

Ad Hoc School Facilities Meeting Minutes

May 31, 2011

Board of Ed Offices

7:30 p.m.

Present: Bill Hart (BOE), Debbie Leidlein (BOE), Keith Alexander (BOE), Kathy Fetchick (LC), Bob Merola (LC), Janet Robinson (Superintendent), Linda Gjeda (Assistant Superintendent), Fran Pennarola (moderator). Also present were two members of the press.

Meeting was called to order at 7:38 p.m.

No Public Participation

New Business:

Janet Robinson presented the analysis prepared by Ron Bienkowski on the impact of closing Head-O-Meadow School. It was made clear at the outset that this was an exercise to see what savings might be realized, and that no decision had been made to either close or recommend closing Head-O-Meadow School or any other school at this time. Ron's written analysis was provided to all present and an electronic version will be mailed to all members of the Committee.

Janet Robinson noted that, by the time a school like Head-O-Meadow is closed, most of the grade level teaching staff will have already been relocated as necessary. Most of the personnel affected by a closing will be the school administration, specialists and custodial staff. As Ron's analysis shows, there will be some negative impact on busing costs. Also, Janet believes that the school itself will need to be kept open for its gym space and accompanying areas. The projected total savings of closing Head-O-Meadow, net of anticipated increases in other areas, is approximately \$1,500,000.

Janet Robinson again made the point that Head-O-Meadow is ADA compliant, and the only elementary school to be totally air conditioned. It currently houses the Special Ed summer school. Hawley, on the other hand, is not ADA compliant and cannot be made compliant. Were it to be closed, it could not reopen as a school. Head-O-Meadow could. Debbie Leidlein inquired as to what the minimum level of students would be to keep a school open (or alternatively at what point do you consider closing a school). Janet indicated that 200 students was probably the minimum number. A discussion then ensued as to the pros and cons of combining grades, such as having a class of mixed second and third graders. The members present shared their own experiences with such arrangements. It was pointed out, in a situation like that, each grade of students would have a different curriculum with a grouping required.

The question was raised as to when a town redistricts and could it redistrict for simply one grade. The logistical problems of this were pointed out, and it does not appear to be a fruitful topic to pursue.

The discussion then turned to the Reed Intermediate School, and Kathy Fetchick, in commenting on the Minutes from the last meeting noted there are many unanswered questions involved in considering the Reed School option (relocating the fifth grades back to the elementary schools , closing the middle school and turning Reed into a school for sixth, seventh and eighth grades). Janet Robinson reported that she had no information as to whether portables could be sited at the property and the impact on capacity. Bill Hart and others noted the need to focus on the core facilities (gym, library, cafeteria, etc.). In considering a shift to a sixth through eighth school, portables can only solve classroom space needs.

The district's plans to decentralize the preschools to the four elementary schools (decentralizing from Head-O-Meadow) were briefly discussed. Janet Robinson believes, from an educational and socialization vantage point, that it would be better for the preschool Special Ed population to become acquainted with their home schools and peers so as to ease the transition to full time school.

It was the consensus of the Committee that it needed to look at the costs and savings involved in the Reed School Option, similar to what was done for Head-O-Meadow. Bill Hart suggested that we assume no construction costs would be required (in order to simplify the model) and consider a 2017 target date. The questions noted in the prior minutes, about this option, need to also be addressed.

The Committee also discussed the need to have information about what it would take to reopen a school. The period of time the district can be reasonably expected to operate with a school closed (be it an elementary school or the middle school) has to be evaluated. Is it five years, ten years, somewhere in between? This raises the question of whether, when deciding to close a school, consideration be given to whether that school can be reopened (Hawley could not).

The next meeting is Monday, June 27, 2011, at 7:30 p.m., at the Board of Ed Offices.

Respectfully submitted by Francis G. Pennarola