

News

June 2014

...of the Horseheads Central School District

SPECIAL EDITION

Two studies help the district chart the future

The district is currently working to chart the future of education in the district.

Two important studies are in process - one with the Elmira Heights district to determine if a consolidation is feasible and beneficial, and one to study the district's facilities and grade configuration to determine if changes would benefit students and to ensure educational and fiscal solvency.

The studies came about as a result of the continuing financial struggles facing our nation, state, and school districts.

The district has reduced its workforce by approximately 146 positions and has eliminated or reduced several programs. The district has reduced spending growth by more than \$14 million in the last six years, and yet the district has also had to use approximately \$5 million in reserve funds the last three years to bridge annual budget deficits during this time. The Board of Education knows this is not a solution that can continue into the future.

Additionally, the state has enacted several pieces of legislation that limit state funding to school districts, including the Gap Elimination Adjustment, which began in 2010 and subtracts a portion of the district's total state aid, and the property tax cap, enacted in 2011 and establishes a tax levy limit for each school district.

Most recently, the state enacted a property tax freeze, which provides reimbursements for eligible

property taxpayers if the school district meets requirements such as keeping budgets within the tax cap and consolidating and sharing services.

As a result, "we have to change the way we operate the district," said Board President Brian Lynch.

"The board is trying to maintain as many of our academic programs, arts and athletics as we can in this environment," said Lynch. "We have decided to look at all funding options now, since some plans will take years to research and potentially implement."

The Elmira Heights district has faced financial challenges as well, as most of the districts in the state have. The two districts already share some services--transportation, food service, and facilities administration--and last year, the districts applied for and received a state grant to conduct a feasibility study.

The study will explore whether or not further consolidation--including consolidating the two districts into one--would be beneficial for the two communities educationally and financially.

At the same time, the Horseheads district is looking at its own buildings and grade configuration. Consultants spent the last year gathering data and providing scenarios. The board recently narrowed the list down to six options, and a task force will spend the next eight to ten months developing an educational impact statement regarding each option.

"Most of the options involve closing at least one school building in order to make our district more efficient, so the board wants to make sure we have accurate information," said Lynch.

"By conducting the two studies, we can determine if there is a more efficient and effective way to operate our school system," said Lynch. "The state has put us in a tough situation, but we are hopeful that one of the plans can help keep our district strong."

The following pages summarize the two studies.



Our Mission ***"Quality Education for All"***

The Mission of the Horseheads Central School Community is to provide a quality education for all within a nurturing environment which promotes excellence, growth, and a sense of civic responsibility.

Consolidation Feasibility Study with the Elmira Heights Central School District

Last November, New York State awarded a \$49,500 grant to the Elmira Heights and Horseheads districts for a study to determine the feasibility of a consolidation.

On February 24, the two boards held a joint meeting, unanimously approving their participation in the study. At the same meeting, the boards set up a board planning committee which consists of three board members from each board and the two districts' superintendents.

The feasibility study came about from joint discussions between the districts to identify possible strategies to address the current academic and financial challenges faced by the districts.

The goal is to complete a thorough and comprehensive feasibility study which will inform the public and guide future planning for the districts.

The study will determine the impact on educational opportunities for students, identify possible operational benefits, and provide an estimate of the possible cost savings and impact on property taxes that would result from consolidation.

Part of the process will be to form a Community Advisory Committee with at least 15-20 members from each district. The committee would provide feedback to the boards and consultant.

A draft of the feasibility study is tentatively set to go to the New York State Education Department in June of 2015. The study will include information regarding academic and extra-curricular opportunities, enrollment and demographics, financial projections including projected tax rate, facility plans, collective bargaining, transportation needs, work force needs, and more.

Following the submittal of the study, each community would hold a "straw vote," a non-binding vote in each community. The tentative dates for these votes is December 2015. If both straw votes pass, the process moves forward. A binding vote would then be held in January 2016.

If the vote passes in both districts, the new consolidated district would begin July 1, 2016 for the 2016-17 school year.

Consolidation Feasibility Study Tentative Timeline

Please note: dates are approximate.

April-June 2014:

Develop request for proposals and hire consultant. On June 9, the boards will publicly interview the consultant finalists.

July-September 2014:

Form Community Advisory Committee (at least 15-20 members from each community)

October 2014:

Begin study with kick-off meeting.

October 2014-June 2015:

Develop Feasibility Study.

June 2015:

Submit draft of the Feasibility Study to New York State Education Department (NYSED).

September 2015:

Present study findings to school boards; boards will adopt a final reorganization plan with revisions if necessary to be submitted to NYSED and Department of State (DOS).

October-November 2015:

Hold public meetings, at least two in each district.

December 2015:

Advisory Referendum or petition ("straw vote") in each community.

January 2016:

Statutory Vote (if straw votes are successful); the vote must pass in each school district for the consolidation to move forward.

For more information, visit the district website at www.horseheadsdistrict.com. Click on "Elmira Heights Feasibility Study" in the Featured Links menu on the left side of the page.

District Facilities Capacity/Utilization and Grade Configuration Study

The district began looking at its facilities and programs when the current financial crisis began several years ago.

In August of 2012, the board held a thorough discussion about long-term planning at their summer retreat. In September 2012, the board Planning and Development Sub-Committee drafted a timeline and charge for a thorough study of facilities and programs, and after several reviews, the board approved the study in October of 2012.

In November of that year, the board hired two advisors to help guide the process: Hunt Engineers and Architects, and Dr. Paul Seversky through Madison-Oneida BOCES.

The two advisors conducted a joint study to evaluate programs and services, facility capacity and utilization, number of schools, grade configuration, and ways to improve effectiveness and efficiency. Using this data, the consultants arrived at 16 reconfiguration scenarios, which they presented to the board in July of 2013.

In September 2013, the board approved the formation of a community focus group to evaluate and rate the scenarios. The focus group conducted their work in October.

In November, the board reviewed the focus group's work, and in March 2014, the board narrowed the options to six. At that time, the board also appointed a task force to conduct an extensive study of the six options. The task force is made up of members of the district's Strategic Plan Implementation Team and additional members as required by board policy.

The task force will conduct their work throughout the next several months and present their findings to the board in the spring of 2015. The group met for the first time May 22.

Beginning in the spring of 2015, the district will hold community input sessions to keep the community informed.

The current timeline calls for the board to vote on any changes in June of 2015. If capital construction is required, a vote would take place

sometime from October to December 2015. Changes would then take effect between 2016-2020.

Facility Capacity/Utilization and Grade Configuration Study Tentative Timeline

April 2014-March 2015

Task Force forms to develop educational impact statement of the narrowed options and presents to the Board of Education.

April-June 2015

Community input sessions are held, educational impact statement is published, and public hearing is held as per Board Policy 7810.

June 2015

The Board of Education selects/votes on an option.

October-December 2015

If capital construction is required for board-approved option, capital project vote is held.

September 2016-2020

Any facilities and grade configuration changes take effect.

Please note: The Board of Education reserves the right to adjust the timeline and charge throughout the process due to changing economic conditions, changes in state requirements/mandates, discussion with other school districts (i.e. additional shared services, consolidation, merger, etc.), and any other unforeseen circumstances.

For more information, visit the district website at www.horseheadsdistrict.com. Click on "Program/Facility Study" in the Featured Links menu on the left side of the page.

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Our Vision

We, the Horseheads School Community, want a district that is nurturing and responsive; strives for balance in a supportive, safe, encouraging environment; recognizes the need for continual improvement in an ever-changing world; has a clearly defined focus on learning outcomes, collaboration, and support systems; and creates an environment within which everyone can thrive and achieve his/her highest potential.

Exit Outcomes

The Horseheads Central School graduate will be a life-long learner; a caring, productive citizen; an effective communicator; a creative problem-solver; a quality decision-maker; a healthy, well-rounded person.

Our Beliefs

We believe everyone can achieve his/her highest potential; trust is essential for growth; learning is cooperative; programs are inclusive; success will be nurtured and expected; learning is performance-based; decisions are data-based; and responsibility, respect and results guide our every effort.

End-of-year information

For students in grades PreK-6:

- Friday, June 20, will be a half day for students in grades PreK-6. Dismissal will be at 11am.
- There will be no school Monday, June 23.
- Tuesday and Wednesday, June 24-25, will be regular days in school for grades PreK-6.
- Thursday, June 26, will be a half day, PreK-6. Dismissal will be at 11am.

For Middle School students:

- Final exams will be June 19-24. Students will follow a modified schedule during those days.
- Thursday, June 19 will be a half-day for Middle School students. Dismissal will be at 11am.
- Wednesday, June 25 will be a half-day for the Middle School. Dismissal will be at 11am.

For High School students:

- Tuesday, June 3 will be a Regents testing day for Algebra 1. Only those students taking the Algebra 1 Regents examination will report.
- The last day of regular classes is June 16. Regents examinations are June 17-26.