

MEMORANDUM

TO: Cortland Facilities Study Advisory Committee

FROM: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

RE: Meeting Notes-Meeting of August 2, 2017

DATE: August 4, 2017

Attendance:

Committee Members: Breck Aspinwall, Anna Bennett, Susan Byrnes, Kevin Cafararo, Nicole Dintino, Rick Gamel, Sister Harriett Hamilton, Lisa Kaup, Stephanie Mitchell-Madden, Amy Sundheim, and Karen Williams

Consultants: Alan Pole and Bill Silky

Observers: Michael Hoose, Jeff Craig, Kimberly Vile, Bob Martin, Angela Wilde, Betty Bentley, Rebekah Stull, Peter Rogoff, Lauren Mossotti-Kline, Christopher Larkin, Heidi Turner, William Turner, Christine Gregory, Jennifer Larkin, Christopher Larkin, Angie Gilbert, Corena Morse, Jackie Carr, Arielle Brown, Jake DeRochie, Amber Thayer, Charles Kasten, Steve Bocciolatt, Tom Cranfield, Abbey Albright, Amanda Peck, Amy Swartz, Jenny Robinson, Alane Van Donsel, Craig Miller, Janice Miller, Gemma Rinefierd, Ryan Mullally, and Janet Griffin

Location: Parker Elementary School

1. Alan Pole welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Parker principal Josh Bacigalupi for the tour of the school prior to the meeting. He reviewed the meeting protocol as well as the schedule of meetings that had taken place and will take place over the next few months. He asked if there were any changes to the notes from the last meeting and there were none.

2. Bill Silky reviewed the purpose of the study that is to answer the following question:

"Now and in the future, is there a better way to arrange the grades and school buildings to maintain, and perhaps enhance, the education of Cortland City School District students while ensuring fiscal responsibility to the taxpayer? If so, how should the grades and schools be organized?"

3. Bill then reviewed the major study conclusions that had been identified during the first two meetings of the committee. He also addressed a follow up issue from the last meeting about the time and frequency for elementary specials.

4. Bill Silky then provided a presentation of the district's transportation program. He noted that the district has a new 5-year bus replacement schedule and that the district operates on a double trip system. He then reviewed some sample bus runs in the district.

Bill noted that high school students are dropped off at 7 am and elementary students are dropped off at 8 am as a result of the 24 in-district runs that occur each day. The longest time any student would be on the bus going to or from school is approximately 30-40 minutes, well within state guidance. High school students living more than 1.5 miles from school are expected to walk; elementary students living more than 0.9 miles from school are expected to walk. There are some exceptions made for students in dangerous traffic areas.

5. The meeting then turned to a discussion of possible facilities options for the district to consider. Bill defined a feasible option as an option that can be implemented and a desirable option as one that is feasible and desirable. He then reviewed three possible options for the committee's consideration:

Option 1: Remain as is and fix up the buildings;

Option 2: Create a middle school by moving the 6th grade to the junior high:

Option 3: Develop sister elementary schools (PK-2 Smith; 3-5 at Parker/PK-2 Barry; 3-5 at Randall) and a middle school and close Virgil Elementary.

6. Alan Pole then facilitated the division of the committee into 3 groups for a 45-minute discussion. Each group was asked to identify additional options and to develop a list of pro's and con's for the three options that Bill had identified. The attachment following the notes provides this summary.

7. The meeting was opened up to the observers for questions and comments. The following is a summary of the comments made by the audience members.

- *Virgil attendance lines were redrawn and Virgil lost kids*
- *The curriculum should be the same in all elementary schools*
- *Will people (including teachers) lose jobs?*
- *Where in the building would the 6th and 8th graders be located?*
- *It is inappropriate to have 6th graders and seniors in the same building*
- *BOCES is always considering places to rent. Perhaps BOCES might be interested in a building*
- *The most proactive people in the district are in Virgil.*
- *Will the 6-8 grade arrangement change our athletic programs? Band program? Art program?*
- *Will 6th graders lose leadership opportunities if not in the elementary schools?*
- *Would the 6-7-8 grade arrangement limit science opportunities for students?*
- *The district is not communicating what this study is really all about; notices on the website are not enough*
- *Space utilization analysis at the High School is incorrect—how many rooms are not used at the High School? 54% room utilization of room usage at the High School is a disservice*
- *Transportation...will kids be on too long? How many students use the late bus runs?*
- *I don't hear people in Homer complain about the transitions.*
- *Are other elementary schools better to close—may be more opportunity to rent/sell with a school in the city.*

- *What does it look like with 6th graders at the Jr-Sr High?*
- *What do school free and reduced lunch counts look like?*
- *The tax assessments of homes will change.*
- *There is not a 6th grade person as a member of the Committee.*
- *Pockets of poverty in the district is a community issue, not a school issue.*

8. The next advisory committee meeting will be held on Wednesday, September 13, 2017 at Randall Elementary School. An optional tour of the school will begin at 5:45 for anyone who is interested. The business meeting of the advisory committee will begin at 6:30 p.m.

We believe this covers the essence of the discussions at our meeting on August 2. If you have questions with these notes, please feel free to contact me. We will also review these notes as an agenda item at our next meeting.

Looking forward to seeing you again on 9.13.17. The tour will begin at 5:45 and the meeting will start at 6:30!!

C: Michael Hoose

Option 1: Remain As Is: PK-6, 7-8, 9-12 and renovate current buildings

Pros

- Does not create any controversy that other options may cause
- Allows for growth of enrollment should it occur
- Fewer transitions from building-to-building than Option 3
- Maintains a sense of community with “your school building”
- Allows smaller class sizes than Option 3
- Protects 6th graders from exposure to older students
- Would likely be less cost if other options mean putting on an addition to a school

Cons

- Requires putting money into renovations of schools that may eventually have to close
- Does not maximize staffing efficiencies
- Maintains the complexity of the transportation system
- Continues to make it difficult to keep the curriculum the same at all elementary schools as compared to Option 3
- Creates more transitional change, not only from small school to big school, but also the introduction of all the new kids
- Does not make it possible to assess all students as thoroughly as possible if all are in different schools
- Does not address the mobility of students within the city schools
- 6th graders are not developmentally appropriate for the elementary
- Likely will result in an increase in taxes; does not save money
- There are accountability in educational curriculum between buildings

Option 2: Realign the grades to house 6th grade at the Jr-Sr High (converting the Junior High to a 6-8 Middle School).

Pros

- Allows for a true (modified?) middle school philosophy
- Frees up space in the elementary schools should enrollment increase
- May allow for the closing of one school
- More developmentally appropriate for 6th graders
- Permits access to more curriculum options/course offerings/state standards
- Curriculum goes 6-8th grade

Cons

- May (will?) make a tight space fit at the Junior-Senior High
- There may be some concerns about developmental appropriateness of sixth graders with 7-12th graders
- Will have to work to segregate middle schoolers from high school students
- Further decreases enrollment in the elementary schools
- Would require facility renovations to address 6th graders crossing paths with senior high students
- Keeping lunches separate would have to be figured out
- There would be no financial advantage to the district
- Would be some staffing issues to make a “true” middle school model
- May result in a lack of community buy-in if it is not a “true” middle school
- Likely additional cost for expansion of cafeteria, entrance, gym, auditorium
- May not change the current arrangement enough financially (same transportation, more lack of space at elementary)
- 9-12 behaviors shared down to 6-8
- No educational advantage

Option 3: Create two grade centers at the elementary level (PK-2 Smith; 3-5 at Parker/PK-2 Barry; 3-5 at Randall) and close Virgil Elementary School. Move 6th grades to the Junior High and make it a middle school.

Pros

- Allows for a true (modified?) middle school philosophy
- Improves coordination & articulation of curriculum
- Provides more options to match students to teachers
- Increases staff efficiencies
- Allows for better/easier balancing of class sizes
- Permits more coordinated services (speech, OT/PT, counseling, etc.)
- Offers exposure to a greater diversity of students
- Provides the ability to use multiple (4 or more) teachers to meet students academic needs within a grade level

Cons

- Concerns about closing Virgil
- More students would have to ride the bus and some bus rides would be longer
- May make a tight space fit at the Junior-Senior High
- There may be some concerns about developmental appropriateness of sixth graders with 7-12th graders
- Will have to work to segregate middle schoolers from high school students
- Would overload the two largest elementary buildings
- Means more (too many?) transitions for students
- Parent involvement may decline if children are in different buildings
- A question of what happens to the closed building and how much savings would actually occur?
- Every building would lose its community feeling
- The sacrifice would not be good for the Virgil community; it is the fastest growing area
- Closes the school with the highest performance
- Would not grow the economic base
- Displaces kids will sour parents

Proposed Additional Options for Consideration

- Create a 6-8 middle school using one of the existing elementary buildings (put the District Office into the Jr-Sr High or a new Tech School).
- Add a second floor to Virgil and re-draw the elementary attendance lines to add students and even out the numbers at all the elementary buildings
- Make the elementary grade configuration K-1, 2-3, 4-5, 6-8
- Take one building and make it a Pre-K center for all PK students
- Building one elementary school near the Jr-Sr High for all elementary students
- Make the elementary schools specialty (magnet) schools like science/tech or fine arts
- Close another elementary school and re-draw the attendance boundary lines
- Build one new PK-5 elementary school near the Jr-Sr High, make the Jr-Sr High 6-12 (one pro is reduced transportation cost; one con is getting rid of five schools)
- Close a building without a mortgage
- Consider a K-8 configuration