

Please Note: These minutes are pending approval by the committee.

Ad Hoc School Facilities Meeting Minutes
April 13, 2011
Reed Intermediate School
7:30 p.m.

Present: Bill Hart (BOE), Keith Alexander (BOE), Kathy Fetchick (LC), Bob Merola (LC), Fran Pennarola (Facilitator), Superintendent of Schools, Janet Robinson, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Linda Gedja, and one member of the press.

Absent: Debbie Leidlein (BOE), Richard Gaines (BOE), Rich Woycik (LC), James Belden (LC) and Bill Furrier (BOS).

Meeting was called to order at 7:38 p.m.
No Public Participation

The main focus of the meeting was a review by the Superintendent of the Committee's request that she consider three options for possibly closing a school. The three options under review are closing Hawley School, closing Head-O-Meadow School and closing the Middle School by returning the fifth grade to the elementary schools and moving the seventh and eighth grades to the Reed School.

Superintendent Robinson noted there are many considerations in closing an elementary school. The neighborhood elementary school is a tradition. If one of the elementary schools were to be closed, Hawley, as the oldest, is the logical one. It is not ADA compliant and cannot be made ADA compliant. Were the school to close, it could not be reopened as a school. The Town could use the facility only with accommodations; i.e., by insuring that members of the public could be accommodated on the first floor.

Ms. Robinson indicated that, even if Hawley were closed as a school, the gymnasium would have to remain open. There is a shortage of gym facilities. She mediates among conflicting parties for gym space. Also, the bathrooms would have to be available whenever the gym was being used.

Turning to Head-O-Meadow, it is a flat, ADA compliant school, and the only elementary school with air conditioning. It is currently used for summer school. It does have a small gym and cafeteria area. There is no room for expansion of Head-O-Meadow given the septic situation. According to one source, growth is expected in the southwestern portion of Newtown, which suggests that Head-O-Meadow should remain open.

As far as the use of portable classrooms, they are already in use at Sandy Hook; there might be room for them at Middle Gate Elementary School.

Closing the Middle School and moving the seventh and eighth grades to Reed School and the fifth grade to the elementary schools was discussed. Janet Robinson indicated that the school was basically at capacity, with a total of about 900 students, suggesting that consolidation like this was only feasible once class sizes reached 300 students per class.

A discussion of the Star Program for medically fragile students, which is self-contained at the Reed Intermediate School, ensued. It is a program that could be moved to the high school, which would free up the classroom space at Reed. There is also at least one room devoted to the needs of two Special Ed students who are wheelchair bound and need specialized services.

The Committee then discussed the challenges in integrating the seventh and eighth grades into the Reed School environment. It was noted that there would be a need for additional lab space (there are currently four rooms and six would probably be necessary).

Impact on district music programs was discussed. Would returning the fifth grade to the elementary schools adversely impact the orchestra and band programs for those students.

The impact on school transportation of closing a school was discussed. Of the three alternatives, it appears that closing Head-O-Meadows would have the greatest transportation impact.

Instructional issues were discussed. Clusters in the seventh and eighth grades typically constitute four teachers and up to 100 students. The fifth and sixth grade clusters are two teachers and 50 students. Bill Hart noted that adding a cluster at the seventh or eighth grade level represented a commitment for four teachers. It was noted that in the seventh and eighth grade levels, there are state requirements for specialization (they need secondary certification). At the sixth grade level, they just need elementary certification.

Superintendent Robinson discussed the Pre-K Program. It has been concentrated at Head-O-Meadow, and they are looking to diversify it to the other elementary schools. She noted that Governor Malloy was an advocate for Pre-K in the Stamford School System and expects efforts to make it statewide. Assistant Superintendent Gedja indicated they were looking at the Pre-K and Kindergarten curriculum this year, with an eye towards easing the transition to first grade. Janet Robinson noted that having the Pre-K's in the local schools made transitions for Special Ed students easier.

Bill Hart began a discussion of what needs to be considered with expanding the Reed School and questioned whether the portables the district currently owns would be suitable. If we don't use the portables, is there room on the Reed site to expand cost considerations for that expansion that need to be considered. Part of the analysis going

forward has to take into consideration the possibility of future growth in the school age population. We don't want to size the school facilities for the low points in enrollment.

Kathy Fetchick pointed out the need to establish tipping points, presumably criteria that would trigger a decision to close a school. We need to consider gym, library, and cafeteria capacities.

Issues for Future Discussions:

1. Converting Reed:
 - (a) What additional laboratory space will be needed; how can it be accommodated?
 - (b) What are the capacities of the gym, the library and the cafeteria for dealing with student needs?
 - (c) Can portables be accommodated at Reed and, if so, where? If portables cannot be accommodated, what are the prospects or possibilities for future expansion?
 - (d) What will the impact of reconfiguring Reed and the elementary schools have on bussing and transportation?
 - (e) What impact would the reconfiguration have on the music program, both in accommodating three grade levels at Reed and the impact on the fifth grade music program if it is returned to the elementary schools?
2. Closing Hawley:
 - (a) What would the operational savings be of closing Hawley? What transitional costs would there be?

The next meeting has been scheduled for Tuesday, May 24, at 7:30 p.m., at the Central Office for Primrose Street.