

Rye School District's School Use Feasibility Committee Report - Next Steps

On July 25, the Rye School Board held its annual planning retreat. Much of the day was dedicated to discussing the district's variable enrollment, our near term educational priorities based on our current student population and how to better anticipate the number of students enrolling in our schools and adapt accordingly through ongoing planning. Highlights from the School Use Feasibility Committee's (SUFC) final report were reviewed. Below are the key points from the working session:

The Board agreed that declining enrollment has repercussions on a school's structure and costs. At the middle school level in particular, the discussion focused on how our variable enrollment requires administration and faculty to continually reevaluate how the curriculum is delivered and the ways in which small grade sizes impact students' social/emotional needs as well as extracurricular opportunities.

The two main configurations suggested by the SUFC were discussed:

- 1) Re-configuring Rye Elementary School (RES) for PreK-Grade 4 students; Rye Junior High (RJH) for Grades 5-8 students
- 2) Combining with Greenland so the middle school students from both towns attend Rye Junior High (Chairpersons of both Boards had previously agreed to openly discuss this idea)

While the Board initially sought to explore one of these configurations further, discussions with the administration focusing on the educational impacts of both options, the projected student population at both Greenland and Rye schools, the upcoming budget cycle, as well as the opportunities for leveraging space for the SAU50 preschool and Rye Recreation, motivated the Board to vote to create a planning sub-committee to further pursue **Option #1** for implementation in the 2019-2020 school year. Members of the sub-committee will be determined shortly. Questions the sub-committee will need to address include but are not limited to:

- What will the new middle school configuration look like? Will 5th graders be in self-contained classrooms or rotate teachers for subject areas?
- Will 5th graders inter-mingle with older students, or will they be separated?
- Will this new model impact staffing needs, including unified arts?
- Will 5th graders participate in middle school athletics?
- What will be the financial impact?
- How will students respond socially/emotionally to a Grade 5-8 model?
- Can we begin to integrate Greenland and Rye middle school students with band, sports or dances to open social opportunities for students of small grade sizes?

The School Board also discussed the following:

- A need to work with our colleagues of the SAU50 Joint Board, comprised of the individual members of each districts' school Boards, to leverage resources and consider more long-term student collaborative efforts. We would like to explore the potential advantages and disadvantages to students' educational experiences by integrating some or all of our students earlier than high school.

- The importance of continually monitoring enrollment data, private school transfers, real estate trends and new housing starts for planning purposes.
- Whether or not to tuition students from other towns into the Rye School District. The Board decided it should consider further exploration upon a successful implementation of the new school configuration.

It is our goal to engage parents/guardians, faculty and the community at large throughout this process. We will be scheduling public forums to solicit input, providing ongoing updates online and discussing progress at regular school board meetings.

The next school board meeting is just around the corner on **Wednesday, August 15th at 5:00pm in the Rye Junior High cafeteria**. Please join us.

Sincerely,

Margaret Honda
Rye School Board