in Nassau County. And in the district you may be talking about a reduction in the amount of an increase; you must look at it more broadly.
- C: A resident was concerned about the accuracy of the enrollment figures under the various options. Add up option 1, enrollment is 2648 students. Add up enrollment in option 2 and it's 2680 students.
- Q: A resident questioned the enrollment figures in option 1 and 2 and asked what happened to 32 students?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that they are estimates projected for 2009-10 school year. In the course of transcribing the different configurations an error was made.
- Q: Was this report done by Drs. Fowler and Beni?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the district put together projected enrollments based on the configurations being proposed.
- Q: If the projected enrollments are wrong would the projected savings be wrong?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded, no, the savings would remain the same.
- Q: How is that, he doesn't understand?
- Q: Enrollment figures are different; is it an error?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded yes. The 2009-2010 school year an error was made in transcribing, taking from one file putting it to another, human error. Estimated annual savings would remain the same because when you create a configuration it creates a different staffing pattern regardless of it.
- Q: Are there any other errors in the report?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded just the enrollment projection.
- C: Imperative that the Board of Education either close 1 or 2 schools. Years ago schools were closed and his children moved with each closing, 1st Willis then Cross. Emotions ran high and his children's education was not affected. Previous Board was irresponsible in signing new contracts at 7 to 8% raises. No longer to continue to pass budgets which reflect additional funding when our schools are running at 65% capacity. The savings will help offset future increases and expenses. It is time for the Board to do the right thing.
- Q: How much of the buildings' square footage is utilized?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the square footage is the total of the building. 65% used in a day. If your class is used for 5 periods, 60% is utilized. If used all nine periods 100% is utilized.
- C: The cost of most houses in the community average 400,000 and 600,000 dollars.
- Q: How does our school tax compare to that dollar amount in Nassau County?

- R: Mr. Waters responded that he was not sure if it was in this current year or last year's budget of where Mineola was ranked in terms of other districts. Mineola was 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> lowest in schools taxes in Nassau County.
- Q: If we were to look at these elementary schools, put one up to lease, which building would fetch highest revenue?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools asked if under these scenarios, Hampton and Cross.
- C: Willis would make less money? Each building under these options Willis would fetch most money if we were to lease a school.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that all buildings are in good shape and 16 to 20 dollars still applies to Willis as Hampton and Cross. If we were to sell a building then Willis would be more marketable
- C: I hope that never happens
- R: The Superintendent of Schools agreed.
- C: Keep in mind that the net raising of our taxes may be decreased in light of the fact that we may be re-apportioning some of the schools and some of the space. But look at current economic situation in the real estate market and went on the presumption that schools, based on each scenario, were not rented, sold, or occupied, (left vacant).
- Q: Would this really be worth it?
- Q: What would be the net net cost to us versus profits in implementing these programs?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded we would have to maintain the buildings, energy requirements, and security whether leased or vacant.
- Q: Was it factored in to maintain empty buildings?
- R: Dr. Beni responded that they assumed that you would be paying same utility costs and overhead.
- Q: If we project same expenses, why are we moving the kids out? What are we saving?
- R: Dr. Fowler responded that operating costs of staff is where the savings is. In 1980s a number of school districts went through a period of consolidating school buildings due to declining enrollments and lessons learned, don't sell, maintain the buildings. There were districts that saved millions of dollars over a period of 15 to 20 years.
- C: Stated several concerns. She has lived in Mineola her whole life, experienced being moved out of Cross when it closed years ago. Costly for the district going from a school to Police Academy and back to a school again. Chaminade does not pay taxes. If we are going to pay or lease we will pay tax on them as well. As a mother and parent who sat in on her children's classes she views the teachers as wonderful. Seen daughter's teacher with 18 children and having to deal with special ed and ESL children. These are her students who require extra attention. You cannot take a classroom of 28 kids, that is not homogeneous, and say it is okay.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools stated that under these configurations class sizes are more or less the same. At last week's Board meeting he presented scenarios for cost reduction. What you are referring to is a whole different proposal. The Board directed him to do a cost containment report in the event they needed to reduce expenses for the 2009-2010 school year. That is not part of the Grade Configuration.
- Q: How many children are in a class if 2 schools are closed?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that class size would be the same and you would probably not have 13 and 14 class sizes but it would be

equalized because there would be 5 to 6 sections in one building and classes would be between 19 and 21.

- C: Knows many parents who will not be able to send their children to parochial school. At Jackson 7 students came in at the beginning of the year and a new class was formed. The current economic situation, you can anticipate that will happen again this year. Felt closing 2 schools without projecting the possibility of getting additional students from parochial would be premature. She teaches Art at the High School with 2 teachers teaching at the same time, that room is 100% utilized. Mineola is a wonderful place to teach, live and raise your children. She understands the economic situation and it needs to be looked at in a different way. If one school is to be closed it should not be sold, but leased, and is against putting 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders into the High School. As a parent and teacher, closing schools is not the only option. She passes her budget because her kids come first, her district comes first.
- R: Dr. Beni responded that private school projections were studied, which BOCES conducted for the district, 20% of Mineola students attend private and/or parochial schools. Even if 10% came back to the public school the capacity is still maintained. It is a variable that can not be projected.
- C: All involves money. Education is not a business. What is good for children is not necessarily cost effective. The district has a low student/teacher ratio. He does not believe this reconfiguration of class sizes would be the same as we have now.
- C: He wants to make sure that everyone on the stage is looking out for the children's benefit. He looks at the budget and is sure there are some things he does not understand, i.e. \$72,000 for public relations. That may be a valid expense. We want the district's name out there and want to be known for our education. What Mineola is known for affects property values. Is it worth losing a reputation of a great district to save \$12 a month? He understands people on a fixed income are taxed further and further. It is difficult for everyone.
- Q: Inquired if Dr. Fowler received a proposal he made to the Board regarding grade configuration? Have you considered it? Will a map of the district be provided at the next Board meeting where grade configuration will be discussed?
- R: Dr. Fowler responded yes he received the proposal. They found it similar to other options that have already been studied.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that a map of the district will be at the next Board Meeting on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November.
- C: He stands by his proposal in going down to 6 schools. Amount of residents in this community that have children attending schools vs. the amount of parents here tonight is overwhelming. We have a very knowledgeable district as far as voters are concerned. If we don't do anything, he doubts the budget will pass. The taxpayers vote on the school budget as every district on L.I., and we will get hit. We have to do something.
- C: Long Island services 17% of students and receives only 13% in State Aid.
- Q: Instead of looking at plans in cutting schools what are we doing to get Long Island's fair share of State Aid?
- R: Dr. Beni responded that State Aid is inappropriately given out. It's based on fundamental assumptions statewide that have been the result of political deals over 100 years. NYS measure's wealth on the value of property and income, and there is a factor called the Combined Wealth Index. We all live in an area where income and property values are substantially higher than statewide.

Several challenges, several reports fundamentally, at the end of the NYS budget, the leaders of each house has “shares” and last year ½ of L.I. did a lot better. “Shares” ensures that you will get only a certain % of the aid, no matter what the need. NYC receives less than their % of students in the state. Decades have been spent fighting this unfairness.

- R: The Superintendent of Schools interjected that Mineola is considered a high wealth district as most schools in Nassau and Suffolk County. We have tried to lobby for a cost of living index and to adjust the formula so that income has more weight than the Combined Index. At his previous district they received 50 to 60% of revenue from State Aid. Here in Mineola the total State revenue is about 8 or 9%. It doesn't capture Mineola's financial needs in terms of the rest of the State. The formula is not based on equity.
- C: Thanked the Board, Administration, and faculty because he is happy with the education his child is receiving in Mineola. The discussion tonight is important for taxpayers and school administration is looking at every possible way to keep taxes down.
- Q: It looks like only 16% of the community responded to the questionnaire? Is it because people are not interested, don't care, or are against it?
- R: Dr. Fowler commented that 16% is high and a more typical response would be 10 to 11%. Above average turn out which was reasonably representative of the community, but obviously it is not scientific. This was not a random sample, it was whoever chose to send it in. You have a good number but no idea if it is representative of the community.
- R: Dr. Beni stated that the Board took an extra step in getting as much information as possible included in their deliberations. Drs. Beni & Fowler have lived through enrollment declines and enrollment increases in their own careers. They have closed schools, built and renovated them. This Board's message was to try and get as much information as possible. As the Board gets closer to a decision interest rises.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools interjected that 1400 responded to the survey and 8900 were sent out to residents. 515 respondents were parents or households that had children attending Mineola schools. There are 1700 to 1800 households that comprise our school system, which equals to 2600 kids as projected. That is almost 1/3 of the district's stakeholders. From that perspective the response was high, but he would have liked to have seen more respondents.
- C: Thank you for having the community here this evening. It is the responsible thing to look at ways to make the most out of the resources we have. He does not like to say no until he hears viable options. Aside from a small savings or gain, it does not seem a tremendous value if 1 or more schools are closed. No one has spoken about the instructional benefits or achievement gains from this. Research is out there that shows small class sizes equal better achievement. Smaller schools equal more effective professional learning communities among the teachers and Administrators within the schools. Emotion cannot be separated. Education is not a business and what is beneficial is not necessarily cost effective. In order for this district to have excellent instructional programs we have to be equal to or better than the districts surrounding us. Extremely solid elementary and middle education, the closeness you have is a very big part of that. Complimented his principal (Hampton). While the residents we are hearing tonight are not scientific, they are very motivated people who vote for the school budget and the Board, and seem committed to keeping schools open. We trust you to make the best



decision possible. Important for you to remember what you are hearing from the community tonight, because the way you will vote is where the district goes.

- R: Dr. Beni responded that as people go through the rich narrative of the background of materials one of the goals is to maximize resources across the schools. It may not seem to make sense, but if you have schools too small and are sharing staff among schools it is very difficult to train staff and special resources, Special Ed, ESL across multiple schools for all kids.
- Q: Who is responsible for the final decision or do parents vote on it?
- R: President Siwinski responded the Board of Education.
- C: Once you vote it goes into the budget and then we vote.
- R: President Siwinski responded yes.
- C: The Board has final say.
- R: Ms. Salvatore responded that the Board can be contact by phone or e-mail.
- Q: Will the Board reveal their decision before they vote?
- R: President Siwinski responded probably not.
- C: Hampton and Cross are in all scenarios to close. When you said scenarios she thought there would be several scenarios.
- Q: Who made the decision to close those schools?
- C: At previous meetings parents didn't want 7 and 8<sup>th</sup> graders going to the HS and yet only options 4 & 5 don't have them at the HS. Parents overwhelmingly said they don't want them in the HS.
- Q: Who came up with the clustering?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the options did not change in all presentations as we clarified from the beginning the Board requested them to identify a building. Whichever building was larger and had more classrooms and largest square footage.
- Q: The clustering was based on school sizes?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that between MD and Cross, MD had more classrooms that were bigger, the same between J and H. Not necessarily what the building offered.
- Q: Central locations were not considered?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded option 3 in 2 buildings Jackson 1-4 and Meadow 1-4. When they looked at projections they collapsed grades 1-4 in Cross and Meadow into 1 building. Projection at Jackson is 492 which would still be under the threshold in terms of capacity.
- Q: Was the amount of time children spent on a bus considered?
- C: Children from Roslyn at a younger age are coming and going home from school.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the bus time Pre-K spends going to Wills was about the same.
- Q: Will the results of the survey be released before a decision is made? When a decision is made will the community surrounding that school have access to the results of the study? Will the Board sit and hear concerns of the residents surrounding the schools that will be closed?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that it was an excellent idea.
- Q: Is Mineola 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> lowest in terms of residential tax rate?
- R: Mr. Waters responded yes.
- Q: What level is Mineola when you combine the commercial and residential tax rate?
- R: Mr. Waters responded that he has not seen information in comparing other school districts in Nassau County by commercial base tax.

- C: We have been told that Mineola has a large commercial base.
- R: Mr. Waters responded correct.
- C: Not one commercial entity was asked for feedback.
- C: Every time you buy something the tax rates are passed along to us. To suggest that Mineola is not paying it is not accurate. Herricks does not have the commerce that Mineola has. Relatively speaking it's a distortion to say we are 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> lowest when we are paying commercial base taxes for them.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that is a philosophical political question. The commercial tax base is up in Mineola. When he first came to the district 58% of the tax levy was on residential. Last 7 to 8 years 50/50 in terms of commercial and residential.
- C: Does Jack not know this?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that you asked comparing other school districts. Business looks at a community's population at what the taxes would be. That is what attracts business owners.
- C: Right now the district is about 50/50.
- R: Mr. Waters responded the numbers are about 47% residential and 47% commercial filed with the State. The remaining 6% is spread between apartments and condos. Our 100% taxes is 47/47 and cannot say what Cold Spring Harbor has.
- Q: How does administration decide which principals and teachers are let go?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that laws apply to seniority and excessing in certification and tenure areas.
- C: Supported Mr. Gaven and wouldn't like to see him go.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that he does not want to see any of his administrators gone.
- Q: Has anyone in the district spoken to Mayor Martins about the illegal rentals in Mineola?
- C: It does put more children into the system who are not paying correct taxes.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded he had had many conversations with Mayor Martins about these concerns and the Mayor has been vigilant in protecting the interest, and has been very good in identifying problem areas and correcting them. He's made significant improvement in the area you mentioned.
- C: She has been at Willis for five years and what she had to go through to register her children without ever leaving the building. There are 3 or 4 children with same address different last names. It is very frustrating because more and more students are coming in.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that they have spoken about collaboration process, and discussed opportunities. The district checks and double checks building codes appropriately filed.
- Q: How would Cross and Hampton be divided into Meadow and Jackson?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded depending which option was selected.
- Q: Hampton's ESL population combined with Jackson's, with less teachers, puts a higher burden on teachers in those classrooms?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the support staff would have to be consistent with State mandates, would not change, nothing less. The proportion of students would be about the same as far as combing the 2 buildings.
- C: Would like to hear gentleman's [Mr. Otto's] proposal especially because the community didn't have to pay for it. There aren't 6 options. Option 6 is not

an option because everything is the same. Option 5 is not viable because it doesn't save money. Option 1 doesn't have enough room at HS for 7-12. Option 2 not an option because students would change every 2 years, not beneficial to students. Options 3 and 4 are the only options.

Q: If a school is to close why not close one? Why two? Are there any other options?

R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the Board reviewed 6 options and has not requested to adjust or develop any other options. Focus on original options presented. [Mr. Otto's] proposal was similar to option 2.

R: Dr. Fowler interjected that the number of facilities used, reducing by 1, 2, or 3 buildings were looked at and each of them gave the Board scenarios which reflected the number of buildings. 6 or 5 seemed to represent the best use of the buildings available under each of the scenarios.

Q: Could someone submit a better option?

R: Dr. Fowler responded that a number of people who attended the meeting in the cafeteria offered some of things mentioned, at that time were taken under consideration. The Board has said they are open to maintain programs, improving programs and meeting financial goals.

C: Cross has 51 students going into it next year which is the highest out of 3 elementary schools, and referenced seeing so many strollers in the neighborhood. If you take 169 kids from MD and 213 from Cross you have 382 kids. The cap for that building is 389.

R: The Supt. of Schools responded that in that particular scenario 5<sup>th</sup> grade is removed.

C: The resident does not believe the 7 and 8<sup>th</sup> graders belong in the HS.

C: If the district wants to save money let the teachers teach. You send the teachers out for training. Kids are not learning when the teachers are not there. Substitutes are not the students' teachers.

C: Option 4 is not reasonable adding to 200 kids to Willis because the cafeteria and playground are small, and there is no parking at Willis. Option 6, to stay the same is ridiculous. The district paid a lot of money for survey. At least you can redraw the lines. Consider class size more balanced in every the schools.

R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that there is no argument for what you said.

C: The only cost saving option is 3, which will save more than \$12 a month. You must reconsider.

R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that we did try to redistrict, it is difficult because schools are the size they are. We don't want to be in a place to redistrict a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader and their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade sibling is at a different school. Should not redistrict by grade level. He has seen moving boundary lines to adjust enrollments, but won't make adjustments in a particular grade.

C: First time attending a BOE meeting and he is for option 6. He grew up in E. Williston and feels 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the HS is a mistake. Option 1 is irresponsible to even suggest it. Small class sizes in E. Williston and after he graduated class sizes increased and had to put addition onto the school. He is also concerned with entering into a lease agreement.

Q: What makes demographics shift to go up?

R: The Supt. of Schools responded when Cross was re-opened it was to make more space not because enrollment increased. We added more space with the same enrollment.

Q: Is it comparable to today?

- R: The Supt. responded he does not have that information at this time.
- C: The Board is going back on a decision it made twelve years ago to re-open Cross.
- R: The Supt. responded that our projected enrollment since 1996 has remained stable with a slight decline.
- Q: If it has been relatively stable; How does the district know what will happen in five years from now?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the goal of this reconfiguration Study has 2 purposes: cost effective without sacrificing educational quality; and a long tradition of valuing small elementary buildings. That value had to be incorporated into the study. He is not going to speak for the BOE, but there is a value of small elementary buildings and will try to do everything to preserve it and be efficient at the same time. He has reduced expenses by 9 to 10 million dollars and was able to preserve small elementary buildings.
- C: Thank the district and Board for this hearing. It is important to hear from the parents directly. There is abundant literature on the effects of teacher student ratio. Ask you to factor this information into your decision as well as the fiscal information.
- Q: What is the district's timetable in making a decision? In May 2 Board Members are up for election.
- R: Mr. Siwinski responded that he is hoping to vote on this by this year.
- C: Hampton was chosen because it's square footage is smaller.
- Q: Were the field sizes taken into account?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that we would have to keep the fields.
- Q: How can you rent the building and not the field?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded the Board is the owner and will determine what is in the lease. We would have complete access to the fields.
- Q: Could the Board consider something less drastic like putting Pre-K and K back into the elementary buildings? Lease out the first floor and maintain the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor and not lose technology. This would leave neighborhood schools open and it would eliminate some staff.
- Q: Asked Drs. Fowler and Beni for their opinion on something that would help district?
- R: Dr. Beni responded something similar to option 5.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the only thing to be conscience of in terms of putting Pre-K and Kindergarten back in building is that Kindergarten was ½ day and now it is a full day. We would need more classrooms. With what we have now in terms of dedicated classrooms, Art and Music classrooms would be at risk.
- Q: Would the numbers equal the numbers for Pre-K and Kindergarten going into the buildings as combining Cross and Meadow?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded it would be difficult at every building. In the past, 2 sections of Kindergarten at Meadow Drive would be one room now it would need 2 rooms. Universal Pre-K would be ½ day rooms rather than ¼. It would require more room and sacrifice Art and Music space.
- C: The population is very heavy in one school and redistricting should also be considered.
- C: She has 2 students at Cross and is strongly against 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the High School. Option 3 concerns parents of 4<sup>th</sup> graders forced to go to the MS next

- year. It disturbs her in not hearing a plan which would need to be executed in a very big hurry for these kids to attend in 2009.
- Q: Who would be handling the transition of 5<sup>th</sup> graders going into the Middle School in 2009? Do you think there is enough time?
- R: Mr. Siwinski responded if option 3 is selected Dr. Licopoli would facilitate it.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that it would be more ideal to implement something like that for 2010, but could be done for 2009. We would have to dedicate all our time and energy in terms of developing a plan reconfiguring schools. There is specific language in contracts as to notification regarding excessing in how it would be met, as well as communications to parents, students and staff.
- C: Asked when a decision is made for either 2009 or 2010 to communicate it to the community. If you do it by 2009 you must have a compelling reason.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that a compelling reason is the issue facing all New York State school districts, the uncertainty of State Aid reduction. Governor Paterson is seriously considering mid-year State Aid reduction and putting a cap on spending levy to levy or budget to budget. A cap is a very challenging aspect for districts when building a budget.
- C: For all of these reasons she finds it hard to believe that within a nine month period from decision to transformation, how you can evaluate and decide, to the best of your ability, for every student affected by this. Give yourselves enough time and don't short circuit the process for \$12 per family a month.
- C: Concerned about increasing class size. Currently 200 students at Meadow Drive, and looking at your options 1,2,3,4, projected enrollments range from 286 to 405.
- Q: Where will the extra 100 or 200 kids being placed at Meadow Drive?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that Music and Art rooms would have to be used and in the 405 scenario a classroom would need to be added and that would be implemented in 2010.
- Q: Would that be sufficient for the extra children at that school?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that he would not recommend it.
- C: Most of these options designate the closing of Cross and Hampton. Between these 2 buildings you will have 31 fewer classrooms. If you have the same number of children and 31 fewer classrooms there will be more crowded classrooms. If close Cross, kids who walk to school now would have to be bussed to Meadow as well as Hampton students to Jackson. All 5<sup>th</sup> graders would need to be bussed as well.
- Q: How many extra buses would the district need to implement options 3 or 4?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded the number of buses in our fleet, and the distribution of students would be doable.
- Q: If 6% of the budget is State Aid, what is the total dollar amount?
- R: Mr. Waters responded 6 million dollars in State Aid.
- Q: What will the district do if State Aid is cut by 20% next year?
- R: Mr. Waters responded that building aid is guaranteed. To lose 1 million dollars in State Aid the district would look to reduce the expense side of the budget, and if you did not have it, you would have to go to the tax levy in order to pickup the shortfall from the State. The Board may need to consider using some undesignated fund balance as a short term solution to pay a portion of State Aid loss.
- Q: When will we find out the total State Aid before the budget?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that the Governor will have an executive budget in mid-December. We are anticipating a 20% reduction and

a 4% cap on increasing the budget. That for Mineola will definitely result in finding ways to reduce the expense side of the budget. Dr. Fowler interjected the built-in increases are to be considered for next year as well.

Q: What is the opinion of the faculty and what is their favorite option?

R: Dr. Beni responded that the question was not posed to the faculty, but these options came out of discussions with the faculty.

C: Mineola is 9th highest per pupil spending. If we went with these options and saved \$1000 we still would be in the top 10 for spending. If the end game is to bring Mineola in line with everyone else we are not going to get there with these options. Make sure everything is done to reduce expenses internally without cutting teachers.

Q: Other than reducing per pupil spending what other reason is there?

C: If option 3 came to pass you would have very little wiggle room.

Q: Does anyone see these numbers being skewed?

Q: Do you see the lines of the district being redrawn?

Q: How can a parent request their child move to a smaller school?

R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that it is something we would have to go to the drawing board and see if the lines could be adjusted. It would have to be part of the planning process regardless of the option.

C: There is a difference of 206 students between Jackson and Meadow in option 3 and feels the children will be lost in the shuffle.

C: Not in favor of 5<sup>th</sup> graders in MS. Between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade there is a drastic difference, maturity wise. If the decision is made in January, she feels it is not ample time to prepare 4<sup>th</sup> graders for next year.

Q: The resident asked Dr. Nagler what he felt because he would be affected by the changes?

R: Dr. Nagler responded that he shares the sentiments of Dr. Licopoli. He is not in favor of closing any of our buildings, but there is a pragmatic piece to it. Comes down to can we continue to run the district with current configuration? If we can that's wonderful. If we are worried about doing it in 9 months or if it needs to be done in 3 months, planning is key to this so the quicker a proactive solution to the problem, the better. There is no easy decision.

C: You will be the one we come to.

R: Dr. Nagler looks forward to it. All of our schools are wonderful and he would hate to see any of them close.

C: There are more and more children with special needs and putting them into one building utilizing more classrooms you may have 2 times amount of students in Jackson with extra ESL students. You cannot have same program. You cannot maintain same schedule for their needs.

Q: How will this impact each Board Member?

R: Mr. Siwinski responded he has a Junior at the High School and a Sophomore in College.

R: Ms. Salvatore responded she has a Senior at the High School.

R: Mr. McGrath responded both are out of the system.

R: Mr. Hornberger responded that he has a 4<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grader.

R: Mr. Hale responded that his child graduated last year.

C: The resident requested that the Board keep everyone in mind when they make their decision.

C: Has been a resident for 4 years and her son attends Cross. The enrollment projections are 5 and 10 years out.

Q: Did the consultants take into account the neighborhood is younger?

C: Concerned in closing Cross and suppose it needs to be reopened in 5 years.

- R: Dr. Fowler responded that neighborhood changes are part of the Study. Ask the Superintendent's Office to look at the Study. You will see all of the documents and conversations with developers, real estate, Village and Town Offices. Over a 5 year period these projections are 1 to 2% accurate. Turn over in housing, new people come in and have children and those are factored into the projections. He did not recommend adjusting the 10 year project because it is an entire generation of school children. You are safe using 5 year projection it will be very accurate.
- Q: What is the district willing to do without if nothing is changed?
- C: Even if State Aid remains the same this year additional \$780,000 of salary increase will be in the budget. What is the administration willing to do without and when will we know?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that is the direction they will ask of the Board of Education. We will begin to build the Education Plan and Budget and the Board will be asked for potential cost reductions. Five years ago when we were on a contingency budget, he put together a method for the Board to make decisions in how to perceive the mechanism. That year they reduced spending, off the top, by 2.9 million dollars. It was one of the lowest budget to budget increases and it still failed and they had to reduce an additional 1.7 million. The district implemented a contingent budget.
- C: All of this takes time. If we lose 20% in State Aid and if the mandate from the public is to remain the same, you must look at where the money will come from. Administration and not the kids will be hurt if the budget goes down. The kids will lose late busses, sports, drama, music etc.
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that we did not get to this place by luck. The way we reorganized our school system, commitments made to improvement, raising aspirations, staff development, bringing on best practices and no one wants anything taken away. That happens because of the combination of administrative leadership, teacher leadership, and support staff. The answer is not reducing Administrators. He proposed last week 700 to 800,000 dollars in cuts. He will build this educational plan and budget the same way. We will put together, in the same fashion, the options the Board has with respect to expense side reductions. Next meeting is first budget presentation developed in concert with Finance Committee in December that will be a starting point in preparing a final budget and adoption of a tentative budget for late March. Start with potential areas for reduction.
- Q: Can she obtain a copy of what the Board has to reduce expenses?
- R: The Superintendent responded at the 1<sup>st</sup> budget presentation.
- C: A resident recommended that everyone make it their business to attend these meetings so you know what is going on.
- Q: After hearing the public's comments and questions, can you come up with options 7, 8, and 9?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded yes there are no limitations. That was the direction we were asked to respond to.
- R: Dr. Fowler responded that if the Board identified elements not reflected in any one of the previous options, then other options could be developed.
- Q: What options are being considered by the Board?
- R: Mr. Siwinski responded that the reason why we are here tonight is to hear the community. His decision will be based on many factors. He has not made up his mind yet, but is close. Mr. Siwinski thinks they really have to discuss it again at the November 20<sup>th</sup> meeting.

- R: Ms. Salvatore responded that in August she put out a cost containment to cut Administrative costs and still believes that is the way to go instead of closing schools. She also stated the possibility of renting Willis.
- R: Mr. Siwinski responded to Ms. Salvatore that the Board cut almost ¼ million out and eliminated one position and you voted no.
- R: Ms. Salvatore responded and more needs to be cut.
- R: Mr. McGrath responded that he is in favor of option 6, for \$12 a month he is not going to gut the system.
- R: Mr. Hornberger responded that he was a member of the Finance Committee and one of their recommendations was the driving force in why Mineola's high per pupil cost is more than the average. A lot of factors: Pre-K is non-funded by the State; Universal Pre-K; we go above and beyond in services for certain programs; Mineola is a front runner which is costly to do; one of these items is running 7 buildings and the replication of functions as it relates to teachers, administrators, secretaries, and transportation. Not a lot of school districts have that. Zero based at that time decided that it would make sense to look at something else. A cost perspective option. A different program that is more superior. He supported grade configuration study since being a Board Member and as he sees more data, still supports it in concept. He is the only one who has small children in the district who will be impacted the most. He has concerns about State Aid and does not want to be reactive which would make the program diminished. He wants to put the district's best foot forward in making a proactive decision with the best information available. Many factors go into this decision. If we stay with option 6, what happens with the delivery of service when State Aid decreases? He will not be able to support same class sizes. Our budget is going up 4 to 5% and services will be cut and class sizes will increase. If a cap is mandated he has to look at all options and how does the district deliver the best program to each and every child. He is worried about having the same money to support the great programs of today and make them better. Option 6 is best for everyone because of the small schools, but he knows we are going to have issues.
- R: Mr. Hale responded that 23 years ago he bought his house on Roslyn Road and one of the key reasons was Hampton was down the block. This is something that needs to be discussed further. He is not for closing home schools. The idea of renting out Willis makes sense, if anything closes Willis is ready for anyone to utilize. The children in the district are very resilient, and he would like to see more options.
- C: If it means putting 22 kids in a class to keep schools, she is favor. Closing a school is very drastic. She thanked the Board for answering questions.
- C: Urged the Board that if they went forward in reconfiguring schools, to pursue seeking a loop hole in State law in looking at quality over tenure for excessing administrators and teachers. She asked Dr. Nagler to have a very direct transformation plan because they will be going to him as their leader and would like to see him more involved in future meetings. A lot of information shared tonight in how these options were brought to bare, detail a plan that would follow. She would argue that you cannot make an informed decision without seeing the detail as to what needs to go into the plan.
- Q: If Willis closes, where will the programs go?
- R: The Superintendent of Schools responded that part of the same question in terms of how we would service Pre-K if they were to go into the neighborhood schools. We have a program we outsource with Kornreich Center. We provide an after-school Special Ed program for Willis.



C: Jackson has 105 first graders in 5 classes, if K goes into home schools where would you put them in Jackson Avenue?

R: The Superintendent responded that every K requires a full classroom.

R: Mr. McGrath responded that in closing Willis, and moving from Willis, there is an issue of increasing staff. You will need more teachers than what you have at Willis.

C: Thanked the Jackson teachers for attending. Jackson does not have class sizes of 14 we have 24 and 28 and it is still a small loving environment. The Middle School offers an excellent education. The quality of education the children are getting should not change. These children are concerned what is going to happen. It is not worth the small cost to not keep the same quality education. Wonderful district we have. Thanked the Board for this evening.

R: Mr. Siwinski thanked Drs. Fowler and Beni.

## **G. Adjournment**

At 10:40 p.m. a motion was made to adjourn this hearing of the Board of Education.

**Motion:** John McGrath

**Second:** Laraine Salvatore

**Discussion:** The Superintendent of Schools commented on the process that was undertaken by the Board of Education; closing schools is a painful thing; schools represent the heart and soul of an area; try to carry the voice for the community and incorporate what parents' value; entire staff dedicated to the development and growth of students; the great value of our elementary schools, unique and very special, more like a family than a school building; appreciates the Board giving the opportunity for what is being done; not just an exercise making a financial decision, this process was extra-ordinary in bringing together information in terms of what to do with respect to expenses; the reason it has taken this long is the input from parents and community was needed. He thanked the Board.

**Yes:** Terence Hale  
William Hornberger  
John McGrath  
Laraine Salvatore  
Stephen Siwinski

**No:** None

**Respectfully submitted,**

Donna Martillo  
District Clerk