

**MANCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION  
PUBLIC FORUM  
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2013  
WADDELL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL GYMNASIUM  
7:00 P.M.**

**MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Crockett, Cruz, Hagenow, Pattacini, Scappaticci, Stafford, and Thames (arrived 7:30 p.m.)

**ALSO** Interim Superintendent of Schools Dr. Kisiel  
**PRESENT:** Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Management Brooks  
 Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services Matfess  
 Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum Radikas

The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m.

Mr. Pattacini explained that this is the first step in the process of fixing our elementary schools. Many of our elementary schools need work and we would like to achieve our goal as quickly as possible with a plan that is the least disruptive and the most cost effective. The two primary issues are condition and space. Nathan Hale School has been closed so we are down one elementary school. Based on the work at Highland Park School and the recommendations that have been made, any renovation at Nathan Hale School would cost about \$30 Million. We need to take a moment as a community to figure out how best to renovate our elementary schools. That is where the SMARTR Committee comes in. It is looking for a way to improve our schools and create the least impact. Projects of this nature require a lot of planning, development, and feedback. We need to come up with a good plan that the community supports. We want to get the public's feedback. Dr. Kisiel will give a brief summary of the plan and then the public will have an opportunity to provide feedback. There have been a couple of meetings in which questions were gathered. We will continue to gather questions and concerns of the community. Once the information is gathered, a special meeting will be scheduled so the questions can be answered.

Dr. Kisiel explained that the SMARTR Committee recommends renovating like new the Cheney Building at Bennet Academy for grade 5. Then build two like new elementary schools to accommodate 525 students each. Potentially close two elementary schools and invest in upgrading the balance of the elementary schools. Ensure Highland Park School is fully occupied after the fifth grade moves to the Cheney/Bennet Complex.

Dr. Kisiel explained that the first recommendation is to renovate the Cheney Building to accommodate grade 5. The Board of Education received the recommendation in April of 2013. On April 22, 2013, the Board of Education

voted unanimously to recommend to the Board of Directors that schematic drawings be provided. Most schools are at capacity. More classrooms are being used for special education. In the elementary schools, grades K-4 will increase by 225 students over the next ten years, in the next two years, by 220 students. The move of fifth grade students will accommodate the need for greater curriculum and instructional coordination between grades 5 and 6. There is underutilized space at Bennet Academy. New plans call for using that space. Enlarging the cafeteria will be necessary. There will be a considerable cost savings; \$7.2 Million after reimbursement. The combination of the two schools allows students to acclimate for two years rather than one, which has been an ongoing concern. Grades 5-6 together is a familiar concept in Connecticut. It will allow us to economize on bus transportation.

**Public Comment:**

Jerry Bidwell, 126 Saddle Hill, said he gets the concept and the plan. He asked if Cheney will accommodate 500 students. He asked why the two schools that are being expanded will need that much space. The lunchroom at Bennet is quite small.

Stephanie Knybel, 138 Bobby Lane, asked if there will be adequate parking at Cheney/Bennet. There is hardly parking for staff and parents. She is worried about the neighborhood losing homes to parking. Ms. Knybel knows recess for the 6<sup>th</sup> graders is in the quad. If adding 5<sup>th</sup> graders, will a playground be added? How will traffic be handled? She doesn't want to see a cul-de-sac.

Charmane Shaw, 48 Lockwood Street, wondered if the Town would utilize the lot at the old Bradlees. If Waddell and Washington Schools are closed, where would the kids go?

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, asked about idling time for the buses. He wants to make things fair to all neighborhoods and wants all students to learn no matter where they live. He would like to see a comfortable learning environment for all students with no more than 25 students in a class, not 35 per class.

Bonnie Schuetz, 12 Conway Road, asked why it took two years to bring this to the citizens. There are 200 students at Highland Park School now. She asked why more kids are not at that school. She asked why two years went by before a public forum was held. The public should have been more involved.

Kim Gorman, 71 Strickland Street, said the majority of research shows that students suffer achievement loss during transition and that 6<sup>th</sup> graders do better at the elementary level. She has yet to hear rationale that doesn't come down to two grades is better than one. She noticed there is nothing in the plans about renovating Illing Middle School. It is in dire need of renovation. Ms. Gorman suggested asking students what they think. She would love to have the Board of

Education interview students that are in the Middle and High Schools to get their opinions.

Dan Moran, 145 Chestnut Street, has always heard smaller is better when it comes to schools; now there is talk of increasing school sizes. His personal view is that the Board of Education doesn't know where it has been or where it is going. It has no plan, no foresight. If it had spent the \$200 Million it was proposing two years ago, it would already have committed funds. He thinks it boils down to racial balance. Mr. Moran asked if more heating, maintenance costs, and personnel costs have been taken into consideration.

Simone Branson, 40 Wilfred Road, has a son that doesn't want his school closed. He is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade now. She asked what the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade class sizes will be. She reminded Board members that there are behavior and emotional issues to take into consideration when making these decisions.

Alma Franco, 31 Lockwood Street, has a daughter that attended Bennet Academy and is now at Illing Middle School. She would like some focus on Illing Middle School. There are behavior issues and more activities are needed. Her son attends Waddell and there is a community at the school.

Matthew Carter, 109 Lockwood Street, said the common space at Cheney/Bennet will be a stumbling block. Lunch waves start at 10:00 now, which is ridiculous. He is concerned with his kids' emotional life and climate. He doesn't want to throw his 5<sup>th</sup> grader in a climate with kids in pre-pubescence; he would like to keep his kids young as long as possible. Recess at Bennet is not an elementary activity.

Dr. Kisiel explained that the next recommendation is to build two large elementary schools to accommodate up to 525 students each. SMARTR was established in January 2012. As part of the research, it looked at the concept of a larger schools. Psychosocial issues were very much on Dr. Kisiel's mind. The SMARTR Committee made recommendations to gain the best reimbursement from the State of Connecticut. We can build a school for 350 students, but we will receive less reimbursement. SMARTR found we can build two larger schools and gain the largest reimbursement. This will reduce the tax impact on Manchester. The impact on student learning and achievement is not due to the size of the school, but rather the size of the classroom. Research is clear that in grades K-6, 17-22 students is reasonable. That is where Manchester is with a couple of exceptions. The two larger schools will address the school facility needs and allow for the closing of two schools, reducing capital costs. The plan will expand the current neighborhood zones. We are ultimately responsible to make sure that the schools are racially balanced. If two schools are created, we need to make sure the schools remain racially balanced. On April 22, 2013, the Board of Education recommended the Board of Directors authorize schematic designs of the Bennet/Cheney, Washington, and Robertson projects in order to be placed on the fall 2013 referendum. SMARTR did look at other recommendations.

**Public Comment:**

Laura Tartoglia, 162 Homestead Street, asked why the SMARTR Committee did not consult the special education community. Her child is a walker. She asked what happens when her child is sick and their family's one car is with her husband. This is all about the money. She doesn't want her child to go to special education with 6 or 7 other children in the classroom.

Scott Aiken, 92 Laurel Street, said if decisions are made regarding money, then the Board is completely missing the point about educating children. At the smaller schools, the teachers know the children. He could probably find an equal number of studies that show the size of the school and classroom affect education. He experienced several elementary schools and personally prefers the smaller schools. The average kid will disappear into the mass of students at the larger school. Elementary school is where education needs to spark.

Tom [no last name or address given], said his house and business are down the street. He doesn't like the idea of larger class size.

Autumn Stark, 26 Little Street, noted the 65% reimbursement rate and asked what the rate was for Highland Park School. She wondered if the percentage is really that much different. She asked why there are no schematics for Waddell School. How were Washington and Robertson Schools chosen?

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, said schools are meeting most of the targets for class size. Teachers understand the culture of their students. He would like to hear from the students.

Denise McInnish, 34 Coolidge Street, asked what is the Board's definition of reducing the tax impact? She has never known a Town to lower taxes. What is the percentage they will reduce our taxes? What is the long term cost of building these schools vs. maintaining what we already have?

Amber Jones, 436 West Middle Turnpike, #6, would like to know the location of the new schools, the teacher/child ration, and what the security will be.

Jennifer Osella, 3 Butler Road, has many concerns about this plan. She asked how long the schools will be racially balanced by closing two schools and building larger schools. Currently teachers have a common plan time during the children's specials. If there is a larger school, it will be difficult to have these meetings as well as attend data meetings.

Elizabeth Medynski, 89 Saddle Hill Road, is a teacher and a resident. She asked how schools are selected for expansion or closure.

Charmoné Shaw, 48 Lockwood Street, asked how the Board of Education will know if a school is racially balanced.

Melanie Stefanovicz, 149 Loomis Street, said Manchester is the City of Village Charm, even with a 50,000 plus member community. She thinks that two large schools is stepping off of the Town's vision. She loves the 300 child schools size. She understand the economy of scale, but there is also a community at each elementary school. She would hate to see Manchester step off that track.

Ivette Figueroa, 47 Pioneer Circle, suggested using the money that would be used to build two mega schools to renovate the schools being planned for closing.

Donna McCarthy Watson, 23 Bramblebush Road, has worked for 28 years in a school of 300. She has concerns about teacher collaboration. Administration responsibilities will increase. The sense of unity and family will be lost. She asked what the reimbursement rate is if a school is renovated. It seems parents/residents want neighborhood schools. The Board of Education is talking about changing the population of the schools in some of the needy areas of Town. She thinks the Board should consider renovating neighborhood schools. The Town's population is changing all the time.

Jeffrey Peek, 58 Homestead Street, is not originally from Connecticut so he is probably less biased. He is worried about the money that will be needed to keep the schools going. He asked about the money spent on the roof of Waddell School this summer. Larger schools will mean a money savings now, but what about the costs to heat and maintain them in the long run. Repairs to a larger heating system will be more. As far as racial balancing, how will the Board integrate something that moves so fluidly.

Matthew Carter, 109 Lockwood Street, doesn't want his children to feel like just a number. As a high schooler it is a little easier to digest. Every teacher in his children's school know them by name. He is worried his children won't know the other children in their own grade level. Manchester is in the bottom 30 of the school systems in CT. How will having a larger school dig us out? Manchester will not attract parents like him. Teachers only account for half of a child's success. The other half is the parents. Parents that are currently walkers will not be able to be involved.

Stephanie Knybel, 138 Bobby Lane, said closing two elementary schools and reducing the overall capital costs of the Board of Education's budget doesn't help the Town's overall budget. Now a closed school becomes a Board of Directors' budget item. How will this really help us as residents and taxpayers? She likes the idea of a reduction in taxes. The schools system is what will bring people to Manchester. The number one rationale is the maximum State reimbursement. She doesn't think this should be the most important priority.

Jerry Bidwell, 126 Saddle Hill Road, is a grandparent and is more concerned about his grandchildren than his taxes. We have to have more faith in the citizens voting for each school. The plan says close two schools and enlarge two school. He asked what happens to the other four schools.

Jill Terry, 11 Ashland Street, is originally from a small town and has a 5 year old. Every teacher knew his name before he even started school because her other child is now in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. She loves the sense of community. It is important that her kids stay in small areas where they know others.

Kim Leining, 46 Ardmore Road, said when renovations begin, the buildings will be brought to code. We will be getting State money, but there will be strings attached. What other requirements are there with this reimbursement?

Dan Moran, 145 Chestnut Street, said education should be the most important thing; not moving bodies around. Looking at where we are now before children are moved around, what will change in the future? How will these new buildings be maintained so we don't end up in the same situation? What will be different? There should be a dedicated fund with \$0.25/sq. ft. put into a special fund for maintenance of the buildings.

Dr. Kisiel explained that the last recommendation is to invest in upgrades of the remaining elementary schools (\$18 Million). The SMARTR Committee compared the costs. To renovate all schools to like new condition would cost \$200 Million. The plan the SMARTR Committee is suggesting will make two larger schools, create the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade school and upgrade the rest of the schools for a differential of \$60 Million. This plan lowers the tax impact compared with renovating to like new condition. Whatever plan is chosen, the schools cannot be ignored. Washington and Robertson Schools are the highest priority based on what needs to be done in the buildings to bring them up to code. Technology needs to be upgraded. Looking at Waddell and Buckley, work needs to be done in those schools as well. All schools will need to be addressed in some fashion for equity.

**Public Comment:**

Denise McInnish, 34 Coolidge Street, said Verplanck School has plenty of land for expansion. It would have little impact on the playground and would be one of the less expensive schools to expand. That would be all for nothing if a referendum doesn't pass. She asked what happens when the taxpayers say no? How will the renovations be funded? Is there a Plan B? We cannot beat smaller schools. All the teachers should know the kids. Smaller schools make a difference. She would rather pay more in taxes and have the elementary schools remain open. We will miss the boat if we make larger schools.

Scott Aiken, 92 Laurel Street, has been in Manchester eleven years and sees two different Manchesters; there is the diverse Manchester that is full of potential and

the Manchester that likes the status quo. He is disenchanted and disheartened with the lack of long term management of the Board of Education and the Board of Directors underfunding education. The status quo renovated Highland Park School over more needy schools. The plan being presented is more of the status quo. Why are the Bowers, Buckley, Highland Park, Martin, and Keeney neighborhoods largely unaffected by this plan? Why is it that the largest percentage of minority students are concentrated in the schools with greater than 500 students? Why are Title I schools over utilized while the non Title I schools are underutilized by as much as 24%. The plan already over utilizes the two larger schools by 1%. Why not close schools in lower density neighborhoods where most students are bused or driven in cars anyway? Why not close Keeney and Martin and reopen Nathan Hale? Why does the racial balance of this room not match the racial balance of the Town? Maybe if the people of Manchester are engaged by the Boards rather than treated like problems we would be able to have the Manchester that is full of potential.

Gerry Bogli, 71 Pitkin Street, has many questions about the change such as which schools to close? How many to close? Why where they chosen? Which schools should be renovated? How large? Why? Neighborhood schools have been a part of the fabric of our community. We may not like newer and fewer schools, but she understands the need for change. She asked what educational improvements will occur? What is a 21<sup>st</sup> century school? What is the financial impact on the individual taxpayer? What will \$100 Million in improvements cost her? We are not the first community to face this task. South Windsor Public Schools has a master elementary plan. She suggested Manchester use it as a model document.

Linda Civitillo, 148 Hawthorne Street, is concerned about the potential closure of Waddell School. All three options include its closure. People purchase homes based on the elementary school location. Children should be able to attend schools with their friends. She has contacted her State Representative, who is opposed to the closure of Waddell School. Waddell was recognized in 2007 as a top performing school.

Nancy Fuentes, 88 Strickland Street, is a mother of four and a foster care parent. She can't believe closing Waddell School would ever be considered. She spoke of the school staff and their help with the transition of her foster children. Teachers went beyond the call of duty and their support will never be forgotten. She hopes her youngest will be able to experience the Waddell School just as her older children have. She doesn't think the revitalization of Broad Street includes an empty school.

Simone Bronson, 40 Wilfred Road, asked what a racially balanced school looks like. Will educational improvement be brought into this plan? There will be a lot of children in one school. What is racial balancing accomplishing? How many principals will there be? Will there be different principals for different grades?

What is the benefit of renovating the schools? Manchester is made up of a lot of different cultures and people. Education should be the goal.

[Name not given], We knew our schools needed renovating; this did not happen overnight. If two larger schools are built, will that mean an increase in staff? All children need attention; they will seek attention whether it is good or bad attention. Who will decide which schools will get closed? Her children go to Waddell School and the teachers are amazing.

Michael Reynolds, 111 John Olds Drive, asked if the Board of Education would ever consider breaking apart a family. He has worked as a social worker at Waddell and Verplanck Schools. So many students are excited to come to school. Closing a school will equal breaking apart a family. Many parents walk to the school. Social and emotional learning is directly related to educational learning. Transitional impact stressors play a major role in education.

Tom Stringfellow, 183 Hillstown Road, pointed out that the heating system at the recently renovated Highland Park School broke and school was cancelled. He would like to hear from the Latinos in Town. The goal of education needs to be looked at. We are raising global children. We need to hear from all different points of view.

Autumn Suart, 26 Little Street, is a parent of a Waddell student. When her son first started at Waddell School, it was introduced to her as a little United Nations. Waddell School is located at the center of Manchester. Keeping the neighborhood schools far outweighs like new renovations. She asked why Waddell School was chosen for closing.

Allison Peek, 58 Homestead Street, said Waddell is a great school with a great community. The parents watch out for each other's children. She doesn't think that will happen in a larger school. She is concerned about the safety and security of a larger school. She asked why Waddell needs to be closed. The like new school was closed today because of a heating issue. One of the goals of the plan is racial balance. What happens in 2020 when people have moved or gone to magnet schools. Waddell is one of the four schools that is racially balanced.

Arlene Ortiz, 43 Love Lane, is a Verplanck parent. One of her children was "iffy" at reading but due to the programs at Verplanck, her child is now reading at a very high level. Large schools will not foster the one-on-one connection. It is not fair to pick certain schools to close. This is about the children and what they need. Why was so much money spent at Highland Parks School? Why is it not at its full capacity? It seems like the concern is all about the money coming from the State. What will the State want in return? She doesn't want to take away the small school feeling.

Kim Gorman, 71 Strickland Street, said Manchester needs a solid long term plan, not a short term fix. Yes we need racial balance and updating. Any decision should be rooted in research. A strong school system makes a community. Manchester has the opportunity to develop a long term plan. She hopes the Board of Education and the new Superintendent will do that.

Matthew Carter, 109 Lockwood Street, asked the Board of Education to think of the students in Manchester is if they were their own children and consider their educational well-being as well as their social climate. Waddell is fantastic. No schools should be closed. There is a huge opportunity to rethink the way we do things in Manchester. The common core is a big issue. We have an opportunity to get in front of the game. If there is a 5/6 school, it will leave room in the elementary schools. This will allow space for a pre-k program in each school. Manchester needs to do things to make people want to buy a home in Manchester. The Board of Education's task is to support the parents, kids, and schools.

Bonnie Schuetz, 12 Conway Road, said two years have been lost. This has been going on for a long time. People haven't been thinking about the children; it's about politics. She asked why Martin School has not been considered. Now we have to keep 320 children in Highland Park School or the State will penalize us. Nathan Hale School is closed. What is Plan B? If the Board of Education does not get us back to the education the Town has been known for, the State will start making our decisions. She hopes the Board of Education really thinks this out. Politics should not be involved.

Dave Minor, 14 French Road, sat through the same types of forums for Nathan Hale School. He wants answers at the January meeting. What will happen to the Waddell building? What about the fields closer to Broad Street? What is the plan for Waddell when all of the students are gone?

Norm D., 421 Parker Street, said Waddell School is in a prime location. The development at Broad Street is between Verplanck and Waddell Schools. If the SMARTR plan will cost \$140 Million vs. \$200 Million, the extra \$60 Million should be used for innovating, staff, and education. Big schools should be completely high tech. If there is so much in savings, some of it should be used to make the schools top notch.

Tracy Maio, 57 Horton Road, asked how much we get from the State for reimbursement for a closed building. The Board of Education is looking at its school closing policy. Manchester's 2020 plan includes Broad Street. The most important word in that plan is community. She asked how the end of Broad Street would look with a closed building. Waddell's PTA is raising money for a new playground. It is part of the community. Waddell is too closely tied into Broad Street to close it. Washington and Robertson Schools need the most renovation. Which schools need the least?

Julie Roach, 109 Falknor Drive, understands why the Board is worried about reimbursement. What will happen to the kids? The community? How long will children spend on the bus? She doesn't want Verplanck or Waddell to close. Which schools have real estate for expansion down the road? If we continue to close schools, people will continue to find other places to live. We need to look at the bigger picture; at something other than money.

Geoffrey Naab, 188 South Main Street, said it is obvious more busing will be needed. What are the additional costs? What is the present cost for busing? Who writes education specifications? How and where can members of the public see education specifications? The notion of closing Waddell School came from a demographic study done by Milone and MacBroom. Who and what are they? Racial balance is a crazy concept. We should be concentrating on having our Legislators working to get the Statute repealed. The concept of racial balance has done a lot more harm than good.

Dan Moran, 145 Chestnut Street, said the emphasis has been placed on the reimbursement rate. He gave an example using the sum of \$30 Million. The reimbursement rates don't differ more than \$5 Million; that is not much disparity. He suggests a dedicated fund for capital improvements funded at the rate of 2% of the net worth of each building per year.

Jeff Peek, 58 Homestead Street, wondered what the savings will actually be. Kids will have to be bused to the schools from all around; that is a two fold increase. Extensive studies show higher graduates from smaller schools. We need fixes for all schools. He wondered about the crime rates at other schools. The size of the school will affect the decisions of people moving into Town.

Brianna Bourbeau, 16 Lodge Drive, is a kindergarten teacher and bought her home through a HUD program designed to bring communities together. She lives in the community in which she teaches. She loves that she runs into her students and their families around town. This builds a strong community. She would hate to see that lost. Students will have to travel farther, which means more busing and travel time. Children need interactions between their families and their school.

Michelle Wlochoski, 103 Thayer Road, is a kindergarten teacher and mom of two high school graduates. Manchester likes its community schools. Many years ago the Town voted on community schools and that is when the themed schools were developed. She suggests supporting the 5/6 school and then continuing to renovate the schools. This provides a great opportunity for pre-school at the elementary schools. We need that in this Town. With the Common Core, the chances are much better if a child has a pre-school education. She thinks the plan could be sabotaged because people want community schools.

Adam Skinner, 36 Edmund Street, is the PTA president at Verplanck School. All elementary schools bring about close communities. If a school closes, it will feel

like big business, it will feel cold. People want small community schools. Going to a larger school will cause children to lose the attention that they need. We will have 225 more students over the next 10 years; where does that leave us? The 5/6 academy will work fantastic.

Mr. Pattacini thanked the public for coming out. The comments and questions have been helpful for the Board of Education and the SMARTR Committee. We have to develop the plan that is in the best interest of schools and the community. We will gather questions and address them in a special meeting to be held in January.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

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