



## MEMORANDUM

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**To:** Warren Township Board of Education

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**From:** Gwen H. Thornton and Charlene Peterson, Field Service Representatives

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**Date:** April 14, 2016

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**Re:** Community Feedback Meeting April 6, 2016 “STEEP”

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The President and Vice President of the Board of Education began the meeting by presenting a power point overview of the research on the study to examine enrollment to members of the Warren Township community. The President and Vice President along with the Superintendent responded to general questions.

As per the board’s request, we facilitated a question and answer session with the members of the community in attendance immediately following the power point presentation. The meeting lasted until approximately 9:00 pm. Listed below are all of the questions and comments put forward by community members. The questions and comments are listed in the order in which they were received. Our understanding is that these questions will be answered, and the answers posted on your district’s website for the community to review.

1. Did the board consider a hybrid of the duplicated model- with two (2) schools K-2 and two (2) schools 3-5 on opposite sides of town? Middle school to remain 6-8 in present location. **Model 1: Maintaining the current configuration was the sole model considered for keeping all schools open. Although the Education Committee discussed a hybrid configuration it was for a three school model, rather than a four school model.**
2. Is redistricting a possibility for Model 1 for the full district in order to equalize class sizes?(Currently uneven distribution- i.e. in one school in a first grade class of 22, there are only 8 boys) **Balancing enrollment is a possible outcome but does not ensure that each grade level will be similarly balanced among schools. The option of redistricting may be a consideration for the administration, this has been a STEEP consideration.**
3. Please follow up with demographers as to why they missed Kindergarten enrollment; District should survey community and identify the ages of all children in households. Cited expansion of preschool soccer recreational league as indication numbers are growing, not declining. **Demographer, Dr. Gripp,**

**explains that the one grade level that is most difficult to predict is kindergarten because this variable has a much higher rate of disparity.**

4. Is bussing for all models feasible? **Yes, Bussing for all models is feasible but there will be different time variations depending on the routes and distance from schools.** May be flawed data in bussing costs; 10% projection maybe too low; last time went up 30%. **More accurate projections will be available once a model is decided and the transportation department is able to model actual routes and put them out to bid. All of these models (except Model 1) will require that the district put their new transportation routes out to bid.**
5. Increase bussing time may be too long for many children, especially the youngest. **It is important to note that the Board did set parameters that reflected an analysis of other successful districts, with route times ranging from 30 - 35 minutes.**
6. Losing siblings in an unduplicated model is a disadvantage that is not mentioned, but is of significant concern for many parents. **This concern was discussed by Board members during public meetings.**
7. Time for bussing Pre-K (due to buckle in, load, unload) will make a difference in bussing time(s) for all students. **Yes, because of this reality Pre-schoolers are bussed separately.**
8. Was any study done on the impact of closing a school on property values? (see the following studies: Bogard and Cromwell, Colwell and Guntennan, Duncome and Yinger) **Local realtors were consulted and during public meetings the Board discussed the likelihood that real estate values may be impacted should a neighborhood school be closed. No study was conducted on the impact of closing a school on property values.**
9. Was the impact of the low income housing included in the study? **Township Administrator Mark Krane and Township Attorney Jeffery Leher were invited and attended a Board meeting to provide an update as part of the process. The Board recognizes that while the number of units and timing are yet to be determined, this remains a concern.**
10. Need data to support the impact on achievement of students that change schools every 2-3 years. **Data on the impact of the number of transitions are conflicting and in some cases more relevant to larger communities. The Education Committee can research this topic further if necessary.**
11. Impact on kindergartners who lose bathrooms in their classrooms. Was this studied? **Yes. This topic was studied and discussed at the board level.**
12. When will the board provide the framework of how staff will be released, putting together a spreadsheet to share with WTEA? **If a school is closed, the WTEA will assist in determining the seniority of positions.**

13. Did you consider closing the board office and relocating it to one of the schools with excess space? **Yes. One consideration is to relocate the board office to the middle school.**
14. Decision should be based on educational opportunities for students, not just dollars and cents. **The Board has stated in the STEEP project Guiding Principles that “we are committed to the highest quality instructional programs...” For more information please view the documents on the District website.**
15. Have you looked at the educational opportunities that could be created in each model? **Educational opportunities were considered through the Education Committee and were presented publicly and are available on the District website. The unduplicated model offered the most consistency for services and educational opportunities by grade level because all students in that grade would be together. The Education Committee’s full report is on the District website.**
16. What are the current mortgages (debt service) on each of the district buildings? **The district no longer has any debt.**
17. Consistency in educational and extracurricular opportunities- how much is driven by structure versus building leadership and personnel? **All three components are critical to the consistency of educational and extracurricular opportunities. In the unduplicated model, however, more opportunities are available specific to a student’s age and grade level. The Education Committee’s full report is on the District website.**
18. Has the new superintendent had input into this process, the models and outcomes? He should be involved now. **As our current Superintendent, Dr. Nastus has been an active participant in the process during her term. The new superintendent is aware of the study and has direct access to all project materials. He is under contract at his current district until June 30th.**
19. The unduplicated models would have influenced decisions of people moving into the town. We should be doing whatever we can to attract people to Warren. People want neighborhood schools.
20. Excess space is an opportunity to build up and expand preschool program. **This idea has been included in the Board discussions.**
21. Was a daycare for staff members as a way to utilize free space in buildings considered as an option? **A daycare for staff members was not considered, but opening the Pre-K program to staff has been discussed.**
22. How can the district increase enrollment and attract people to Warren? **The municipal government and local businesses are key in discussing the question of how to attract people to Warren. Growth in enrollment could be an outcome of this discussion.**

23. What case study was done on the implications of closing a school and then reopening it? **The Board reviewed the outcomes of closing and re-opening schools in similar districts to Warren.**
24. Concerned with models that impact small number of children who will have to make multiple transitions. Model 2 disproportionately impacts some children. **Student transitions were considered through the Education Committee.**
25. Students in multiple schools from the same family impacts family involvement in the schools (time, overlapping events, etc.) **This issue is being considered by the Board and has been discussed. Currently, events are staggered to accommodate families with students in multiple schools.**
26. Has the board looked at case studies of districts that have made the transition recently to a different configuration of grades and the impact of such? **The Board has reviewed districts that have different configurations and fall within similar socio-economic guidelines. No significant differences in student performance were noted on these districts' school report cards.**
27. Did the board sit down with the transportation (bus) vendor to see if it could manage the various options? Inability to handle volume last year and CCD. **The Board and business office have met with the transportation department to review various options. In addition, the business administrator and transportation department have spoken to our current vendor to discuss the project and potential impact to the current contract.**
28. How will outcomes of survey be distributed? **Outcomes will be posted on the district website.** Why were models 6 to 8 not discussed? **The Board identified the first five options as the most viable and therefore eliminated not just models 6 to 8 but also several combinations.** There are many interdependent factors and no one has laid out all of the details for any of the models. **Yes, there are many interdependent factors. Such factors have been intensively discussed in committee and at Board meetings. Additional detail will be forthcoming once the options are narrowed and a final model is selected.**
29. Can the board engage a professional organization to assist in moving forward so that the more immediate issues of the district can be addressed? (no progress to date) **Several consultants were interviewed by the Board and the majority selected New Jersey School Board Association to address community feedback, and the Board and Administration in moving forward on all other issues.**
30. Why rush with so many unanswered questions. **The Board has been reviewing the issue since Dr. Haber's demographic report was published in January 2014 and agreed to create the official STEEP project in the Fall 2015. As enrollment continues to decline it is prudent to understand options. In**

**September 2016, the K-5 district enrollment will be down by 414 students (295) from the 2009-2010 enrollment.**

31. Why are we doing this if saving money is not a priority? **We are conducting STEEP to identify the best program to maximize educational, social and emotional opportunities for all students. The BOE established goals for the STEEP project which are located on our website.**
32. Is there data that will explain/demonstrate the benefits of one model over another? Please identify the research studies for the public. **There is limited research available that clearly identifies any one model as being optimal. We did review the success of districts similar to Warren Schools who represent different models. Please see the formal committee reports which outline the research/data used for the educational advantages and disadvantages of each model.**
33. At the end point of this process, what will be the outcomes? Will 9 people make the decision? **The Board of 9 people, after considering data gathered and community feedback, will make the decision.**
34. Will the community have the opportunity to provide general comments on the survey? **Yes. This opportunity was made available to the community through the survey.**
35. The community deserves data and fact based information to demonstrate why any of the models benefit students. Need similar size district, in rural/suburban areas that is unduplicated. **Districts similar in socio-economic factors and size were reviewed. Each district, irrelevant of the model, was successful. The NJ Department of Education website provides extensive data comparisons for additional consideration.**
36. What is the goal- the focus? **The goal is to maximize educational and social and emotional opportunities for all students in an efficient fiscal manner. The Board established goals for the STEEP project which are located on our website.**
37. We would hate to see schools close, teachers lose their jobs when children are getting a great education.
38. From a planning perspective, the board needs to include the town, the county, and the high school; Look at all implications; solutions come from a variety of sectors. Currently there exists a disconnect between all of the stakeholders involved- that if involved could develop a workable solution that would benefit everyone.
39. We are all here because we like what we have. How many would pull kids out and go somewhere else if things change? **The Board does not have that information nor can they predict these figures, but we recognize the concern.**
40. Are we addressing needs that currently exist? Putting too much stock in inaccurate demographic information. **Two demographic studies have been conducted and**

**are similar in documenting decline. The one variable that will always be a challenge because of variability is the incoming kindergarten projection. The District has been tracking actual enrollment to the projections.**

41. Parent involvement is very important in elementary schools. Has the board considered the emotional impact, the buddy systems, and the siblings? **Yes. These areas have been considered in each of the models.**
42. How do we get the board to stop spending time on this and address the immediate issues at Mt. Horeb? **The Administration is responsible to review individual building issues and address them accordingly.**
43. When will the board and elected officials address the issues rather than just giving the community 3 minutes to speak at Board meetings? **The Board is addressing the issues through STEEP, and community feedback through the feedback session and survey.**
44. What kind of communication is taking place between the board and the Town Council? **The Board has met with representatives from the Town Council to discuss growth projections. The Superintendent and Board Secretary meet with Mr. Kane on a periodic basis to share district updates.**