

To: Oneida School Community Advisory Committee

From: Steve Bocciolatt

Re: Meeting Notes – Meeting of September 19, 2023

Date: October 3, 2023

**In Attendance:**

Committee Members: Matt Archer, Erin Belanger, Alana Boylan, Alex Cafalone Hannah Ezman, Pete Gillander, Gretchen Ironside, Jessica Jones, Megan Kelly, Nikki-LaVeck Adam Litwak, Megan Rice, Megan Rose, Matt Shene, Cindy Smith, Stacey Tice, Kathy Zangrilli

Consultant: Stephen Bocciolatt

Resource: Matthew Carpenter, Jason Benedict

Location: Costello Training Center

1. Mr. Bocciolatt began the meeting with a review of the agenda for the meeting.
2. Minutes from 8/29/23 meeting were distributed to committee members prior to the meeting.
3. Mr. Bocciolatt began a PowerPoint presentation reviewing the four grade configuration options discussed to date.
  - Four Elementary School Buildings
    - Option 1: Status Quo; Remain as four K-5 buildings
    - Option 2: Grade Center Plan (K-2, 3-5)
      - Transition from four K-5 buildings to four buildings with the following grade center configuration:
        - (2) buildings: grades K-2
        - (2) buildings: grades 3-5
  - Three Elementary School Buildings
    - Option 3 - Close an Elementary School - (3) K-5 Neighborhood Schools
    - Option 4 - Close an Elementary School - (3) K-1; 2-3; 4-5 Grade Center Schools
      - Transition to a Grade Center Plan
        - (1) School - Grades K-1
        - (1) School - Grades 2-3
        - (1) School - Grades 4-5
  - Other Possible Options, if any – To Be Determined

- Reviewed several key points in each of the four grade configurations. The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss option 3 (three K-5 neighborhood schools) and option 4 (three grade center schools, K-1; 2-3; 4-5) if an elementary school is closed. Classroom space for grade level classes, the Pre-K program, special education services, art, music (including band and chorus) and support services were the focus of the overview.
  - Reviewed a summary of full size classrooms for each elementary school.
4. A group discussion was held for the majority of the meeting regarding two grade configuration options if an elementary school is closed. The options discussed were:
- Three (K-5) neighborhood schools
  - Three grade center schools (K-1; 2-3; 4-5)

Summary of comments/questions are as follows:

- **Influx of ENL students and delivery of services for both ENL and special education students.**
  - Some of the ENL students do not speak any English.
  - What would the delivery of services look like for the ENL students in a K-5 building vs a grade center building?
  - Would services be delivered in the classroom with other students (push-in) or would the services be delivered in a separate classroom (pull-out).
  - Would services be delivered in one building? If so, and in a K-5 grade configuration, students would be transported out of their attendance zone. That is the current practice with ENL students attending Seneca Street School.
  - Currently all students in 15-1 special education classrooms are located in one building. Would all of these students continue to be in one building? How will these services be delivered? Would the services be more inclusive with teachers pushing into the classroom to deliver these services? If so, additional classroom space would be available.
  - Planning would be needed to determine the number of classrooms and mix of students in the classroom to meet the special education requirements.
  - Strength of district: staff willing to try new things. Also, there are some experienced staff that have worked previously in inclusion classrooms.
- **Enrichment:** We don't have enrichment or we need more of it. The district previously had a traveling enrichment teacher.
  - Mr. Boccia commented professional learning communities (PLCs) are one way of looking into how best to deliver these services to students. Four questions to consider:
    - What do we want our students to learn?
    - How will we know when they have learned it?
    - How will we respond when some students do not learn?
    - How will we extend and enrich the learning for students who are already proficient?
  - Special education and enrichment – need to address the financial burden and responsible use of time being place on staff. Design a program with flexibility in the schools and with a grade center configuration, more staff together in the same grade level. It is a slow process and a significant amount of training is needed.

- **Grade Configuration**

- Grade center configuration lends itself to more inclusion.
- In a grade center configuration, there is more flexibility with general education and special education services.
- From a parents' perspective, can see why the parents might want a K-5 grade configuration.
- In a K-5 building, one strength lies with the teachers knowing the students, knowing families, knowing siblings. More difficult in a building with only two grade levels. Older siblings will not be able to help younger siblings walking home or getting home on the bus.
- A grade center building, addresses program inequities, class size issues, available programs, classroom space and staffing.
- If there are three elementary buildings, it will be a significant improvement whether in a K-5 grade configuration or in grade center configuration. Current structure one reason why program is inconsistent.
- Basically, people do not like change from a K-5 grade configuration. Just different. They do not know other options.
- More consistency with grade center configuration.
- In smaller grade bands (K-1; 2-3; 4-5), staff can specialize.
- Advantages of horizontal collaboration outweighs vertical collaboration – move mountains.

- **Transportation**

- How would students be transported in a grade center configuration?
- Possibly staggered start and end times for each elementary school.
- Times for each elementary school do not have to be staggered. It might mean buses arrive at homes at different times based on the grades of the children in a family.
- In a K-5 grade configuration, would the district redistrict?

- **Academic vs Social Emotional**

- Can staff tell which elementary school a student attended? Over the last several years it seems to be more difficult. However, students know the difference. They know who ranks and who doesn't. The students see it and behave differently. High school it was said can expect more from Seneca Street. Last five years seems less of a concern. 5th grade students going to the middle school in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The staff could not really tell which school the student attended.
- Pro's for a neighborhood school can also be a disadvantage.
- What would we call the building in a grade center configuration?
- Academics would be better for grade band vs K-5 configuration. Social/emotional better in a K-5 grade configuration? Mostly unknown.
- If it was possible to have a K-2;3-5 grade band configuration, decision would be easy, but size of the buildings is a problem for this grade configuration.
- Anxiety of moving
- Taxes, concerned with higher taxes. People are moving out of the district.
- Is there a long range financial plan? Grade configuration plan? Several years ago, an idea was discussed of building two elementary schools - one building on the north end of the district and one building on the south end of the district.

- We were told several years ago there is no return on investment in education if a building is closed.
- Programmatic problem vs feelings. If a change feels bad will be ok. If the goal is to provide a better education, we should do the things necessary to make that happen.
- Need creative ways to collaborate if not in the same building.
- Even in a grade center configuration, no guarantee collaboration will take place.
- Collaboration ok, but more equity gives students a better chance. Currently, vast inequities in the program.
- Same grade levels in different buildings not much happens with horizontal collaboration.
- Need to focus on “One Oneida. Schools need to be united no matter the grade configuration
- Favorite elementary school is special. Important enough –can’t be disregarded.

5. Questions/Comments regarding the grade configuration options.

6. Upcoming School Community Advisory Committee meeting

- Wednesday, October 4, 2023 at Costello Training Center at 6:30 pm  
(changed meeting from Thursday, September 28<sup>th</sup>)
- Thursday, October 26, 2023: Location to be determined

C: Matt Carpenter