School Building Utilization and Grade Configuration Study

Onteora Central School District

Boiceville, New York

Final Report

Kevin S. Baughman, Ph.D. - School Study Consultant

December, 2019

Onteora Central School District

Boiceville, New York

2019-2020 Onteora Board of Education

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Dr. Kevin Baughman	Principal, Dr. Kevin Baughman & Associates

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Kevin S. Baughman, Ph.D.
Study Consultant
December, 2019

Consultant Origin of Views and Errors and Omissions Disclaimer

This disclaimer indicates that the analysis, views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in the text of this study originate solely from the consultant unless otherwise referenced, and not to any other organization, group or individual. While the study consultant, Dr. Kevin Baughman, made every effort to accurately review and interpret information in order to develop a full understanding of the data, interviews, and information collected, the consultant assumes no responsibility or liability for any errors or omissions in the final written content of this study. The information contained in this Final Report is provided on an "as is, completed" basis.

Onteora Central School District
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PART I: Framework of Study

1. Executive Summary

For purposes of long-range planning and in light of declining student enrollment, the Onteora Central School district Board of Education determined a need to study grade level configurations and school building utilization. The district contracted with consultant, Dr. Kevin Baughman, to conduct the study. The study began in late June and was completed in November, 2019.

Data and information on the school district was collected by the consultant through multiple methods including group and individual interviews, review of school district records, community and school forums, and a district online survey. As part of the study, prior student enrollment was analyzed and future enrollment projected. New York State student achievement data for grades 3-12 was compared to statistically similar school districts as well as neighboring districts. A literature review of pertinent educational research was also included as part of the study.

Six different grade level configuration scenarios were selected for review by the consultant. Included in each scenario analysis were: the positive and concerns about the configuration; enrollment and transportation implications; repurpose possibilities for any school closed by the scenario; transition/roll out; and fiscal redirection potential. The six configuration scenarios reviewed in the study included:

Scenario A: Phoenicia & Woodstock grades K-5, close Bennett, Middle School 6-8, High School 9-12
Scenario B: Phoenicia & Woodstock K-4, close Bennett, Middle School 5-8, High School 9-12
Scenario C: (Present) Phoenicia/Woodstock K-3, Bennett 4-6, Middle School 7-8, High School 9-12
Scenario D: Close Phoenicia & Woodstock, Bennett K-5, Middle School 6-8, High School 9-12
Scenario E: Close Phoenicia & Woodstock, Bennett K-4, Middle School 5-8, High School 9-12
Scenario F: Close Phoenicia or Woodstock, (two) K-5 w/Bennett, Middle 6-8, High School 9-12

The review of educational research suggested that school grade level configuration and grade span have little to no impact on student achievement, while the number of student transitions between schools negatively affects student learning. A ten-year historical analysis of student enrollment indicated a decline of 430 students and a projection over the next decade of a continuing decline. The study's one-year snap shot of student achievement indicated Onteora outperformed the majority of similar and neighboring school districts on the grade 3-8 English Language Arts and math assessments and secondary New York State Regents exams. The analysis of the six grade configuration scenarios indicated that every scenario, when compared to the present district grade configuration, presents cost savings in both transportation and staffing – savings that could be redirected to other program and staffing needs. The survey response indicated some positive sentiment towards separating young children from older, shorter bus runs, maintaining smaller class sizes, and preserving community schools due to the adverse community impact of a school closure. Survey responses also frequently indicated concerns for rising costs, inefficient busing, and long-term declining enrollment. The study also identified the need to better separate middle school children from older high school students in the building.

The school district benefits from a large tax base, multiple fiscal reserves, and an average annual low tax increase over the past decade. Despite underutilized buildings and high per student costs, there is little short-term threat to program or service elimination that would likely spur a decision. Long term, the continued declining enrollment must be inevitably addressed for fiscal, political and pedagogical reasons. This study data can form the framework for initiating that process.

2. Purpose of Study & Consultant Background

The purpose of the study was to identify and analyze multiple grade level configurations and assess the instructional and operational positives and concerns of several different scenarios. The study provides the district with important information for effective long-term future planning and decision making.

The Onteora Central School District's most recent review of grade level configuration was in 2011-2012 resulting in the current grade spans and school building use. With a continued decline in student enrollment, the School Board of Education upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools requested that an outside consultant study grade level configuration and building utilization of the Onteora Central School District.

In June, 2019 the school district contracted with Dr. Kevin Baughman to conduct the study. Dr. Baughman was a school administrator for over 25 years, including 11 years as a Superintendent of Schools. After his retirement from administrative service, Baughman served as full-time professor and coordinator of the Educational Leadership Program at The College of Saint Rose until his retirement last year. Since his retirement from public service, Dr. Baughman has worked with a host of public and private educational schools and agencies providing expertise in strategic planning, leadership training and searches, and grade level configuration studies.

3. Study Methodology

The study period was approximately five months culminating with the Final Study Report and presentation of the key findings. The study required collecting and analyzing key information about the school district as well as actively engaging the school-community to solicit vital input. The study consultant made the selection of the six different grade level configuration scenarios included in the study based upon an analysis of the district, grade configuration research, and the experience of the study consultant. A sample of the study activities included:

- Review and analysis of numerous district instructional and financial documents and policies
- Conducted facility tours of each building
- Development of series of questions – a base set discussed in most interviews, and a set of more unique questions for certain district roles
- 1:1 interview with school administrators, supervisors and Board of Education members ranging between 30 and 90 minutes
- 1:1 or small group interviews with teachers, students, parents, community members, and business owners of approximately 30 minutes each – met with approximately 110 people
- Phone interviews used when face-to-face interviews could not be scheduled due to time conflict that lasted approximately 30-45 minutes each
- Multiple periodic meetings with numerous district staff to discuss data
- School and community forums to generate more input on grade level configuration
- Consultant review of applicable educational research on grade configuration
- Development of student enrollment projections through 2028-29 school year using a five-year cohort survival co-efficient, and based upon the previous ten years of actual enrollment data
- Review and analysis of transportation requirements for each of the scenarios

- Collection and analysis of Onteora school district student achievement data and comparisons to "similar" school districts in New York State including grade 3-8 ELA and math assessments, and New York State Regents examinations
- Development, administration and analysis of the 560 responses from an online five-question community survey regarding grade configuration, all responses were anonymous and IP addresses were unidentifiable, multiple responses were acceptable from a single computer to encourage full access and participation in the survey
- Development and presentation of the Final Study Report

4. Overview of Onteora School District & Grade Configuration

The Onteora Central School District is comprised of the Towns of Shandaken, Woodstock, West Hurley, Olive, and parts of the Towns of Marbletown and Lexington. The Onteora school district is approximately 278 square miles[1] making the district the 16th largest school district out of 639 grade K-12 school districts in New York State. Onteora has a high degree of sparsity of both students and residents, with slightly less than 5 students per square mile, and approximately 55 residents per square mile of the school district. The two largest school district taxpayers include the New York City Municipal Water Authority for the reservoir (21.84% of tax levy), and New York State - State land (4.97%) accounting for nearly 27% of the total tax levy derived from all residential and commercial taxpayers in the school district.

During interviews with community and staff and through consultant observations, Onteora students are very polite, engaged, confident, outgoing, and supportive of each other. The staff seem to focus on children's needs, often not leaving school until long after student dismissal. Students and parents comment frequently on the high quality of the educational experience at Onteora. There is a political, economic and ethnic diversity among the students. Students enjoy small classes, dedicated and experienced faculty and access to appropriate instructional technology. The high school offers approximately 15 AP courses (Advanced Placement) and 57 electives enriching a comprehensive core academic program. Students may choose from many co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities and participate in highly acclaimed visual and performing arts programs.

The school enrollment as of October, 2018 was 1,213. The ethnicity of students was 2% Black or African American, 11% Hispanic or Latino, 2% Asian or Other Pacific Islands, 76% White/Caucasian, and 8% Multi-Racial. The current school district buildings include Phoenicia School grades K-3 (29,900 square feet, 16 classrooms); Woodstock School grades K-3 (43,800 sq. ft., 20 classrooms); Bennett School grades 4-6 (47,440 sq. ft., 22 classrooms); Middle/High school 7-12 (185,000 sq. ft., 62 classrooms); Transportation Garage (5,400 sq. ft.); and West Hurley (Closed school since 2004, Sale Pending, 44,045 sq. ft.).

The central school of Onteora opened in 1952.[2] It was comprised of about 25 one and two-room school houses from a large geographical area. Some of the school houses had so few students that they needed to combine to become more efficient and provide a more comprehensive level of

[1] New York State Education Department
[2] From the Onteora Central School Dedication booklet, 1953.

services. District Superintendent Reginald Bennett along with the Board of Education planned and supervised the building of the new central school, development of curriculum, and hiring of the first staff. The present site of the High School and Middle School was the original first site. It was selected due to its central location. The building was a K-12 school with approximately 900 students in the first centralized school district. It was one of the first K-12 buildings in New York State.

Over the past several decades of declining student enrollment, the Onteora school district has engaged in exploring alternative school building and grade level configurations. This prompted the school district to close the West Hurley school in 2004. In 2006-2008, with a student enrollment of approximately 1,738 students, the school board and district administration contracted with KSQ Architects to develop a District Master Plan that included plans and estimates to upgrade facilities including three grade K-5 elementary schools, and a grade 6-8 middle school separate and distinct from the grade 9-12 high school. During 2006-2007, the school trustees approved Plan A of the District Master Plan which included a grade 6-8 middle school.

The District Master Plan and trustee approval generated community interest and some opposition. In June 2008, the board of trustees of the school district amended their approval by changing the middle school configuration to a grade 5-8 configuration. However, the school trustee elections changed the composition of the trustees and in July, 2008 the new school board of trustees rescinded the grade 5-8 plan, placing the grade level configuration questions under a moratorium pending further discussion.

No formal action was taken for several years until a Middle School Task Force was created in 2010-11 for the purpose of exploring and evaluating middle school and district wide grade configurations. The task force explored and evaluated several options including: a) Three K-8 schools; b) a grade 5-8 in the middle/high school; c) a grade 5-8 in Bennett; d) a grade 6-8 in Bennett; e) a grade 6-8 in the middle/high school; f) a grade 7-8 in the middle/high school; and g) a grade 7-12 Junior-Senior High School.

With student enrollment in 2010-2011 about 200 students less than when the District Master Plan of 2006-2007, the school board of trustees further explored several issues for possible board action at grades K-6. The options included a) Two K-6 elementary schools, close one elementary school; b) One K-3 & 4-6 school, close one elementary school; and c) Two K-3, and one grade 4-6 school. Item c was a form of grade clustering known as the Princeton Plan. The school board of trustees decided to implement option c (Princeton Plan) effective with the 2012-13 school year. The Phoenicia and Woodstock schools became grades K-3 primary schools, and the Bennett school became a grade 4-6 intermediate school. The middle school remained as a grade 7-8 configuration.

Despite the new grade level configurations in 2012, further declining enrollment has required district officials to continue to address how to keep all schools open. Short term strategies include adjusting the primary school attendance boundary to better balance children between Phoenicia and Woodstock. The district has also located specific programs in one of the primary buildings and then bus children district wide to the MAP (self-contained, behavioral program) at Woodstock or the ENL (English as New Language) children to Phoenicia. Interview feedback indicated that without a more long-term strategy for acknowledging and managing declining enrollment, leadership and staff find it difficult to engage in long term planning.

5. Financial & Operational Characteristics of Onteora

The financial and operational characteristics of the Onteora School District are unique when compared to the majority of school districts in New York State. The school district property values are bolstered by the taxable property of the Ashokan Reservoir, a major component of the New York City Water supply. New York State also is a significant taxpayer with the state-owned forest lands. The school district real property value is also buoyed by many second home properties. In several of the towns, it was indicated that over 50% of tax bills were mailed to out of district addresses. Despite the higher than average property wealth, the percentage of district students who are economically disadvantaged has increased to approximately 46% of all enrollment.

New York State distributes state aid based upon a combination of full value property and incomes of school property owners divided by the total number of children residing in the school district. This forms a ratio when comparing to all other school districts. The full value property/weighted students of Onteora are 3.3 times wealthier than the New York State Average when computed per student. While the income may only be 1.1 times higher per student, the combined wealth ratio is 2.21 (with 1.0 being the average in New York State). This explains why the school district receives significantly less state aid than most other rural, somewhat impoverished school districts.

The combination of student sparsity and geographical size of the school district requires extensive and often redundant school bus runs daily. With only an 8% state aid formula for transportation costs, *approximately 92% of all transportation costs are paid for through the local school tax levy*. Similarly, the building aid ratio is the state's share of paying local school building renovations and new construction. Onteora's maximum reimbursement rate for school building capital improvements is only 31% so the district, with sufficient reserves, often pays for smaller capital improvements without bonding which saves borrowing costs. The low reimbursement rate also discourages larger scale school construction bonding since a large portion of costs will be paid by the local taxpayer.

The Onteora school votes have enjoyed positive support since at least 2005-06. Voter turnout typically is 800-1,000 voters, with a high of 2,104 in 2010-11, and a low of 657 in 2015-16. The most recent 2019-20 budget vote carried a 2.98% tax levy, the largest increase since 2011-12. The school budget still passed by nearly a 75% approval rating. Over the past ten years, the average school budget tax levy increase was 1.87% annually with 4 years of 0%.

School districts need to maintain adequate fiscal reserves in the face of the 2% tax cap limitation, and uncertain economic and political times. This strategy is consistent with existing state law, reduces tax levy spikes, and helps maintain existing education programs and critical services. The Business Official annually reviews the School District Financial Reserves Plan in public with the Board of Education. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019, the projected reserves for the close of the 2018-19 school budget were $20,240,741.03, up by $998,531 from the previous year.
The school district creates and holds reserves within the general parameters established by the New York State Comptroller's office. Due to the overall strong financial health of the school district, the district has created and aggressively funded reserves in 8-10 reserve accounts including Unemployment Insurance, ERS and TRS Retirement Rate, Employee Benefits, Capital Reserve, Repair Reserve, etc. Each year as part of the budget planning, the school district uses approximately $3.2 million of surplus funds from the previous budget year as part of the new budget revenues in order to reduce or limit the local school tax levy.

PART II: Analysis of School District Data & Community Input

6. Student Enrollment Projections

Student enrollment by grade, school and district fluctuates daily. The data in the following tables is for in-district children, with enrollment totals based upon the October BEDS data collection (Basic Educational Data System) collected and reported to New York State annually. Table 6.1 below provides actual district enrollment per the BEDS annual report for the school years 2008-09 through 2018-19. The BEDS October data had not yet been finalized for the 2019-20 school year and is not included for analysis in this study.

One of the key drivers of student enrollment is the size of the incoming kindergarten class. Incoming kindergarten classes can be impacted by external factors. For example, a newly established local private or parochial school or an increase in home schooled children could divert incoming kindergarteners. Stable or growing kindergarten classes suggest a long term stable or increasing enrollment. Conversely, a decreasing kindergarten class likely suggests a decline in total student enrollment. Table 6.1 indicates a downward trend in the number of incoming kindergarten children. The five-year average incoming kindergarten classes between 2009-10 and 2013-14 was 96.6 children. The most recent five-year average between 2014-15 and 2018-19 was only 82, a reduction of 14.6. This trend alone suggests a future enrollment decline.

Table 6.1: Onteora Central School In-District Enrollment – Actual

Based Upon Fall NYS BEDS Data, District Provided Information, and the Annual Enrollment Report from Haber & Associates

Grade	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	5yr/Ave.
K	113	108	77	86	116	96	87	80	79	79	85	82.0
G1	108	120	114	86	81	126	91	91	90	71	79	84.4
G2	106	103	108	112	85	93	123	94	88	85	67	91.4
G3	111	105	94	115	106	93	99	128	93	92	83	99.0
G4	111	106	107	91	121	103	95	94	129	87	88	98.6
G5	108	118	98	109	86	119	110	89	94	129	80	100.4
G6	124	112	111	101	102	94	119	103	90	93	130	107.0
G7	156	118	114	105	105	102	98	128	105	102	92	105.0
G8	152	155	123	110	106	105	101	103	126	106	100	107.2
G9	144	150	154	125	114	114	113	106	109	129	102	111.8
G10	172	148	139	138	114	107	107	106	105	101	113	106.4
G11	154	158	147	136	132	111	103	105	103	97	95	100.6
G12	179	143	145	141	129	129	115	100	101	105	99	104.0
In-District	**1,738**	**1,644**	**1,531**	**1,455**	**1,397**	**1,392**	**1,361**	**1,327**	**1,312**	**1,276**	**1,213**	
Free/Reduce	23	27	22	33	37	40	43	43	44	44	46	

	2008-09*	2009-10*	2010-11*	2011-12*	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Bennett	267	263	240	234	352	322	325	288	313	303	298
Phoenicia	225	215	208	212	142	147	156	150	133	127	134
Woodstock	289	296	261	253	202	260	244	241	217	199	180
Middle School	308	276	237	214	211	207	203	235	231	199	192
High School	649	601	587	539	489	461	438	417	418	430	409
In District	**1,738**	**1,651**	**1,533**	**1,452**	**1,396**	**1,397**	**1,366**	**1,331**	**1,312**	**1,258**	**1,213**

** Elementary schools were Grades K-6*

Table 6.1 indicates that the Onteora Central School District over the past ten years (2009-10 through 2018-19) has experienced a marked decline in student enrollment. Over this period, 431 fewer children attended the school district, a reduction of 26.2%. This would translate into 22 classrooms – the equivalent of a typical elementary or middle school building enrollment. *The average student loss per the last ten-year period was 43 students annually and most concerning, the enrollment declined every single year.* An additional concerning data point in the table regards the increasing number of students with financial hardship. Over the past 11 years, the percentage of children qualifying for free/reduced price lunch has doubled, from 23% to 46%. In addition to the obvious social and economic impact on children and families, this also places additional fiscal stress on a school district due to increased demands for services and academic supports to address the needs of the children and families due to impoverishment.

Table 6.2:
Onteora Central School District Projected Enrollment - 5 Year Cohort Survival Coefficient

Using Five Years of Co-efficients to Capture Trending Data

Grade	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
K	85	77	74	80	83	82	82	82	82	82
G1	85	85	77	74	80	83	82	82	82	82
G2	77	83	83	75	72	78	81	80	80	80
G3	69	79	85	85	77	74	80	83	82	82
G4	81	67	77	83	83	75	72	78	81	80
G5	87	80	66	75	81	81	74	71	77	80
G6	79	86	79	65	75	81	81	73	70	76
G7	137	83	90	83	68	79	85	85	77	74
G8	92	137	83	90	83	69	79	85	85	77
G9	103	95	142	86	94	86	71	81	88	88
G10	95	97	89	132	81	87	80	66	76	82
G11	108	91	92	85	127	77	84	77	63	73
G12	95	108	91	92	85	127	77	84	77	63
Total:	**1,193**	**1,168**	**1,129**	**1,107**	**1,089**	**1,079**	**1,027**	**1,027**	**1,020**	**1,018**

Total Enrollment - By Grade Configuration Using 5 Year Cohort Model

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Gr. K-3	316	324	319	314	312	317	325	327	326	326
Gr. 4-6	247	232	221	223	239	237	226	222	228	235
Gr. 7-8	229	220	174	173	152	147	164	170	162	151
Gr. 9-12	402	391	415	397	386	377	312	308	304	306

The projection of future student enrollment utilized the cohort survival co-efficient method. This method utilizes the average of the historical change between one grade level to the next over either a five- or ten-year period. Therefore, past history enrollment trends are utilized in projecting enrollment forward. A ten-year correlation co-efficient is often used when enrollment in the school district is relatively stable, while a five-year is used to capture an emerging trend or changes in the district. For this study, projection used the five-year cohort correlation co-efficient to best capture recent enrollment trends. The enrollment difference between the two methods regarding student projections was overall nominal. Enrollment projections are an estimate based upon past trends. The further a projection extends into the future (more than five years, e.g.) the degree of reliability is reduced. School districts should engage in revised enrollment projections at least bi-annually to ensure better long-term accuracy and reliability of projections.

The future projection of incoming kindergarten children for the first five years of data in the projections (2019-20 to 2023-24) was based upon data from the report by Ross Haber and Associates 2018-19 for enrollment projections for Onteora Central School District. The second five years of the projections (2024-2029) were based upon the most recent five-year actual historical average of incoming kindergarten children which was 82 kindergarten children per year.

Table 6.2 provides student enrollment projections through the 2028-29 school year. The projections suggest a continued decline in student population, however the declining trend slows. Whereas the previous ten-year period experienced a decline of 431 students, the next ten-year period is projected to decline by approximately 195 students from the 2018-19 base line year. Moreover, assuming the incoming kindergarten students register as expected, the *grades K-3 cumulative population will remain stable or experience a slight increase of 12 students over the next five years compared with the previous five years* of actual enrollment. Grades 4-6, 7-8, and 9-12 will experience some decline in enrollment over the next five years. Grades 4-6 will average 232 students over the next five years – 73 students less than the previous actual five-year period (2014-15 through 2018-19). Grades 7-8 will see a smaller average annual loss of 22 students annually. The high school, grades 9-12 are projected to see an average reduction of 24 students through 2023-24 school year.

Some responses from the recent school community survey suggested that school enrollment tends to "ebb and flow" or that Onteora's student enrollment will increase in the future. Several survey respondents and interviewees shared anecdotal accounts of new families moving into the school district from New York City with more to come. However, the prior ten years of actual enrollment history showed a loss of 431 students, or 26% of the total student population. *There was a consistent decline every year.* The trend of kindergarten enrollment also indicated a trending decline. The enrollment projections for the next ten years, 2019-20 through 2028-29, indicate a *continued, but slower student decline* of approximately 195 children. The majority of the losses will be at grades 4-12. The projected enrollment will decline from the 2018-19 enrollment of 1,213 to approximately 1,018 students in the 2028-29 school year.

No one can rule out that a giant box store company won't decide to build a large warehouse or corporate offices in the Onteora School District that would likely spur school enrollment. But limitations on utility infrastructure, limited interstate proximity, and the tax structure, make this scenario a very low probability. With a high degree of probability based upon history and projection, student enrollment will continue to decrease in the Onteora Central Schools over the next ten years.

7. School District Transportation

Although the school district operates and owns a small bus fleet, the majority of busing is contracted to First Student, a private vendor at a cost of approximately $2.6-2.8 million annually. For the smaller portion of busing done by the school district, approximately 5-6 bus drivers are employed, as well as a transportation dispatcher and a supervisor who works closely coordinating transportation with the outside contractor. Total district bus mileage in 2017-18 was approximately 186,000 miles covering about 15% of in-district daily routes, some vocational runs, most field trips, and a small number of late bus runs. The contract vendor travels over 962,000 miles plus most out of district runs and late bus runs. The total transportation annual mileage is over 1.1 million miles. According to the transportation supervisor, the goal of a maximum student time on a bus of 45

minutes is usually achieved. However, there are a few students, due to living an extreme distance from school, who may ride a bus up to 1 hour, 15 minutes (*e.g. when a child from Pine Hill is transported to Woodstock Primary*). For the different grade configuration scenarios presented in this study, all routing schemes were based on an average of 45-50-minute bus rides for the Elementary and 40-45 for the High School. These are equal to what they are now and may be a little shorter due to less bus runs freeing up more staff and more flexibility to shorten runs.

For the study, the estimated transportation costs for each of the six different grade level configuration scenarios was analyzed. A table showing transportation costs and required runs is provided for each scenario (A-F) in Part III of this report. Estimated costs were calculated by the Onteora School District Transportation Department. Transportation costs were based upon student miles driven, not deadhead (bus empty) miles. The estimates are based upon the first student on to the last student off. Therefore, *each table delineates the specific unique cost impact of transportation for each of the grade configuration in relation to the other grade configuration scenarios*. Transportation costs for out of district transportation, field trips, sports trips, and late runs are not reflected in any of these estimated costs as they would be least affected by a scenario change. All transportation costs were based upon a *two-tier* bus schedule. This type of schedule reflects separate bus trips for the elementary and secondary students.

Under grade level configurations scenarios D and E (See Part III), the district would operate a "central campus". The central campus would cluster all grades K-12 on the Boiceville campus in three schools. Under a central campus, it could be possible to operate a single tier of busing (one general starting and ending time for the three schools). Under scenarios D and E, the Bennett school would operate as a districtwide K-4 or K-5 school, with the middle school grades 5-8 or 6-8, and the existing high school grades 9-12. Single tier busing would further reduce the estimated costs. A single tier of busing under Scenario D and E provides both advantages and drawbacks that are discussed later in Part III.

8. Student Achievement Comparisons 2017-18

8-A. Student Achievement Comparison with Two Different Groups of School Districts

There are approximately 639 grade K-12 school districts in New York State. Every school district possesses unique identifying characteristics. Objectively selecting similar school districts for comparisons is challenging since there is some subjectivity in the district attributes selected for grouping similar districts.

For this study, school district student achievement comparisons were made with two different groups of school districts. In the first group, seven school districts were selected from across New York State that shared a set of similar district characteristics. In each chart, they are designated as "*Statistically Similar Districts in Enrollment and Sparsity*". A second group of six school districts located in reasonably close proximity to Onteora were also compared. These districts are labeled in each chart as "Other Area School Districts". Both groups of school districts are shown in each table.

The statistically similar group includes the seven school districts considered statistically similar for comparison. This is based upon sorting on the following combination of variables: 1) Student in-district enrollment; 2) Size of each school district in square miles; 3) Number of students per square mile (sparsity); and 4) Total population per square mile. These key factors were selected based

upon the experience and knowledge of the consultant since each has an impact on school district school and grade level configuration, transportation and budget. These factors also often represent the rural nature of geographically large school districts.

The second group of six school districts primary common characteristic is they are all located within close geographical proximity. This group of school districts may not necessarily be similar statistically. However, the local and regional newspapers and other media may compare these school districts on a range of fiscal, athletic and academic areas. Often, Onteora may compete in athletics or other academic areas with these schools as well.

Comparisons of the school districts included in the four tables includes the areas of finance, classification, graduation rate, student achievement scores of the grade 3-8 ELA and math assessments, and scores on the New York State Regents examinations.

8-B. Limitations of Data Use

The data comparisons have several significant limitations. The sample was a *single test year*, 2017-18. A school district may have had a strong or weaker group of students participating in the exam during a single year. This is further exacerbated by the often relatively small sample size participating at a specific grade level from one or more school districts. Ideally, comparisons should be made over three or more years to create a reliable trend. Collecting and comparing three years of data was made more difficult since grade 3-8 state assessments and one or more Regent examinations have undergone substantial revisions and cannot be compared from one year to another. The percentage of student participation and opt/out also can challenge both the validity and reliability of the data. It is difficult to simply assume that the students who participated in the exams were similar to those students who opted out. The participation levels varied dramatically on the grade 3-8 assessments from a high of 93% to a low of 38% between school districts.

The data comparisons of student achievement included in this study are provided as a one-time "snap-shot" for large scale general comparison with other school districts. District officials (and others) must be strongly advised to not draw any conclusions or make inferences from the provided data. Therefore, *the analysis of assessment data by exam below is indicated through general observations and comments rather than specific statistical reference*. The observations and analysis of the data are helpful in identifying subtle differences between Onteora and the other school districts when comparing various student assessments. However, any large variance should raise questions to explore further, not indicate a potential problem or need to take action. School districts should regularly collect achievement data from other similar and area school districts to help measure and compare district and student progress.

8-C. District Analysis

Fiscal Analysis

Table 8.1 listed below provides a profile of each of the 14 -school district included in the study: seven districts that are statistically similar, six districts that are in close proximity, and Onteora Central School District. Table 8.1 indicates that Onteora is similar to the statistically similar districts in the following ways: a) sparsity of children per mile ranges between 2-8, Onteora is 5; b) geographically large districts ranging from 199 to 639 square miles, Onteora is 273 square miles; and c) enrollment range of 1,109 to 1,414, Onteora was 1,257 (2017-18). One area of noticeable difference from both groups of school districts is the high Combined Wealth Ratio (CWR) of

Onteora at 2.34. With the average CWR in New York State of 1.00, a 2.34 is significantly driven by the higher property wealth of the district buoyed by second home values, and of course the two largest school district taxpayers include the New York City Municipal Water Authority for the reservoir and the state land of New York State. The CWR affects several state aid formulas that reduce state aid, shifting more district costs to the local taxpayer. Due to the much higher than average property wealth, the local effort (a combination of tax levy and local revenue) is the lowest of the other districts in the table. Only one of the districts, Saranac Lake, has a lower local effort of 10.25, while Onteora has a rate of 11.60. Other districts range between 12.13 – 21.56. Several data points raise possible questions to explore further as well. These include the classification rate of

Table 8.1: School District Profile Comparison

Statistically Similar Districts in Enrollment and Sparsity												
School District	Enroll	Sq Mi.	Stud./ Mile	Pop./ Mile	%Class	F/R Lunch	$ Per Student	Local Effort	CWR	State Aid %	Insrt. $ %	Benefit $ %
Adirondack*	1,179	365	3	23	13.8	51	22,411	16.67	0.73	60	43	22
Altmar-Parish*	1,155	170	7	44	19.4	60	28,447	16.41	0.43	76	51	17
Ausable Valley	1,109	278	4	34	14.0	53	28,100	16.18	0.75	58	44	24
Lowville	1,277	258	5	33	12.6	45	19,522	16.67	0.53	65	49	18
Saranac	1,414	179	8	77	14.5	41	20,466	17.97	0.60	57	55	23
Saranac Lake	1,137	639	2	22	12.2	41	24,404	10.25	1.61	31	51	23
Taconic Hills*	1,297	199	7	61	12.1	57	25,511	12.13	1.53	28	42	17
Onteora	1,257	273	5	55	20.0	44	35,405	11.60	2.34	18	52	26
Other Area Local School Districts												
New Paltz	2,169	X	X	X	15.1	25	25,466	21.56	1.04	27	51	22
Pine Plains	880	X	X	X	17.0	41	29,158	13.20	1.93	23	47	23
Rhinebeck	1,031	X	X	X	9.1	15	30,164	15.54	2.17	11	52	24
Rondout	1,902	X	X	X	16.5	45	30,079	17.29	1.20	38	53	23
Tri-Valley	965	X	X	X	15.2	51	30,671	18.51	1.04	33	47	18
Webutuck (NE)	664	X	X	X	12.8	56	26,931	12.78	1.35	32	51	23
NYS Ave.					15.3		$24,712					

*Notes: Data lagged one year. Unless noted, data from 2017-18. Free and Reduced % from 2016-17 (F & R Lunch). CWR = Combined Wealth Ratio. Local Effort = Dividing all local revenue by the actual prior year property value of the district. State Aid = % of total revenues. Instr. = Instructional expenses % of budget. Benefit $ % = Benefit expenses % of budget. Districts that have closed one or more schools since 2012 are designated with an *. Stud./Mile is number of enrolled public students/total square miles. Source: http://www.oms.nysed.gov/faru/PDFDocuments/rptTable4.pdf*

students in Onteora (20.0%) which is the highest of the 14 districts in the table, and higher than the New York state average of 15.3%. Onteora also has the highest costs per student of all districts in the study at $35,405 (2017-18) with the state average of $24,712.

Student Achievement Analysis

The 2017-18 English-Language Arts (ELA) grades 3-8 district scores are indicated in Table 8.2 below. The numbers shown indicate the percentage of children by grade level that achieved proficiency on the assessment. Proficiency on this exam is when children achieve a level 3 or 4 on the four-level scaled score exam. Scaled scores and levels are determined after assessment results are analyzed by both the New York State Education Department and the test development vendor.

Despite the limitations of the data previously discussed, Onteora *strongly outperformed* all or a strong majority of districts in the ELA exam at grades 3, 4, and 7, *outperformed* the majority of

schools at grade 5, and scored in the middle range of district scores at grades 6 and 8. Onteora outperformed the New York State average in 5 of 6 grade levels for ELA. The cumulative overall grade 3-8 ELA assessment scores indicate that Onteora *outperformed* 10 of the 13 other school districts. There was little discernible difference in the overall performances between the two groups of districts in the table for ELA grades 3-8.

Table 8.2: Grade 3-8 ELA Student Achievement % Proficient

Statistically Similar Districts in Enrollment and Sparsity								
School District	**%Tested**	**Gr3**	**Gr4**	**Gr5**	**Gr6**	**Gr7**	**Gr8**	**% Prof 3-8**
Adirondack	64	41	40	20	45	31	47	37
Altmar-Parish	93	43	31	15	36	28	25	30
Ausable Valley	48	48	35	29	66	24	27	40
Lowville	95	39	45	50	56	42	59	48
Saranac	65	58	46	27	47	35	57	45
Saranac Lake	73	26	38	20	53	24	27	31
Taconic Hills	86	14	49	28	36	26	29	31
Onteora	49	59	53	41	52	50	45	50
Other Area Local School Districts								
New Paltz	38	37	46	41	54	24	26	40
Pine Plains	71	26	20	29	70	41	57	38
Rhinebeck	79	68	56	45	50	43	49	52
Rondout	76	53	38	21	37	25	49	38
Tri-Valley	77	36	24	25	44	27	50	33
Webutuck (NE)	71	22	22	3	27	30	31	22
NYS Ave.	**78**	**51**	**47**	**37**	**49**	**40**	**48**	**45**

Data from 2017-18 test administration. The % Prof indicates the combined and averaged proficiency across all grade levels 3-8. Proficiency indicates the percentage of students scoring at levels 3 and 4 on the assessment with 4 being the highest. Grade 3-8 Math and ELA for 2017-18 were redesigned and cannot be compared to prior years. Source: Sources: NYSED Data 2017-18 https://data.nysed.gov/

Table 8.3 on the subsequent page, provides school district performance on the 2017-18 Grade 3-8 Math assessment. Onteora *strongly outperformed* all or the vast majority of school districts in the two groups for math at grades 5,6, and 7. The remaining grades 3, 4, and 8 performed *at or near the middle range* among the school districts in Table 8.3. The cumulative overall grade 3-8 math assessment scores indicate that Onteora *outperformed* 10 of the 13 other school districts. There was little difference in the overall performances between the two groups of districts in the table for Math grades 3-8.

Table 8.4 shown on the subsequent page highlights the 2017-18 New York State school district Regents examination scores. The numbers listed in the table indicate the percentage of students in a school district that demonstrated proficiency on the exam. The results indicated that Onteora strongly *outperformed* 11 of the other 13 school districts on the Chemistry exam. Onteora *performed above the average* range of the 13 other school districts on Algebra II, Physics, Transitional Global History and Geography. Students from Onteora cumulatively *performed in the average range* of the school districts compared in Table 8.4 on the following Regents examinations or other academic areas including graduation rate, percentage of students receiving the Regents Advanced Diploma, Algebra I, Living Environment, and Earth Science.

Table 8.3: Grade 3-8 Math Student Achievement % Proficient

Statistically Similar Districts in Enrollment and Sparsity								
School District	**%Tested**	**Gr3**	**Gr4**	**Gr5**	**Gr6**	**Gr7**	**Gr8**	**% Prof 3-8**
Adirondack	63	51	39	28	26	40	40	38
Altmar-Parish	85	60	34	15	41	37	0	38
Ausable Valley	50	37	47	27	49	50	19	39
Lowville	93	57	48	61	56	34	34	49
Saranac	65	51	53	26	41	35	26	42
Saranac Lake	72	40	34	25	32	11	25	28
Taconic Hills	81	14	47	44	43	16	36	33
Onteora	51	44	37	55	58	54	38	47
Other Area Local School Districts								
New Paltz	39	37	36	54	42	58	79	50
Pine Plains	69	29	30	48	68	53	60	45
Rhinebeck	76	59	60	41	57	58	58	56
Rondout	74	69	43	39	36	25	43	43
Tri-Valley	73	47	35	39	42	23	47	39
Webutuck (NE)	72	18	52	24	45	38	45	38
NYS Ave.	**76**	**54**	**48**	**44**	**44**	**42**	**50**	**47**

Data from 2017-18 test administration. The % Prof indicates the combined and averaged proficiency across all grade levels 3-8. Proficiency indicates the percentage of students scoring at levels 3 and 4 on the assessment with 4 being the highest. Grade 3-8 Math and ELA for 2017-18 were redesigned and cannot be compared to prior years. Source: NYSED Data 2017-18 https://data.nysed.gov/

Table 8.4: NYS Graduation & Regents % Proficient

Statistically Similar Districts in Enrollment and Sparsity													
School District	**Grad Rate**	**Reg Adv**	**Regent Diplom**	**English**	**Algeb I**	**Geom**	**Algeb II**	**Living Env**	**Earth Science**	**Chem**	**Physics**	**Trans. Glob**	**U.S. History**
Adirondack	90	26	56	82	85	71	89	83	82	80	64	77	97
Altmar-Parish	83	31	43	34	53	58	64	66	85	21	68	46	63
Ausable Valley	88	23	62	84	83	85	93	93	71	N/A*	71	76	81
Lowville	94	51	41	92	91	94	84	90	81	85	96	78	96
Saranac	88	43	34	81	90	92	100	93	79	82	94	78	91
Saranac Lake	89	47	36	82	73	77	100	91	77	63	95	87	89
Taconic Hills	79	23	52	73	73	65	94	69	56	62	N/A*	49	66
Onteora	87	31	50	84	82	89	96	84	78	85	95	81	91
Other Area Local School Districts													
New Paltz	93	51	34	87	90	81	93	92	85	92	80	92	91
Pine Plains	85	31	51	78	88	80	98	95	91	75	61	80	84
Rhinebeck	89	38	47	94	91	94	98	94	87	83	98	89	91
Rondout	89	38	43	75	76	88	88	77	68	74	85	78	77
Tri-Valley	80	20	49	68	77	63	81	73	84	88	N/A*	70	88
Webutuck (NE)	84	27	50	70	67	35	46	81	66	55	N/A*	58	80

Data from 2017-18 Regents examinations. Note: N/A indicates that less than 20 students took the exam and the data is excluded. Regents % meeting NYS Proficiency is indicated by the percentage (%) of students in a district that met or exceeded Level 3 on the exam (assumes proficiency). Sources: NYSED Data 2017-18 https://data.nysed.gov/*

In summary, despite the data limitations previously discussed, Onteora overall typically matched or outperformed the other 13 school districts on the grade 3-8 ELA and Math, and the New York State Regents Examinations. The 13 other districts represented both rural, geographically large schools, as well as locally area school districts that are closer proximity.

9. Research and Information on Grade Level Configuration

9-A. Summary of Key Research Results

- The impact of grade level configurations on student learning is generally inconclusive.
- What a teacher does in a classroom is far more important than a specific grade configuration.
- Each school community considers different factors when making grade configuration decisions.
- No grade configuration is right for all districts.
- The longer students stay in one school, the more relationships they form with teachers and other adults.
- Student achievement is adversely affected when children make transitions to new schools.
- Often space rather than educational considerations drive grade level configuration decisions.
- Team teaching, where students rotate within a small group of team teachers, is cornerstone of middle level practices and is used in over 77% of all middle schools in some form.
- Advocates of middle level education typically believe that grade configuration is less important than the actual instructional practices within a school.
- There are conflicting studies on whether students in a single K-8 building or a 6-8 middle school building exhibit higher levels of student achievement.
- A feature of the grade 6-8 middle school is Grade 6 students are more likely to be instructed by content specialists in a middle school instead of a generalist in an elementary school.
- The majority of New York State school districts (62%) with enrollments between 1,100 and 1,400 use three school buildings.
- Onteora is the only district of the fifty-five districts with similar enrollment between 1,100 and 1,400 students that uses five schools.
- The most prevalent grade configuration was grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12, used by 35% of the similar enrollment school districts in New York State.
- The second most used grade configuration was grade K-4, 5-8, and 9-12, representing 22% of the similar school districts.
- The most often used middle school configuration used by similar enrollment schools in New York State is grades 6-8 (n = 23, 42%) followed by a grade 5-8 middle school (n = 13, 24%).

9-B. Overview of Research on Grade Level Configuration

There is a myriad of grade level configurations used in public schools in the United States. Some examples include: individual grade level centers; grades K-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6; K-8, 4-6, 5-8, 6-8, 7-8, 9-10, 10-12, 9-12 and K-12. Some school systems also include Pre-Kindergarten (PK) or Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK). Within the educational literature, few academic studies exclusively explore grade level configurations and the research that does exist on the impact of grade level configurations is generally inconclusive. This at least partly explains why grade level configuration decisions are less driven by research and more often based on student enrollment, building space, costs, and from parental and community influence. Frequently when school districts conduct grade configuration studies, they do so because of too much or too little capacity in their schools. Often space rather than educational considerations drive the decision.[1]

[1] Silky, William; Pole, Alan (2016). **A Grade Configuration Study**. Cazenovia Central School District, Cazenovia, New York

The research indicates that there are several key factors that should be considered when determining the best grade configurations most appropriate for a school district. Among the variables for consideration include: [2]

□ Student enrollment by grade level and building – current and long term projected
□ Transportation and other operational costs
□ The costs to develop the infrastructure to change a grade alignment
□ Teacher/staff training, certification for new grades in school
□ Leadership availability and background
□ School schedules
□ Student achievement – strengths and weaknesses on state and national examinations
□ School system goals for student achievement
□ Effects on other schools, districts and BOCES
□ Number of transitions for affected students (Primary, Intermediate, Middle, High School)
□ Impact on parent involvement
□ The influence of older students on younger students
□ The flexibility of a school building to accommodate diverse ages, and developmental needs

Research does not conclusively suggest that any particular grade level configuration has a positive or negative impact on student achievement. Regarding student academic and social development, the grade configuration is substantially less important than what a teacher is doing in the classroom that is developmentally appropriate.

In 2012, the Onteora School District elected to reconfigure grades based loosely on the Princeton Plan. The schools were configured into (two) grades K-3, and one building each of 4-6, 7-8, and 9-12. Devised almost 50 years ago at Princeton University, the Princeton Plan was originally a method of combating racial segregation in schools by going to a districtwide K-1, 2-3, 4-6, 7-8, and 9-12 configuration.[3]

9-C. Elementary Grade Configuration

There is little research examining student outcomes when comparing grade K-2 or K-3 grade configurations with intermediate school grade 4-5 or 4-6. Consistent with other grade span research, the most significant factors that positively affect student outcomes are the quality of the teacher, classroom practices, and the overall learning culture of the building. Dividing the grades of an elementary school into a K-3 and a 4-6 requires that students make one or more transitions from one school to another. Researchers have found that the frequency of transitions can have at least a short-term negative effect on student development and achievement. A study by Alspaugh found a significant achievement loss during each transition year. The study indicated that some students regain what is lost in the following year, but it would seem that students who make fewer transitions need fewer years to make up for achievement losses caused by transitions.[4]

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[2] Baughman, Kevin (2017) **A Study of Building Utilization and Grade Configuration**. Westmoreland School District, Westmoreland, New York.

[3] AASA Newsletter. ***Figuring and Reconfiguring Grade Spans (Reeves, Kimberly) 2019*** https://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=8716

[4] Alspaugh, John W. (1999). **The interaction effect of transition grade to high school with gender and grade level upon dropout rates**. Montreal: American Educational Research Association. (ERIC Document No. ED431066)

At a practitioner level, there are positive features for dividing elementary grades into two or more buildings (e.g. grades K-3 in one building, grades 4-6 in separate building). Dividing elementary into two or more grade level groups permits each school to narrow the focus of curriculum. Teachers can focus intensely on fewer subjects and become subject expert specialists. Locating one or more grade levels in a single district building also permits larger numbers of teachers at the same grade level to collaborate using a common curriculum. Having more classrooms at each grade supports more opportunities to match students to teachers according to teaching and learning styles. Other features of a divided elementary configuration may include students feeling safe being with other students their own age, and students may be able to participate on an equal level in more activities and be less influenced by older students. Since teachers in this setting are more content specialist, it may be more difficult to assign a teacher to teach another grade level or teach in other elementary content areas after a period of time serving as a specialist.

The positive features of a continuous grade configuration (K-5 e.g.) is more convenience for families for parental involvement, PTA participation, and parent volunteers. Grade level communication of curriculum, alignment, and coordination is easier to facilitate. This configuration encourages consistent communication with families since all children are at one campus or in one building. Of consequence and as previously mentioned in the research, the continuous grade levels reduce the needed transitions between schools for children. Since students are in a building for more years, staff/student/parent relationships have more longevity. Under this grouping, the articulation and coordination of curriculum is easier and more seamless with more grade levels. Since teachers in this setting are more generalists, they can be more easily assigned to other grade levels or teach in any elementary content area.

9-D. Middle School Grade Configuration

Beginning in the early 1900's, the junior high came into existence as a bridge to high school. The junior high - typically grades 7 and 8 – included a strong focus on study skill and behavioral preparation for high school. Although lacking a theoretical framework in child or social development, the junior high survived in many school districts until the late 20th century. Today, the traditional junior high school (grades 7-8, or 7-9) span now accounts for only 5 percent of schools.[5]

During the late 1960's and early 70's, middle schools were created in response to perceived low student achievement and high-risk behaviors in early age adolescent students. The middle level design was based upon the needs of young adolescents utilizing strategies such as small learning communities, team teaching, advisory periods, and flexible scheduling. Team teaching, a cornerstone of middle level practices, is where students rotate within a small group of team teachers. It is most common in the United States with over 77% of schools using some form. This practice encourages a closer relationship between teachers and students. Proponents also argue it promotes a greater feeling of connection by each student to the school than in a grade 7-8 junior high.[6]

Today, a middle school configured as a grade 6-8 is the most common middle level configuration in the United States. Thirty years after the concept of middle schools was introduced, much of the research on the benefits of the concept is inconclusive. This may be partly due to a failure to

[5] AASA Newsletter. Op. Cit.

[6] Cromwell, S. "**Team Teaching: Teaming Teachers Offer Tips.**" Education World, December 1, 2009. http://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/admin/admin290.shtml

properly implement the initial research on middle school education. Advocates of middle level education typically believe that grade configuration is less important than the actual instructional practices within a school. The National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades policy statement suggests that focusing on changing grade configurations as the solution to middle grades problems and challenges may not achieve the intended results. Further, high achieving middle level schools are characterized by "academic excellence, responsiveness to the unique needs of young adolescents, and social equity," rather than a particular grade level configuration. [7]

An alternative to the grade 6-8 (or similar) middle school configuration is the grade K-8 school. There is a growing list of public, charter and private schools grouping students in kindergarten through eighth grade together in one building rather than separate elementary and middle schools. This practice is observed most often in urban schools. A large base of research in this comparison does not yet exist. However, two somewhat recent studies compared student achievement of students in grade 6-8 and K-8, one in New York City[8] and the other in Florida.[9] Both studies tracked student achievement over the majority of the primary grades and, in the Florida case, into high school. Both studies provided evidence that students who move to a middle or junior high school in Grades 6 or 7 experience a sharp decrease in their learning trajectories and continue to struggle, relative to their peers who attended K–8 schools, through Grade 8 and into high school. However, there are other studies comparing K-8 and separate elementary and middle schools that contradict the learning benefits of a K-8 configuration, or find that the gains were not sustainable over time.[10]

Although research may not conclusively indicate a positive impact on student achievement through the middle school grade configuration, research does suggest that transitions from one school to another can negatively impact student outcomes. Transitioning to a new school may disrupt existing social relationships, reduce bonds between students and teachers, and expose students to less effective teaching methods.[11] Specifically, the transition from elementary to middle school has been associated with increased violence, substance abuse, and mental health referrals, along with a reduction in self-esteem. The effects of school transitions may be more severe for students from particular demographic backgrounds and students with additional risk factors, such as low social competency or familial instability. [12]
The middle school configuration (Grades 6-8) impacts on sixth-grade students in ways different than the junior high (grades 7-8, or 7-9). Grade 6 students in middle schools are more likely to be instructed by content experts in a middle school instead of an elementary school. Grade 6 students

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[7] National Forum to Accelerate Middle Grades. https://www.middlegradesforum.org/

[8] Rockoff, J. E., and B. B. Lockwood. 2010. **"Stuck in the Middle: Impacts of Grade Configuration in Public Schools."** Journal of Public Economics 94 (11–12): 1051–1061.

[9] Schwerdt, G., and M. R. West. 2011. **"The Impact of Alternative Grade Configurations on Student Outcomes through Middle and High School."** Working paper, Harvard University

[10] NYSBA On Board Online. Heiser, Paul. **What the research says about K-8 schools vs. separate elementary and middle schools.** April 2, 2018.

[11] Report: Hanover Research (for Morgan Hill Unified School District)
Review of Grade Level Configurations
https://www.napls.us/site/handlers/filedownload.ashx?moduleinstanceid=4047&dataid=8327&FileName=Hanover-Review-of-Grade-Level- Configurations-Morgan-Hill-Unified-School-District.pdf
Prepared for Morgan Hill Unified School District by Hanover Research, January 2015

[12] (2004) Maclin, C. and J. Monteiro-Leitner. "**Planning For the Elementary to Middle School Transition: An Experience in Progress in a Rural Midwest Middle School**." National Forum of Applied Educational Research Journal, 17:3, p. 4. http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Maclin,%20Cindi%20Planning%20For%20the%20Elementary%20to%20Middle%20School%20Transition.pdf

in a 6-8 middle school have greater access to a broader, richer array of extracurricular opportunities and school experiences than if remaining in a typical elementary school. Grade 6 students also experience more and varied teachers and teaching styles. These students also must learn to behave more independently since the middle school due to its size and design, does not exert as close of supervision of each child as what might be experienced in an elementary setting. Although some school districts have elected to include grade 5 at the middle school configuration, the amount of research examining this transition is limited. Some evidence suggests that delaying or reducing the number of school transitions that students experience may result in improved student achievement. A study of Grade 5 students in elementary (Grades K-5) and intermediate (Grade 5 only or Grades 5-6) schools in Texas from the 2003-2004 through the 2007-2008 school years when controlling for school size, socioeconomic status, student mobility, and the number of Limited English Proficiency students and found that Grade 5 students in elementary schools obtained significantly higher scores on state standardized tests of math and reading than did their peers in intermediate schools Grades 5-6.[13]

9-E. Grade Configurations of Similar Size New York State School Districts

Table 9.1 below summarizes the various grade level configurations, number of buildings, geographical size, and number of students per mile. The 55 New York State public school districts have similar enrollments to Onteora ranging from 1,109 to 1,400 students. Onteora, according to the New York State Education Department, had an enrollment of 1,257, nearly the average enrollment in Table 9.1. The data is from 2017-18.[14] [15]

The number of school buildings used in each school district ranged between 2 and 5 buildings. The majority of school districts (n = 34, 62%) in table 1 used three school buildings followed by four buildings (n = 12, 22%) while 15% of school districts (n = 8) used two school buildings. Only one school district of the 55 districts in the table used five school buildings – Onteora Central School District. One possible explanation could be the large geographical size of Onteora with approximately 278 square miles. However, isolating the largest geographical school districts, those with between 199 and 639 square miles, the five school districts in the table averaged 3.4 school buildings (4, 4, 4, 3, and 2 buildings). The contention could be that the Onteora Middle and High School are just a single building. However, the New York State Education Department recognizes them as separate buildings, each with its own building number, separate fire code inspection report, separate signage, and different principals. In Part III of this report, the need for a clearer identity of the Onteora Middle School is discussed.

In comparing the number of schools that house grades K-6 within Table 9.1, only two school districts out of 55 have three buildings, Canastota and Onteora. The remaining 53 school districts maintain 2 or fewer school buildings to house grades K-6. Finally, the average number of school buildings for the 55 school districts in table was 3.47.

When examining the different grade configurations of the school districts in the table, it becomes clear that there are many variations. The most prevalent configuration was grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-

[13] Combs, J., D. Clark, G. Moor, A. Onwuegbuzie, S. Edmonson, and J. Slate. "**Academic Achievement for Fifth-Grade Students in Elementary and Intermediate School Settings: Grade Span Configurations**." Current Issues in Education, 14:1, pp. 18-30. http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/677/147

[14] NYSED Data 2017-18: https://data.nysed.gov/

[15] NYS School Size: http://www.usa.com/rank/new-york-state--land-area--school-district-rank.htm

12, used by 35% of the districts in the table (n = 19). This was followed by grade K-4, 5-8, and 9-12, representing 22% of the districts (n = 12).

The middle school configurations indicated that the majority of middle schools are grades 6-8 (n = 23, 42%) followed by a grade 5-8 middle school (n = 13, 24%). A group of school districts (n = 16, 29% of the 55 districts) do not have a formal separate middle school. Instead, these districts have a junior-senior high school with either grades 6-12 or 7-12. School districts not utilizing a middle school is likely more a school district decision based upon space availability, student enrollment or history rather than a decision based upon instruction or child development. Table 9.1 data appears on the next page.

Table 9.1: Comparison of Grade Configurations in Similar New York State Schools

NYSED Data 2017-18 *https://data.nysed.gov/*

NYS School Size: *http://www.usa.com/rank/new-york-state--land-area--school-district-rank.htm*

County	School District	Enrollment	Elem1	Elem2	Elem3	MS	HS	# Bldgs	Sq Miles	Stud/Mile	Pop/Sq Mi
Clinton	Ausable Valley	1,109	K-3	4-6		7-8	9-12	4	278	4	34
Tioga	Newark Valley	1,114	K-3	4-7			8-12	3	144	8	52
Ontario	Gorham-Middlesex	1,116	K-2	3-5		6-8	9-12	4	159	7	63
Dutchess	Pawling	1,116	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	51	22	170
Cattaraugus	Salamanca*	1,122	K-3	4-7			8-12	3	66	17	115
Franklin	Saranac Lake	1,137	K-5	K-5		6-8	9-12	4	639	2	22
Greene	Greenville	1,142	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	135	8	60
Allegany	Wellsville*	1,152	K-5				6-12	2	105	11	90
Oswego	Altmar-Parish*	1,155	K-6				7-12	2	170	7	44
Cattaraugus	Gowanda	1,155	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	95	12	118
Westchester	Tuckahoe	1,156	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	1	1,156	7,871
Suffolk	Mattituck	1,157	K-6				7-12	2	23	50	422
Wayne	North Rose Wolcott	1,157	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	123	9	73
Greene	Cairo-Durham*	1,161	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	117	10	83
Saratoga	Corinth	1,162	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	72	16	105
Nassau	East Rockaway	1,162	K-6	K-6			7-12	3	1	1,162	9,070
Albany	Voorheesville	1,166	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	36	32	199
Rensselaer	Brunswick Central	1,175	K-5				6-12	2	69	17	114
Oneida	Adirondack*	1,179	K-5	K-5		6-8	9-12	4	365	3	23
Saint Lawren	Canton	1,189	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	127	9	95
Tompkins	Lansing	1,191	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	55	22	134
Genesee	Le Roy	1,201	K-6				7-12	2	50	24	166
Onondaga	Jordan Elbridge*	1,204	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	59	20	153
Wyoming	Attica*	1,206	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	148	8	92
Niagara	Royalton Hartland	1,219	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	80	15	113
Erie	Cleveland Hill	1,229	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	2	615	5,633
Steuben	Wayland-Cohocton	1,247	K-5			5-8	9-12	3	156	8	59
Seneca	Seneca Falls	1,250	K-2	3-5		6-8	9-12	4	49	26	201
Albany	Watervliet	1,254	K-6				7-12	2	2	627	5,515
Saint Lawren	Potsdam	1,256	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	94	13	164
Ulster	**Onteora**	**1,257**	**K-3**	**K-3**	**4-6**	**7-8**	**9-12**	**5**	**273**	**5**	**55**
Clinton	Northeastrn Clnton	1,271	K-5	K-5		6-8	9-12	4	124	10	69
Chenango	Sherburne Earlvl	1,271	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	156	8	56
Montgomery	Fonda Fultonville	1,275	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	127	10	68
Lewis	Lowville	1,277	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	258	5	33
Oneida	Clinton	1,286	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	37	35	326
Columbia	Taconic Hills*	1,297	K-6				7-12	2	199	7	61
Chautauqua	Southwestern	1,298	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	43	30	217
Madison	Canastota	1,301	K-1	2-3	4-6		7-12	4	56	23	174
Erie	Eden	1,303	K-2	3-6			7-12	3	68	19	149
Oswego	Hannibal	1,313	K-4			5-8	9-12	3	83	16	98
Greene	Coxsackie Athens	1,323	K-4	K-4		5-8	9-12	4	61	22	211
Dutchess	Dover	1,333	K-2	3-5		6-8	9-12	4	66	20	158
Sullivan	Fallsburg	1,339	K-6				7-12	2	71	19	151
Oneida	Holland Patent	1,344	K-2	3-5		6-8	9-12	4	120	11	77
Yates	Penn Yan	1,344	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	158	9	98
Broome	Whitney Point	1,349	K-3			4-8	9-12	3	139	10	66
Nassau	Carle Place	1,350	K-2	3-6			7-12	3	2	675	4,923
Onondaga	Skaneateles	1,355	K-2	3-5		6-8	9-12	4	67	20	135
Erie	Akron	1,356	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	80	17	121
Saratoga	Mechanicville	1,361	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	17	80	567
Livingston	Dansville	1,378	K-2	3-6			7-12	3	124	11	81
Broome	Susquehanna Valley	1,396	K-5	K-5		6-8	9-12	4	63	22	169
Jefferson	General Brown	1,398	K-6	K-6			7-12	3	82	17	109
Greene	Catskill	1,400	K-5			6-8	9-12	3	71	20	175

10. School - Community Survey Results Summary

This section provides an analysis of the survey questions and summarizes the results. For each question applicable, the analysis will focus on the aggregate responses of all demographic groups as well as a sub-group comparative analysis of the respondent groups. Subgroups were in some cases combining smaller response groups. Small size groups make it difficult to reliably generalize from a small sample that may not be representative of the group they represent. The sub groups were therefore a) Students; b) Community and other; c) Parents/guardians; and d) All teachers and staff.

Survey participants were not provided with detailed information or background prior to completing the survey. There was no information on possible building modification or expansion, alternate uses for a closed building or potential cost redirection. Analysis of individual comments indicated that this hampered the thinking and often the responses from individuals as they responded. For example, some respondents assumed the buildings would remain "as is" without renovation or expansion and therefore shared concerns that there could be overcrowding for certain scenarios. The survey design must balance the amount of prior information that should be provided with its impact not only on the quality of responses, but completion of the survey.

Text analysis was conducted using several methods including word clouds, and common word phrases. Despite the time required, a review of the actual text of survey respondents was conducted to capture the richness of individual responses. Interpretation of comments during text analysis can be challenging since the researcher cannot further explore the intended meaning of the comments from each respondent. For example, the response "maybe" neither indicates support or opposition to a particular idea or question. Fortunately, the majority of comments were relatively straightforward. The input from the survey from all constituencies has been integrated throughout this study where appropriate.

The survey questions, results and analysis are provided below starting with Question 1.

Q1: This question asked respondents to identify to a particular group. The choices and percentages for each are provided below.

Table 10.1 - Summary of Survey Participants N = 560

Sub Group	Number of Respondents (n)	% of Total Respondents
Current student in the school district	53	9.5%
Current parent/guardian	251	44.8%
Community member or other	153	27.3%
Teacher in Grade K-3, 4-6, 7-12	55	9.8%
District staff other than teachers	48	8.6%
Totals:	560*	100%

** Note: 7 of the surveys were manually completed and the data was integrated with online responses.*

The survey was open between October 15 and November 6, 2019. The survey was open to anyone having the link to the survey. The school district sent several notifications to students, staff and parents. Community notifications were through the local media. Hard copies of the survey were available in the local town libraries in the school district. The survey was available in Spanish. Referring to Table 10.1. the turnout of 560 responses (553 online plus 7 hard copies) was an

excellent response, indicating the topic of grade configuration and building utilization continues to be of strong interest by the school and community. Of special note, the student and community response far exceeded what has been previously observed by the consultant in similar size districts. This could be indicative of a strong student and community connection to the schools as well as encouragement from school staff and parents to participate.

Table 10.2 below lists the factors in descending order of importance that should be used in deciding grade configuration and school building use (and closure). This table represents the aggregate of all groups participating in the survey.

Q2: What factors should be considered in determining grade level configuration and how school buildings are utilized?

Table 10.2 – Factors to Be Used in Determining Grade Configuration and School Building Use

Most Important Factors Ranked from Most to Less Important	Number of Respondents	% of Total Respondents
1. Learning needs of children	388	70.7%
2. Social/emotional needs of children	330	60.1%
3. Additional student opportunities for enrichment/acceleration	307	55.9%
4. Length of student time on bus	305	55.6%
5. Impact on costs/effective use of public funds	286	52.1%
6. Space availability and condition of school building	280	51.0%
7. Decline (or increase) in student enrollment	277	50.5%
8. Consistency of instruction and curriculum district wide	270	49.2%
9. Ensure school buildings are fairly distributed geographically across district	230	41.9%
10. Research on grade level configuration, and school size	224	40.8%
11. Maintain neighborhood schools	192	35.0%
12. Number of student transitions between schools from grades K-12	189	34.4%
13. Community use of school buildings after school hours	142	25.9%

The top four factors, items 1-4, concern the learning and social environment and impact on children. This would suggest that district officials should pay close attention to the impact on the child and the learning environment as part of any future deliberations. Items 5-7 are more centered on fiscal and operational impacts including costs, space/condition of building, and enrollment.

The final observations of Table 10.2 include the unexpected results. Based upon interviews and interactions with numerous students, staff, parents and community, the consultant was surprised that items 9 and 11 were not rated as more important. Ensuring that schools are distributed across the district (41.9%) and maintaining neighborhood schools (35.0%) scored lower than expected. This does not mean these factors are not important, but perhaps should serve only as part of a larger aggregate of variables that should be considered in any future decision-making process. One other possible explanation for the phenomena may be the sheer number of people directly impacted by school location for grades K-3. Another factor ranked as one of the highest was additional student opportunities for enrichment and acceleration. It is interesting to observe that the district lacks any formalized gifted and talented program. Other program acceleration opportunities were not observed although they may exist in some format.

Table 10.3 below provides additional analysis of the differences between the three largest subgroups regarding survey question 2: Reponses to Factors to Determine Grade Configuration &

School Building Use. Significant differences compared to the aggregate percentage were shaded and defined as 10% or more *(chosen due to size of sample and a one-time response)*. Differences of perspective are important to identify for the school district if district officials engage in a future decision process regarding grade and school building utilization. Understanding the differences can help the district to better communicate with the diverse constituencies, understand potential support or opposition to options, and prepare materials and information that respect and address the diversity of opinions that exist in any school district.

Table 10.3 Subgroup Reponses to Factors to Determine Grade Configuration & School Building Use

Most Important Factors Ranked from Most to Less Important - Subgroups	Parents n =249	Commn N = 146	Teachers &Staff n =101	Students n =53	All Groups
1. Learning needs of children	75.1%	58.2%	79.2%	67.9%	70.7%
2. Social/emotional needs of children	64.7%	50.7%	59.4%	66.0%	60.1%
3. Additional student opportunities for enrichment/acceleration	65.1%	46.6%	45.5%	58.5%	55.9%
4. Length of student time on bus	61.9%	51.4%	48.5%	50.9%	55.6%
5. Impact on costs/effective use of public funds	49.0%	58.2%	55.5%	43.4%	52.1%
6. Space availability and condition of school building	50.6%	53.4%	46.5%	54.7%	51.0%
7. Decline (or increase) in student enrollment	48.2%	56.2%	54.5%	37.7%	50.5%
8. Consistency of instruction and curriculum district wide	49.0%	45.9%	65.4%	28.3%	49.2%
9. School buildings fairly distributed geographically across district	43.0%	37.7%	45.5%	41.5%	41.9%
10. Research on grade level configuration, and school size	41.0%	33.6%	52.5%	37.7%	40.8%
11. Maintain neighborhood schools	40.6%	30.8%	29.7%	30.2%	35.0%
12. Number of student transitions between schools grade K-12	40.2%	24.7%	28.7%	45.3%	34.4%
13. Community use of school buildings after school hours	23.3%	28.8%	25.7%	30.2%	25.9%

Factors 1 and 3 exhibit differences of perspective from the community respondents. Although around half of the community survey participants identified the decision factors of children's learning needs and enrichment opportunities as helping drive any grade configuration or school use decision, the *community responded significantly lower on both factors than the aggregate for all groups.* This is not surprising considering that community are less likely to have children in the school district now.

The teacher/staff subgroup also exhibited some substantial differences in selected factors for decisions on grade level configuration and school use. Three factors teacher/staff viewed differently than the aggregate groups were factors 3, 8, and 10. Factor 3, additional opportunities and enrichment was rated as less important. A possible explanation might be that school staff feel that they already provide a rich curriculum and opportunities within the classroom to extend lessons and learning. The teacher/staff group rated factors 8 (consistency of instruction and curriculum) and factor 10 (use of research in grade configuration) significantly higher than the aggregate responses. A possible explanation for factor 8, teachers and staff value the importance of all instructional staff within a discipline or grade level consistently and effectively preparing children to meet the New York State Learning Standards and accompanying local and state assessments. All schools and teachers are jointly held accountable for the demonstrated learning of every child attending a school. Factor 10, use of research, is consistent with the common belief instructional staff are scholarly by nature, and are always interested in emerging research and literature than can help propel children forward.

The student subgroup responded similar to the aggregate with the exceptions of three factors, 7, 8 and 12. This included rating two factors significantly lower than the aggregate group including factor 7, decline (or increase) in student enrollment and factor 8, consistency of instruction and curriculum district wide. The student group rated factor 12, the number of student transitions

between schools grade K-12 significantly higher as a factor that should be considered in making decisions about grade level configuration and use of buildings. Students do not see the first two factors as important as the other groups and further exploration would be needed for explanation. However, for factor 12, students have had a first-hand experience regarding the number of transitions from one school building to another. This transition can be traumatic for students and research indicates that the first year after a transition adversely impacts upon student learning and achievement and transitions should be limited. If adults move further in exploring changes to grade configurations and school utilization in this district, students are indicating support for including the number of transitions as part of the decision-making process.

Q3: The current Middle School is grades 7-8. Prior studies and committees suggested changing the grade configuration to either grades 5-8 or 6-8.

The general sentiment when aggregating all respondent groups was more positive towards a grade 6-8 middle school. There was little support for a grade 5-8 middle school due to the age span and differing levels of maturity. The positives for moving grade 6 to the middle school included comments such as "most developmentally appropriate"; "would help with vertical curriculum alignment at grades 6-8"; and "more time to meet New York State middle level credit mandates". Other positives included another year in middle level would help students connect with the middle school and the configuration is widely used in school districts. Concerns about moving the sixth grade included concerns about the maturity level of fifth and sixth grade students interacting not only with grade 7 and 8 students, but high school students too. Another concern was the lack of segregation and separation of middle level and high school students thus the younger children are interacting frequently with the older high school students in the common hallways. Students shared concerns about possible congestion in hallways and other common spaces if an additional grade or more came to the middle school. In subgroup analysis of the survey, the respondent groups, parents, community, and teacher/staff, demonstrated generally consistent sentiment towards grade 6 moving to the middle school. The student subgroup shared approximately equal sentiment between the current grade 7-8 and a possible grade 6-8 configuration.

Q4: The six grade and building configurations listed below were selected by the consultant for the study. Please feel free to comment and provide your perspective on each one.

SCENARIO A: Make both Woodstock and Phoenicia grade K-5, *close Bennett*, make Middle School grades 6-8, and keep the High School 9-12.

The overall comments from the combination of all groups i*ndicated more positives than concerns for the Scenario A.* Common positives included maintaining K-5 schools at the "ends" of the district and adding sixth grade at the middle school. Other positives included addressing a wide range of home locations (from student feedback), and that it protects and preserves community schools. Concerns were primarily about closing the Bennett school due to its centralized location and generally good condition. An additional common concern was whether Phoenicia and Woodstock could accommodate the additional children without undue class size creep and putting "Art on a cart". There were several concerns about any of the scenarios raising class size. All of the scenarios in the study assume meeting the School Board Class Size policy guideline for grades K-5 at the mid-range.

When comparing the group responses of the respondent groups – teacher/staff, community, parents/guardians, and students, there appeared some discernible differences for Scenario A. The community respondents appeared undecided on the scenario with somewhat equal positives and concerns. The concerns were largely focused on closing Bennett school. For the largest group of respondents to the survey, the parents/guardians, comments tended to be much more positive than concerns for Scenario A. The preservation of the local K-5 buildings in supporting the local communities was a common thread. Some parents indicated concerns with closing Bennett solely because they did not have sufficient information regarding how the building could be repurposed. The teachers indicated slightly more concerns than positives regarding this configuration. A common thread of concern was losing a school building on a centralized campus, as well as the good condition of Bennett. The student respondent group expressed fairly strong positive sentiment about this scenario. Some students expressing that closing local schools might harm a community.

SCENARIO B: Make both Woodstock and Phoenicia grade K-4, *close Bennett*, make Middle School grades 5-8, and keep High School 9-12

The overall comments from the combination of all groups indicated that although there was some support for Scenario B, the *stronger sentiment was concerns about Scenario B* for two main reasons. There was a common concern against closing the Bennett school due to its central location on the main campus, the previous district capital project there, and the good condition of the building. Some respondents questioned what would be the repurpose of Bennett. There may be a more positive response to this scenario once repurpose information on Bennett was provided. The second concern regarded moving to a grade 5-8 middle school configuration. There was a prevalent sentiment that the age and developmental differences between a 10-year-old and a 13-year-old is too dramatic in the same school. This concern might be addressed by organizing the middle school into a grade 5-6 and a grade 7-8 configuration within the middle school. Students in particular, indicated concerns about overcrowding by adding two grades of students.

When comparing the responses of the respondent groups – teacher/staff, community, students, and parents/guardians, the responses and sentiments to scenario B were generally similar including concerns about closing Bennett and the age disparity between grade 5 and 8 students.

SCENARIO C: Maintain the present grade configuration in each school, grades K-3 at both Phoenicia and Woodstock, grades 4-6 at Bennett, grades 7-8 at the Middle School, and keep the High School 9-12.

The overall comments from the combination of all groups indicated *an almost virtual dead heat in terms of positives and concerns for the present grade level configuration Scenario C*. The most common positive threads indicated that the present configuration provided smaller class sizes, preserves smaller neighborhood schools, doesn't close any schools, and seems to be working. The frequent concerns shared among all groups about Scenario C is that the middle school should be at least grade 6-8, the middle school needs better separation from the high school, it is very costly, and there are too many transitions.

Of most interest, some of the respondent groups held different levels of support for the current configuration. The respondent groups for Scenario C (Present Configuration) include teacher/staff, community, parents/guardians, and students. The community respondent sentiments were somewhat opposed to the current Scenario C. There were supporters and opposers in the

responses, but what was noteworthy is the amount of distance between many of the individual respondents. For example, on the same question, two different responses might include "This is ideal" and the other "Bad Idea". The opposition to the current configuration included the excessive costs, too many student transitions, and not a realistic solution given declining enrollment. Supporters of the current configuration among the community respondent group included "things seem to be working" and "2012 was enough of a trauma". The parent respondent group was the largest group responding to this question. Parents overall, supported the existing scenario C positives slightly more than the opposition group concerns. Positives of Scenario C from the survey indicated several common themes including maintaining of small class sizes, separation of smaller children from older children, and keeps all schools open especially the neighborhood schools. Concerns shared include that the middle school is not separated from the high school, this configuration doesn't work for all students, the scenario is very expensive to maintain, that it is wasteful, and there are too many student transitions. The teacher group respondents which were substantially smaller in number than either the parents or community groups, indicated a generally equal sentiment towards positives and concerns about the current grade level configuration. Positives included threads that the configuration is working and not broken so why fix it? Other positive trends included "not a proponent of devastating communities (through closing a school). Concerns included that small school sizes make it difficult to maintain consistent and fair staffing and programming. Others indicating that the present configuration was not financially responsible, while others shared that there were too many transitions. The student respondent group responded with more positive sentiment towards the present configuration. Positives included that the present configuration seems to be working. Concerns included that children in grade 4 are too young to leave elementary school, and the configuration is not effective use of resources.

It was somewhat surprising that the overall response was generally equal in positives and concerns. The current configuration began its eighth year of operation this past fall. The status quo scenario will typically garner generally strong support because it is familiar, represents the default solution, and indicates no change and offers stability. Further, approximately half of respondent feel the configuration is generally working.

SCENARIO D: Close both Woodstock and Phoenicia (grades K-3), *make Bennett elementary school K-5*, and make the Middle School grades 6-8, and keep High School 9-12.

Scenario D is a significantly different than the three prior scenarios. It includes closing two school buildings that are also serving as neighborhood grade K-3 schools. This is the first scenario that also is a centralized single campus. The overall comments from the combination of all groups indicated slightly more concerns than positives, with the concerns of parents most prevalent. Positives included that Scenario D seemed the fairest and most economical solution since the facilities would all be on the same campus and all children would have the same access to programs and opportunities. Other positives included that the district was "finally acknowledging the realities of declining enrollment", and the district was moving towards an inevitable future. Other parents shared that although they would be saddened by the loss of the two neighborhood schools, (the scenario) makes sense. Other responses indicated that with declining enrollment this is the time to take action and make Onteora work for the community. Concerns including the possible longer bus rides for children, potential of staff layoffs, the negative influence of older children, possible negative impact on home values due to the school closings, and the unfairness to children and parents who live near and attend one of the two schools. Others indicated that the budget passage was an indication of support for the current configuration. Obviously, the issue of closing a school elicited comments of care and passion. Other concerns about this scenario and the closings

suggested schools are important to communities, providing children and families with a sense of place and community.

The subgroup of parents shared many sentiments either as positives or concerns about this scenario. Comments ranged from "This makes the most sense" to "This is a terrible idea!". Overall, this group shared somewhat more concerns about this scenario. This is not surprising as many of the parents either previously had or currently have children attending one of the K-3 school buildings that would be closed under this scenario. Further, some respondents assumed that the proposed changes to buildings would assume no capital work or possible expansion. An analysis of the community and teacher/staff groups who responded to the survey indicated a relatively equal sentiment of positives and concerns for Scenario D. Positives and concerns were generally similar to the parents. The student responses tended to be slightly more positive than the concerns towards a centralized campus. One of the positives indicated was that adding the sixth grade provided more time for a student to get to know her/his teachers. Perhaps some of the most intriguing aggregate comments suggested *that if schools should be closed, the cost savings should translate into more learning opportunities for children.* The detailed analysis of each grade configuration scenario in the Part III portion of this report, contains a section *Fiscal Redirection Potential.*

SCENARIO E: Close both Woodstock and Phoenicia (K-3), *make Bennett grade K-4*, make Middle School 5-8, keep High School 9-12.

The primary difference between Scenario D and E is moving grade 5 to the middle school. Otherwise the two scenarios are similar. The overall comments from the combination of all groups indicated more concerns than positive comments for Scenario E. Common concerns among all groups included the need to keep the youngest children closest to home, and fifth graders not being ready to be immersed in the middle school with older children. Other general concerns included the perceived potential longer bus runs with this scenario, and closing community schools a disservice to young children. Positive comment threads suggested it was a logical step considering the declining enrollment.

Examining any differences in the subgroups, the teacher/staff subgroup indicated more positives than concerns for this scenario. The community group indicated slightly more concerns than positives for this scenario and the parent and student groups both indicated the greatest negative concerns for this scenario. Similar to Scenario D, the closure of two schools, especially with the West Hurley sale unresolved, and the lack of more detailed information and background, contributes to the concerns.

SCENARIO F: Close either Woodstock or Phoenicia (grades K-3), *maintain two elementary schools as grade K-5* with one being Bennett, make Middle School grades 6-8, keep High School grades 9-12.

The overall comments from the combination of all groups indicated more concerns than positives, however the indication was partially driven more favorable because the scenario would only close one school versus two schools as discussed in two other scenarios. Many of the comments focused more on which school to close, Phoenicia or Woodstock, rather than the actual configuration scenario.

The primary common concern focused on the divisive, difficult and rancorous atmosphere that would be created when selecting which of the K-3 primary buildings to close. Other concerns included the perceived potentially longer bus rides from some portions of the school district, potential loss of jobs, larger class sizes, and the sixth graders potential loss of innocence from moving to the middle school. Another common concern was the unfairness of selecting one school over another.

Examining any differences in the subgroups, the student and community groups indicated far more concerns than positives. The teacher/staff indicated slightly more positive sentiment. Finally, the parents expressed more concerns than positives for this scenario.

Q5: Please feel free to share any other thoughts regarding school building utilization and grade configurations.

Survey respondents provided many interesting comments in this section. Since it was open ended, the responses varied widely making it difficult to synthesize and extract specific common meaning from the text. Several large common themes were observed:

1) Many comments continued to focus on specific scenarios A-F already discussed in this section.

2) There was a general request for more information including the specifics and detail of each of the six grade configuration scenarios. The participants generally indicated a desire to be kept informed. Participants remarked on the difficulty of responding to the survey without adequate background detail.

3) There was a general sense of appreciation for asking for community input, listening, and acknowledging the importance of the school-community in this process.

4) There was some level of suspicion shared regarding why the study was undertaken. Some questioned whether there were other motivations regarding budget or program that underlie the study and the survey. (This perhaps could be attributable to some district decisions over the past several decades that closed a school, and reconfigured the existing schools.)

The overall survey results indicate from school and community input that there are many deeply caring, passionate people who form the Onteora Central School District. Students, staff, teachers, parents and community members hold strong opinions about how the school district should be organized and function, and these opinions can be quite diverse. A primary and most common theme weaved throughout the responses by all groups focused on protecting and preserving young children. From bus rides to bathrooms, survey participants want to ensure that young children are

separated from older children. The analysis also indicated a general sentiment to guard against change unless there are strong compelling reasons. Change challenges and can destabilize an organization, and people sometimes perceive change as a potential for loss.

At the risk of repetition, the consultant reminds the school district decision makers that the survey results, although interesting, should be cautioned about overreaching and drawing clear conclusions from the data. There are *considerable variables that could be influencing the results and could impact on the reliability of the responses*. Some of these contravening variables include the order and wording of the questions, the text and tone of the introduction, and the lack and depth of background information, not to mention the interpretation of text. Text analysis still remains an evolving process and "science". Despite these limitations, the survey data can provide some assistance on community general feelings and perspectives.

To move forward in this process and garner community support and maintain trust, district officials would need to consider the school-community general concerns shared in the survey. District officials would need to ensure a clear and transparent process for decision making, and how and who would be involved. A comprehensive architectural review of facilities linked to one or more scenarios could be investigated and the local cost impact estimated. Information would need to be compelling and detailed, focused on the long-term advantages of a change in grade reconfiguration or building use, with sensitivity to the impact on local communities, and how the cost savings could be redirected into more learning opportunities, programs, and enrichment benefiting all children equitably. A long term educational vision coupled with resources, could create programming and services that would attract more students, positive media attention, and increase property values.

PART III: Grade Configuration Scenario Analyses

11. Interpreting Each Scenario Analysis

Part III provides detailed analysis of each of the six grade level configurations included in the study. The six scenarios (A – F) are as follows:

12. **Scenario A:** Phoenicia & Woodstock K-5, close Bennett, MS 6-8, HS 9-12
13. **Scenario B:** Phoenicia & Woodstock K-4, close Bennett, MS 5-8, HS 9-12
14. **Scenario C:** (Present) Phoenicia/Woodstock K-3, Bennett 4-6, MS 7-8, HS 9-12
15. **Scenario D:** (Central Campus) Close Phoenicia & Woodstock, Bennett K-5, MS 6-8, HS 9-12
16. **Scenario E:** (Central Campus) Close Phoenicia & Woodstock, Bennett K-4, MS 5-8, HS 9-12
17. **Scenario F:** Close Phoenicia or Woodstock, (two) K-5 with Bennett, MS 6-8, HS 9-12

For each of the six grade level configuration scenarios listed above, the implications for each of the areas listed below will be discussed. A brief description and background of each is listed below.

A List of Positives and Concerns for Each Scenario

A list of the Positives and Concerns is provided for each scenario. The list is not exhaustive but is intended to provide future planners and decision makers with a starting point for analysis of grade configuration options. The six scenarios for grade level configuration and building use are not ranked by the order they appear, nor should the number of positives or concerns be an indication of any favored scenario. The implications of each scenario were developed based upon consultant interviews, review of documents, observations, tours of school buildings, discussions with staff and community, review of research, and the experience of the consultant.

Enrollment Implications

The impact of each grade configuration scenario on the physical building is discussed including the possible need for capital construction work including space addition or renovation. The implications on the building were based upon consultation with building principals and other district officials and the experience of the consultant. For specific plans and costs, an outside school architect would be able to identify needed school re-designs accommodating one or more of the grade configuration scenarios presented in this study. For planning purposes, the Onteora School Board Class Size Policy Regulation – 8480R (2014) was used.

Transportation Implications

Information is provided on the estimated miles, runs and costs of each of the grade level scenarios. This information was developed in consultation with the Onteora School Transportation Department. As previously shared, estimated costs are based upon mileage when buses have children riding on a regular school route. All grade configuration scenarios are compared to the current configuration and building use (See Scenario C) to measure any savings or additional costs. Each of the different grade configuration scenarios bus routing schemes were calculated on an average of 45-50-minute bus rides for K-5 children, and 40-45 for grades 6-12. The bus ride times are approximately equal to the present grade configuration. Each of the scenarios would use fewer buses and bus runs likely making bus ride times potentially shorter.

Transition/Roll Out

For each scenario other than the current grade configuration, information is provided regarding the estimated time for completion of capital construction work (if any), use of buildings during the planning and development, and estimated impact on children in affected grade levels.

Fiscal Redirection Potential

Several of the scenarios would provide increased efficiency by eliminating or reducing some redundant or unneeded expenditures. Some operating costs would be reduced immediately after a new grade level configuration were implemented (e.g. reduced transportation miles). Other cost reductions regard staffing levels*. Estimating cost reduction opportunities for different grade configuration scenarios is difficult and at best, a rough conservative guess. A school board is often constrained by labor contracts, specific personnel issues, prior history and culture, and local political expectations.* Several of the scenarios could reduce staffing levels without degradation of safety, services or learning opportunities for children. Staffing reductions could be addressed largely through attrition. For the purpose of estimating the costs of staff (likely through attrition), estimated costs of $100,000 were based upon a teacher at step 5 with benefits. A support staff position with benefits was estimated at $56,000. The combination of reductions from operating costs as well as any staffing would form the nucleus of savings that could be redirected into other fiscal needs, programs, services, and staffing. These reductions are at the discretion of the Board of Education. Cost reduction or savings do not factor in any needed capital costs for modifying schools to better accommodate different grade configurations.

School district officials could redirect these funds into other programming, student and staff needs, or other district fiscal needs. The school district would need to identify instructional areas for additional investment through redirection of funding resulting from savings from another grade configuration other than the current one. Several examples of programs or services that could benefit from redirected funds include: a) adding another world language at the high school; b) creating a more robust AIS and RtI support system for children; c) beginning world languages earlier than grade 7; d) developing a support program for struggling high school students at risk of dropping out; e) address the growing percentage of economically disadvantaged children in the district through additional social workers, counselors, etc. to support both the child and family; f) consider implementing an International Baccalaureate program (IB); g) develop a pre-engineering program such as Project Lead the Way for grades 6-12; h) develop a Onteora Performing Arts center; and i) providing a more defined gifted and talented program (arts and academics).

Building Repurpose Potential

Where a scenario calls for the closure of one or more buildings, a list of possible alternate uses of a closed building are provided. This list is not exhaustive and each building, due to its unique location, may have purposes specific to the location.

Grade configuration Scenarios A – F are on the following pages.

Section 12:

Grade Configuration Scenario A

1. Phoenicia & Woodstock become grade K-5 schools
2. Bennett Intermediate grade 4-6 is closed
3. Onteora Middle School adds grade 6 to become 6-8
4. High School remains grades 9-12

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Positives and Concerns About Grade Level Configuration Scenario A

Scenario A: <u>Phoenicia & Woodstock grade K-5 schools, close Bennett, MS grade 6-8, HS 9-12</u>

Positives of Scenario A
• Less student transitions between buildings increases academic performance (per research). • Opportunity to pair older with younger children and siblings. • Middle school 6-8 configuration part of a larger system-wide plan, not merely single action. • More grade levels in a K-5 building ensures greater consistency of curriculum and early literacy approach. • Information sharing and interaction between elementary grade levels increases. • NYS Learning Standards (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) are congruent with this configuration. • Provides K-5 community/village schools distributed across the school district. These two schools help bond each of the communities, even more so for Phoenicia where it serves as a hub providing an important identity for its local community. • Youngest children K-3 district wide are already attending Phoenicia or Woodstock, less adaptation needed. • Children in grades 6-12 already on main campus so less adaptation needed the September of implementation. • The district can create two K-5 developmentally appropriate elementary schools. • Grade 6-8 middle school, more time to meet the state middle level academic requirements. • Possibility of beginning world languages earlier than grade 7 • Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated (for example) to a fourth year of world languages, expansion of electives, adding additional staffing to meet the AIS and RtI remediation requirements, program acceleration options, or to focus on increasing graduation rate through additional supports for struggling students. • Consolidating into two K-5 buildings makes it easier to provide full continuum of special education services in each school. • May be able to offer ENL (*English as a New Language*) and MAP (*special behavioral needs*) services in both buildings – now only offering in one building requiring additional transportation and relocating children. • Opportunity to fully integrate K-5 instructional technology system-wide (connectivity, training, implementation). • Students shared in discussions that they meet their entire cohort now beginning in grade 4, and spend the next 9 years socially and academically interacting with the same cohort. Some students suggested exposure to the intact cohort later – grade 6, making the secondary experience more exciting socially including the opportunity to meet new people. • Reduction in transportation runs and costs of approximately $350,000 gross savings compared to current grade configuration lowers pollution, increases safety with fewer bus runs. Student ride times equal to or potentially shorter than present.
Concerns of Scenario A
• Impact on community use of a closed school facility for boosters, town recreation, clinics, performance arts, literacy, conservancy, community garden, fire department, etc. • Closing a school building should be an open and transparent process engaging the community. The closing may alienate students, parents and community. • Shifting of staff to different buildings can change the work and learning environment. • Middle school will require some structural modification to support true middle school identity, separation from high school. • Although Woodstock – with space restructuring – may be able to accommodate a K-5 enrollment, Phoenicia could not without a capital construction project. • Middle level students during interviews reflecting on their own experiences, suggested that some sixth graders might not be mature enough to initially handle the independence of middle school. • Some middle level students during interviews suggested that younger students should earn the right to attend middle school by fulfilling grade 6 at the intermediate. • Grades 4-5 – now at main campus in the Bennett school, may have fewer after school activities if attending one of K-5 schools. • Grade 4 children would need to return to a community/village school the September of implementation for grade 5. • Greater number of sections at a grade level (under the 4-6 district wide configuration) results in potential for greater variety of student activities and increased participation. • Current Bennett program provides teachers who are content experts, specializing in teaching certain subjects. The subject specialization and student exposure to a series of teachers prepares grades 4-6 for secondary education experience. • Elementary class sizes between two schools less likely to be equitable. • Continues practice of “elementary attendance borders” which constantly are shifting, confusing, and parents sometimes unsure where children will attend the following year creating less predictability. • Survey indicated some concern about closing Bennett as it appears in very good condition and also so soon after renovations and closing a school building on a central campus.

Scenario A Description

Phoenicia and Woodstock would be grades K-5 elementary schools, the Bennett building would be closed and repurposed, the middle school would become grades 6-8, and the high school would remain grades 9-12.

*Enrollment Implications on Phoenicia, Woodstock and Middle School**

Table 12.1 below projects the enrollment for this scenario. Woodstock is 13,900 square feet larger than the Phoenicia building. Woodstock could accommodate 4 additional sections required for a K-5. However, there would be little flexibility to accommodate any "bubble", and the K-5 scenario could jeopardize the science room and other spaces.

Phoenicia could not accommodate a K-5 enrollment of 236-243 without adding classrooms and possibly increasing space for physical education and the cafeteria. With approximately 7-9 acres, there is sufficient land for expansion. Phoenicia's highest student population over the past five years was about 156 students. Even with space restructuring, an estimated 3-5 additional classrooms would be needed to accommodate the projected enrollment through 2029.

The middle school, by adding an additional grade 6, adds between 80-100 students, 5-6 classrooms. Although there is likely sufficient space in the current middle-high school building (if central administration offices are relocated), it will require some physical reconfiguration of space and the design should ensure more segregation of space between the middle and high school students and a clear middle and high school identity as discussed in more detail in Section 18. High school students indicate that the schedule and strategic utilization of current classrooms could help the segregation. High school students frequently use one or more middle school hallways as a "cut through" to get to certain classes on time. This requires study by a school architect with principals.

Table 12.1 – Enrollment Scenario A

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Phoenicia Elementary K-5				236	238	237	236	238	242	243
Woodstock Elementary K-5	*Transitional Planning Phase*			236	238	237	236	238	242	243
Middle School 6-8	*Changes Take Place 2022-23*			238	226	228	244	243	232	227
High School 9-12				397	386	377	312	308	304	306
In District	**0**	**0**	**0**	**1,107**	**1,089**	**1,079**	**1,027**	**1,027**	**1,020**	**1,018**

Transportation Implications

All grade configuration scenarios are compared to the current configuration and building use (See Scenario C). Table 12.2 below summarizes the transportation costs of this scenario. Scenario A has 10 bus runs less, with 70,980 fewer miles driven. The reduction in student miles driven (when children are on the bus) reduces the carbon CO^2 emissions by 449,375. The Scenario A estimated gross cost savings when comparing to the current configuration is $350,000 annually, and after state aid, the local tax levy cost impact would be reduced by $322,000 per year.

Table 12.2 – Transportation Scenario A

	Bus Runs	Total Runs	Annual Miles	CO^2 Annual Emissions	Annual Cost
Phoenicia Elementary K-5	11 runs				
Woodstock Elementary K-5	12 runs	51 runs, 2 tier	291,200	1,050,625	$1,785,000
Middle 6-8, High School 9-12	28 runs				

Transition/Roll Out

The planning, approvals, design and any construction would likely require 3-4 years from a district decision. The Bennett building would be slated to close, but could be used during construction/renovation of either Phoenicia and/or Woodstock to accommodate enrolled children if needed. This helps reduce learning disruption during any capital work, as well as expedites the time of construction and reduce overall costs. Children primarily impacted would be in grades 4-6, currently at Bennett. Grade 5 and 6 would form part of the new grade 6-8 middle school the following September when the new grade configuration is implemented. Grade 4 would return to one the two elementary schools depending upon the new K-5 attendance boundary guideline.

Fiscal Redirection Potential

Yes. In addition to the savings on transportation of $322,000 described above, the closing of Bennett would provide some staff savings in the areas of nursing, supervision, and custodial. Depending upon actual sections in grades K-5, additional cost reductions could be realized but are not represented here. A conservative cost redirection estimate without any instructional staff reductions in Scenario A is $534,000. This estimated calculation does not factor in capital construction costs. Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated to address key district educational and children's needs discussed earlier in Section 11 under *Fiscal Redirection Potential.*

Building Repurpose Potential for Bennett Building

There are many possible uses or combination of uses for the Bennett school. One possible need to free space at the middle school for grade level expansion would be to move most central services to the Bennett building including the district offices (3,800 sq. ft.), the maintenance offices (2,500 sq. ft.), and relocating the current transportation garage and offices (5,800 sq. ft.) to the Bennett building. The current transportation space is small and inadequate, is not in good condition, and has underground storage tanks. The relocation of the transportation building to the Bennett building would also free up parking space at the middle/high school and improve traffic flow in the parking lot. Other possible uses of Bennett include relocation of other governmental buildings from flood plain, function as a community center, rental of space to the Ulster BOCES, possible Ulster BOCES Adult Education, a performing arts center, or serve as a satellite site for possible evening classes for Ulster Community College or SUNY New Paltz. The Bennett building could also serve as the Onteora Academy of Arts and Sciences – a regional high school in a project-based learning environment with both a science and performing arts focus that could attract students from other school districts through a BOCES Co-ser. The Rural Ulster Preservation Company (RUPCO) also represents an additional opportunity and possible resource for assisting in development and repurpose of a closed school facility. However, because of the location of Bennett on a school campus, consideration of any private use would require a separate access road segregated from school traffic.

** Estimated requirements for classroom and other modifications based upon consultation with building principals and other district officials and the experience of the consultant. The Board of Education may wish to engage an outside school architect in identifying needed school re-design to accommodate one or more of the study grade configuration scenarios and establish a cost estimate that would help the Board of Education in finalizing the comparisons of the different grade level configurations.*

Section 13:

Grade Configuration Scenario B

1. Phoenicia & Woodstock become grade K-4 schools
2. Bennett Intermediate grade 4-6 is closed
3. Onteora Middle School adds grade 5 & 6 to become 6-8
4. High School remains grades 9-12

Positives and Concerns About Grade Level Configuration Scenario B

Scenario B: Phoenicia & Woodstock grade K-4 schools, close Bennett, MS grade 5-8, HS 9-12

Positives of Scenario B
• Less student transitions between buildings increases academic performance (per research). • Opportunity to pair older with younger children and siblings. • Middle school 5-8 configuration part of a larger system-wide plan, not merely single action. • More grade levels in a K-4 building ensures greater consistency of curriculum and early literacy approach. • Information sharing and interaction between elementary grade levels increases. • Provides K-4 community/village schools distributed across the school district. These two schools help bond each of the communities, even more so for Phoenicia where it serves as a hub providing an important identity for its local community. • Youngest children K-3 district wide are already attending Phoenicia or Woodstock, less adaptation needed • Children in grades 5-12 already on main campus so less adaptation needed the next September of implementation. • The district can create two K-4 developmentally appropriate elementary schools. • Grade 5-8 middle school, more time to meet the state requirements. • Possibility of beginning world languages earlier than grade 7 • Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated (for example) to a fourth year of world languages, expansion of electives, program acceleration options, adding additional staffing to meet the AIS and RtI remediation requirements, or to focus on increasing graduation rate through additional supports for struggling students. • May be able to offer ENL (*English as a New Language*) and MAP (*special behavioral needs*) services in both buildings – now only offering in one building requiring additional transportation and relocating children. • Opportunity to fully integrate K-4 instructional technology system-wide (connectivity, training, implementation) • Both Woodstock and Phoenicia could likely accommodate the space needed to become K-4 schools without major capital construction work, free space would be challenging. • Fewer shared staff between middle and high school due to adding grade 5 helps create unique identity for middle school 5-8. • Reduction in transportation runs and costs of approximately $350,000 gross savings compared to current grade configuration lowers pollution, increases safety with fewer runs. Student ride times equal to or potentially shorter than present configuration. • A grade 5-8 middle school permits students to stay in a building longer to build stronger connections with the teachers and staff and culture of the building. • Allows more flexible teaching among 5th and 6th grade teachers and 7th and 8th grade teachers in middle school 5-8 building.
Concerns of Scenario B
• Impact on community use of a closed school facility for boosters, town recreation, clinics, performance arts, literacy, conservancy, community garden, fire department, etc. • Closing a school building should be an open and transparent process engaging the community. The closing may alienate students, parents and community. • Some people perceive that fifth graders are not developmentally ready to deal with older children at middle school • Shifting of staff to different buildings can change the work and learning environment. • The middle school will require some structural modification to ensure creation of a true middle school identity and separation from the high school. Grades 5-6 may need some separation from 7-8. • Greater number of sections at a grade level (under the 4-6 district wide configuration) results in potential for greater variety of student activities and increased participation. • High school students expressed concerns that some grade 5 students lack physical size or maturity to be with older peers. • Grade 4 – now at main campus in the Bennett school, may have fewer opportunities for school activities in K-4 or K-5 school. • Current Bennett program provides teachers who are content experts, specializing in teaching certain subjects. The subject specialization and student exposure to a series of teachers prepares grades 4-6 for secondary education experience. • Elementary class sizes between two primary schools less likely to be equitable. • Continues practice of “elementary attendance borders” which constantly are shifting, confusing, and parents sometimes unsure where children will attend the following year creating less predictability. • NYS Learning Standards (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) are not congruent with current configuration so multiple sets of learning standards must be followed in each building grades K-8. • Survey indicated some concern about closing Bennett as it appears in very good condition and also so soon after renovations and closing a school building on a central campus.

Scenario B Description

Phoenicia and Woodstock would be grades K-4 elementary schools, the Bennett building would be closed and repurposed, the middle school would become grades 5-8, and the high school would remain grades 9-12. *The only difference between Scenario A and B is that grade 5, instead of being part of the two K-5 buildings, becomes part of the grade 5-8 middle school.*

*Enrollment Implications on Phoenicia, Woodstock and Middle School**

Table 13.1 below projects the enrollment of this scenario. Woodstock could accommodate an additional grade level required for a K-4. There would be some flexibility to accommodate any "bubble", and the science room and storage could remain intact.

Phoenicia could also accommodate adding a single grade and become a K-4 elementary school but it would require a strategic restructure and reorganization of the space. It would require consolidation of some spaces, sharing of space between academic areas, and less flexible scheduling. It would minimally require 2 additional classroom spaces. It is possible with some consolidation of existing classroom space and possible renovation of a "storage" area previously used as a classroom. Storage may need to be consolidated and moved to an external storage unit.

The middle school, by adding an additional grade 5 and 6, doubles its enrollment to 318 students, 8-10 classrooms. It is unclear without involvement of a school architect if there is sufficient space to accommodate this configuration. It will also require some physical reconfiguration of existing space and the design should ensure more segregation of space between the middle and high school students and a clear middle and high school identity as discussed in more detail in Section 18. High school students indicate that the schedule and strategic utilization of current classrooms could help the segregation. High school students frequently use one or more middle school hallways as a "cut through" to get to certain classes on time. This requires study by a school architect consulting with the middle and high school principals.

Table 13.1 – Enrollment Scenario B

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Phoenicia Elementary K-4	*Transitional Planning Phase Changes Take Place 2022-23*			199	198	196	199	203	204	203
Woodstock Elementary K-4				199	198	196	199	203	204	203
Middle School 5-8				314	308	309	318	314	309	306
High School 9-12				397	386	377	312	308	304	306
In District				**1,107**	**1,089**	**1,079**	**1,027**	**1,027**	**1,020**	**1,018**

Transportation Implications

All grade configuration scenarios are compared to the current configuration and building use (See Scenario C). Table 13.2 below summarizes the transportation costs of this scenario. Similar to A, Scenario B has 10 bus runs less, with 70,980 fewer miles driven. The reduction in student miles driven (when children are on the bus) reduces the carbon CO^2 emissions by 449,375. The Scenario B estimated gross cost savings when comparing to the current configuration is $350,000 annually, and after state aid, the local tax levy cost impact would be reduced by $322,000 per year.

Table 13.2 - Transportation Scenario B

	Bus Runs	Total Runs	Annual Miles	CO^2 Annual Emissions	Annual Cost
Phoenicia Elementary K-4	10 runs				
Woodstock Elementary K-4	12 runs	51 runs, 2 tier	291,200	1,050,625	$1,785,000
Middle 5-8, High School 9-12	29 runs				

Transition/Roll Out

The planning, approvals, design and any construction would likely require 3-4 years from a district decision. The Bennett building would be slated to close, but could be used during construction/renovation of either Phoenicia and/or Woodstock to accommodate enrolled children if needed. This helps reduce learning disruption during any capital work, as well as expedites the time of construction and reduce overall costs. Children impacted include the grade 3 in both primary schools, remaining in the school for grade 4 in September of the implementation year. All grade 4-6 children in Bennett would all go to the middle school in year one of the implementation to form grades 5, 6 and 7 of the grade 5-8 middle school.

Fiscal Redirection Potential

Yes. Similar to Scenario A, the savings on transportation of $322,000 described above could likely be coupled with some staff savings in the areas of nursing, supervision, and custodial due to the closure of Bennett. Depending upon actual sections in grades K-4 from year to year as well as the grade 5 added to the middle school, additional cost reductions could be realized but are not represented here. A conservative cost redirection estimate without any instructional staff reductions in Scenario B is $534,000. This estimated calculation does not factor in capital construction costs. Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated to address key district educational and children's needs discussed earlier in Section 11 under *Fiscal Redirection Potential.*

Building Repurpose Potential for Bennett Building

(Since Scenario A and B both include closing the Bennett school, this section is similar to Scenario A.)
There are many possible uses or combination of uses for the Bennett school. One possible need to free space at the middle school for grade level expansion would be to move most central services to the Bennett building including the district offices (3,800 sq. ft.), the maintenance offices (2,500 sq. ft.), and relocating the current transportation garage and offices (5,800 sq. ft.) to the Bennett building. The current transportation space is small and inadequate, is not in good condition, and has underground storage tanks. The relocation of the transportation building to the Bennett building would also free up parking space at the middle/high school and improve traffic flow in the parking lot. Other possible uses of Bennett include relocation of other governmental buildings from flood plain, function as a community center, rental of space to the Ulster BOCES, possible Ulster BOCES Adult Education, a performing arts center, or serve as a satellite site for possible evening classes for Ulster Community College or SUNY New Paltz. The Bennett building could also serve as the Onteora Academy of Arts and Sciences – a regional high school in a project-based learning environment with both a science and performing arts focus that could attract students from other school districts through a BOCES Co-ser. The Rural Ulster Preservation Company (RUPCO) also represents an additional opportunity and possible resource for assisting in development and repurpose of a closed school facility. However, because of the location of Bennett on a school campus, consideration of any private use would require a separate access road segregated from school traffic.

** Estimated requirements for classroom and other modifications based upon consultation with building principals and other district officials and the experience of the consultant. The Board of Education may wish to engage an outside school architect in identifying needed school re-design to accommodate one or more of the study grade configuration scenarios and establish a cost estimate that would help the Board of Education in finalizing the comparisons of the different grade level configurations.*

Section 14:

Grade Configuration Scenario C

Present Configuration

1. Phoenicia & Woodstock remain grade K-3 schools
2. Bennett remains a grade 4-6 intermediate school
3. Onteora Middle School remains grade 6 & 7 school
4. High School remains grades 9-12

Positives and Concerns About Grade Level Configuration Scenario C

Scenario C: (Present) Phoenicia & Woodstock grades K-3, Bennett grades 4-6, MS 7-8, HS 9-12

Positives of Scenario C
• Maintains K-3 village community/village schools distributed across the school district. These two schools help bond each of the communities, even more so for Phoenicia where it serves as a hub providing an important identity for its local community. • Maintains the status quo since 2012 – ensures stability and comfort with the familiarity. • Possible UPK in the K-3 buildings if space permits and the UPK programs need location. • No need to undergo capital construction or renovation to accommodate other grade level configurations. • Small class sizes are maintained. • Grade 4-6 departmentalization permits greater teacher specialization and skill focused coaching. • Overall, student achievement based upon a limited sample, suggests the district is highly competitive with region and with similar schools. • Grade 4 -6 now at the main campus in the Bennett school, likely have more after school activities than if attending an elementary school K-4, K-5 or K-6. • Staff in middle and high school under current configuration seem generally comfortable with the staff sharing (19 current staff) and the professional interactions – they "make it work". • Grade 6 rides on the elementary bus. • Short term, may be least costly option when considering needed capital costs.
Concerns of Scenario C
• Fewer grade levels in same building challenges consistency of curriculum and different approaches to literacy across K-6 grade levels and buildings. • More student transitions between buildings impacts on academic performance per the research (K-3, 4-6, 7-8, and 9-12 is 3 transitions). • Only offer ENL (*English as a New Language*) and the MAP (*special behavioral needs*) programs in one K-3 building requiring transporting of both groups of students from across district regardless of attendance boundary. • Underutilized buildings and the staffing required to keep a building open consumes district financial resources. • Some perceive that the current configuration is costly, especially transportation costs and negative impact of redundant transportation on environment with CO^2 pollution. • Grades K-3 not currently utilizing integration of instructional technology into everyday teaching and learning. • Grade 4-6 and 7-12 on different schedule requiring double busing which substantially increases busing costs. Late runs merge all children regardless of age. • NYS Learning Standards (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) are not congruent with current configuration so multiple sets of standards must be followed in each building. • K-3 and 4-6 current configuration lacks developmental transition (primary early childhood generalist vs. content discipline specialist). • Neither K-3 building due to small enrollment and lack of classroom sections, provides full range or continuum of services (transitional to either less or more services). • A projected declining enrollment over next ten years challenges the use of the current grade level configuration and use of all five schools due to equity of class sizes between schools, offering continuum of services for children with special needs, communication and consistency of practice, content and common vocabulary among staff, and availability of resources. • Long term, the current grade configuration requires the most bus runs, provides the least educational advantages, and generates greatest recurring costs of all scenarios. • Enrollment size of K-3 schools requires location of some district wide programs at one of the schools requiring extra transportation, and causing family confusion. • Requires constant monitoring and adjustments of attendance zones by school officials to ensure some level of balance between primary school enrollments. • Elementary class sizes between two primary schools less likely to be equitable. • Current configuration can divide children in same family into three schools.

Scenario C Description

(Maintain Current Configuration) Phoenicia and Woodstock would remain grades K-3 primary schools, Bennett would remain grades 4-6 intermediate school, the middle school would still be grades 7-8, and the high school would remain grades 9-12.

Enrollment Implications on All Schools

Table 14.1 below projects the enrollment of this scenario. The projected decline in enrollment will continue the trend of under capacity use of each of the school buildings. Grades K-6 will remain relatively stable, but the secondary level will undergo a more pronounced decline when considering the combination of middle school grades 7-8 and high school grades 9-12 which will decline from a peak of 631 to a low of 457 in grades 7-12 by 2028-29.

The enrollment scenario for C assumes a relative balance in students between the Phoenicia and Woodstock primary schools. This would require additional busing of children from Woodstock to Phoenicia which would be difficult. Current enrollments are not balanced. Approximately 130 students are enrolled at Phoenicia and 170 at Woodstock. The small numbers of students at specific grade levels in the grade K-3 schools causes some very small classes – especially in the co-teaching classrooms. Notwithstanding the obvious increased costs, with so many adults often in a classroom coupled with so few children, several challenges occur. More is not always better. Coordinating services and support is more challenging for the primary teacher when managing the efforts and services of the special education teacher, monitors or assistants, therapists, etc. Children find it harder to develop any level of learning independence or self-directed learning when adults are always at the ready to assist. Finally, having large discrepancies in the enrollment of students in a grade between the two schools can be an issue of equity to both classroom teachers and parents. Two classrooms at the same grade could be 12 and 22 children in the different schools.

The smaller enrollment size of both K-3 schools, some district wide programs can only be housed at one of the schools (ENL, Behavioral Self Contained, etc.). This creates a problem of continually transporting many students to either primary building that is not considered the "home" school, but instead the "program" school. Although the two primary schools represent and serve the needs of each community/village school area, in reality the number of students that attend either primary school that are truly residents of the area can be considerably less. Finally, this requires school district officials to be constantly adjusting attendance zones and shifting programs to ensure there are adequate students attending each primary school which is confusing to parents and students and disruptive to families.

The two existing Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) programs that remain in the school district could be encouraged to rent/occupy open space in Woodstock and Phoenicia (total of 25-30 full and part-time) although both currently have other space lease/occupy agreements.

Table 14.1 – Enrollment Scenario C (Current)

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Phoenicia Elementary K-3	158	162	160	157	156	159	163	164	163	163
Woodstock Elementary K-3	158	162	160	157	156	159	163	164	163	163
Bennett Intermediate 4-6	247	232	221	223	239	237	226	222	228	235
Middle School 7-8	229	220	174	173	152	147	164	170	162	151
High School 9-12	402	391	415	397	386	377	312	308	304	306
In District	**1,193**	**1,168**	**1,129**	**1,107**	**1,089**	**1,079**	**1,027**	**1,027**	**1,020**	**1,018**

Transportation Implications

Table 14.2 summarizes the transportation costs for Scenario C – the present configuration. All grade configuration scenarios are compared to this current configuration and building use. Table 14.2 below summarizes the transportation costs of this scenario. The current configuration Scenario C is between $350,000 and $630,000 more expensive than the other grade level configurations included in the study. This scenario has the greatest student miles driven (70,980 to 161,980 miles depending upon scenario), and has the highest pollution of CO^2 of all scenarios (449,375 to 800,000 more depending upon scenario.) Not only is the proposal most costly, it also increases risk of bus accident due to the number of runs and mileage driven, as well as most harmful to the environment.

Table 14.2 - Transportation Scenario C

	Bus Runs	Total Runs	Annual Miles	CO^2 Annual Emissions	Annual Cost
Phoenicia Elementary K-3 Woodstock Elementary K-3 Bennett Intermediate 4-6 Middle 7-8, High School 9-12	8 runs & 2 share 11 runs 15 runs 27 runs (1 pm)	61 runs, 2 tier *(K-6 and 7-12 runs are two tiers & times)*	362,180	1,500,000	$2,135,000

Fiscal Redirection Potential

The Scenario C is likely the most expensive configuration in the comparisons not including any capital construction work needed in some of the other scenarios. There are not likely any financial resources that could be redirected to other needs or programs with this scenario.

Section 15:

Grade Configuration Scenario D

Central Campus

1. Close both Phoenicia & Woodstock schools
2. Bennett becomes grade K-5 elementary school
3. Onteora Middle School becomes grade 6 -8 school
4. High School remains grades 9-12

Positives and Concerns About Grade Level Configuration Scenario D

Scenario D: Close Phoenicia & Woodstock schools, Bennett is grades K-5, Middle 6-8, HS 9-12

Positives of Scenario D
• Less student transitions between buildings increases academic performance (per research). • Opportunity to pair older with younger children and siblings. • Middle school 6-8 configuration part of a larger system-wide plan, not a single action. • More grade levels in a K-5 building ensures greater consistency of curriculum and early literacy practices. • Information sharing and interaction between elementary grade levels increases. • Possibility of beginning world languages earlier than grade 7. • Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated (for example) to a fourth year of world languages, expansion of electives, program acceleration options, adding additional staffing to meet the AIS and RtI remediation requirements, or to focus on increasing graduation rate through additional supports for struggling students. • Consolidating into one K-5 building allows offering full continuum of special education services in Bennett building. • Could offer ENL (*English as a New Language*) and MAP (*special behavioral needs*) services in one location avoiding unnecessary transportation and re-location of these students. • Elementary class sizes more equitable, classified students more easily integrated into regular classrooms (full continuum services). • Opportunity to fully integrate K-5 instructional technology system-wide (connectivity, training, implementation, single system) as well as full connectivity on a central campus. • Greater flexibility in Middle School scheduling (access to additional curricular opportunities by spreading out credit attainment) through adding grade 6. • NYS Learning Standards are divided by K-2, 3-5, 6-8 – aligned with this configuration. • This model would offer a centralized campus, consistency in curricular alignment, and instructional pedagogy. Perhaps dividing the Bennett building into K-2 and 3-5 "clusters" would better support learning and address developmental needs of learners. • Staff could be utilized across grade levels to best support student needs, class sizes, and grade-level configurations. • Reduction in transportation runs and costs compared to current grade level configuration saves $630,000 annually, lowers pollution, increases safety with fewer runs. Student ride times equal to or potentially shorter than present configuration. • Able to adhere to Board of Education Class size policy with elementary children K-5. • Eliminates "elementary attendance borders" which constantly are shifting, confusing, and parents sometimes unsure where children will attend the following year. More predictable. • Most efficient use of financial and human resources, offers long term district solutions. • Future enrollment declines/changes can be easily adapted to with a central campus.
Concerns of Scenario D
• Impact on community use of two closed school facilities for boosters, town recreation, clinics, performance arts, literacy, conservancy, community garden, fire department, etc. • Closing a school building should be an open and transparent process engaging the community. The closing may alienate students, parents and community. • Closing two schools while still managing disposition of West Hurley from a closure in 2004. • Shifting of staff to different buildings can change the work and learning environment. • The middle school will require some structural modification to ensure creation of a true middle school identity and separation from the high school. • Scenario requires a capital construction project to add classrooms and other spaces including addition of physical education space at Bennett. It will have an approximate local levy impact of 69% of total costs spread over 15-20 years. • Removes community/village schools. The community schools help bond each of the communities, even more so for Phoenicia where it served as a hub providing an important identity for its local community. • Students would be exposed to their graduating cohort beginning in Kindergarten and spend next 13 years with relatively same group (versus other options including current where it begins in grade 4). • Current Bennett program provides teachers who are content experts, specializing in teaching certain subjects. The subject specialization and student exposure to a series of teachers prepares grades 4-6 for secondary education experience.

Scenario D Description

(Centralized Campus) The Phoenicia and Woodstock buildings would be closed and repurposed. Bennett would be the district grades K-5 elementary building, the middle school would become grades 6-8, and the high school would remain grades 9-12. All children would be housed on a single campus.

*Enrollment Implications on Bennett and the Middle School**

Table 15.1 below projects the enrollment of this scenario. The Bennett school cannot accommodate the children as a districtwide K-5 building without adding space because the projected highest enrollment through the end of school year 2029 of 486 children is 163 more children than the highest actual number enrolled in the building over the past five years. This translates into approximately 8-10 new classrooms minimum. An additional gymnasium would also be needed to address the increased enrollment and to meet state required physical education requirements. This would require a capital construction project including new space and renovation to the existing school building footprint.

The middle school, by adding an additional grade 6, adds between 80-100 students, 5-6 classrooms. It is important to note that space will be tightest in 2022-23 (assuming implementation) when combined grade 6-12 enrollment will be 635. However, middle/high school enrollment will continue to decline through 2028-29, when grade 6-12 enrollment is projected at 533. As a perspective, the grade 7-12 middle/high school in 2018-19 totaled 601 students so adding a grade level to the middle/high school building will help ensure it maintains a core of students over the next ten years.

Although there is reasonably sufficient space in the current middle-high school building, it will require some physical reconfiguration of space and require part time and other shared staff to share certain classrooms during the school day during open periods – at least at the onset of the implementation and discussed in the previous paragraph. The design should ensure more segregation of space between the middle and high school students where possible, as well as a clear middle and high school identity as discussed in more detail in Section 18. High school students indicate that the schedule and strategic utilization of current classrooms could help the segregation. High school students frequently use one or more middle school hallways as a “cut through” to get to certain classes on time. This requires study by a school architect collaborating with the school principals and staff.

Table 15.1 – Enrollment Scenario D

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Bennett Elementary K-5	*Transitional Planning Phase Changes Take Place 2022-23*			473	477	474	471	476	484	486
Middle School 6-8				238	226	228	244	243	232	227
High School 9-12				397	386	377	312	308	304	306
In District	**1,193**	**1,168**	**1,129**	**1,107**	**1,089**	**1,079**	**1,027**	**1,027**	**1,020**	**1,018**

Transportation Implications

All grade configuration scenario transportation costs are compared to the current Scenario C configuration and building use. Table 15.2 below summarizes the transportation costs of Scenario D. Under grade level configurations scenarios D and E – where Bennett serves as a districtwide grade K-4 or K-5 school – the district would have a "central campus". Also included on the campus would be the middle school grades 5-8 or 6-8, and the existing high school grades 9-12. Scenario D and E provide the greatest transportation savings of all scenarios when compared to the present grade configuration. These two central campus scenarios would annually save $630,000 compared

to the present configuration described in Scenario C. The school district would continue to operate a two-tier system (two separate bus runs). The school district would also annually drive 161,980 fewer bus miles, and reduce CO^2 pollution by over 800,000.

Under a central campus in scenarios D and E, it could be possible to operate a single tier of busing (one general starting and ending time for the schools). Single tier busing would further reduce the estimated costs of $1,505,000 by about $175,000. Single tier busing would work more easily with a later school starting time since the buses would not need to leave to start an elementary bus run after the first run. There would also be slightly less wear on each bus due to reduced bus runs and mileage. Families would also only need to manage a single bus time. Despite additional cost reductions, a single tier of busing under Scenario D and E provides both advantages and drawbacks.

Several challenges or drawbacks are created by single tier busing in the two scenarios D and E. Although there would be a common starting and ending time, it may be less so in reality. The amount of time required to pick up/drop off at the middle and high school would likely create a delay at Bennett. Another issue is the current layout of the bus parking at Bennett. Presently, it can only accommodate a maximum of about 26 buses. Under a single tier schedule, it is estimated that a maximum of 38 buses would need to be staged at Bennett. This would likely require re-design and new routing to accommodate the increased number of buses – adding to the capital construction costs already required at Bennett. Another option would be to escort the Bennett elementary children to walk to the middle school/high school for a single bus pick up/drop off. This raises several student safety issues as well as requiring significant adult supervision. Further, creating a single tier of busing also reduces school bus driver time. The difficulty of attracting, training, and retaining school bus drivers is already challenging. Shortening bus runs makes serving as a school bus driver less attractive creating the potential to have less qualified and able people driving a school bus with children onboard. Finally, some parents may be uncomfortable with young children in grades K-5 riding on a school bus with older children.

Table 15.2 - Transportation Scenario D

	Bus Runs	Total Runs	Annual Miles	CO^2 Annual Emissions	Annual Cost
Bennett Elementary K-5 Middle 6-8, High School 9-12	15 runs 28 runs	43 runs, 2 tier	200,200	700,000	$1,505,000

Transition/Roll Out

The planning, approvals, design and any construction would likely require 3-4 years from a district decision. A likely implementation target at the earliest could be September, school year 2022-23 or later. Both the Phoenicia and Woodstock buildings would be slated to close but could be used during the construction phases of the Bennett building to accommodate students displaced from sections of Bennett under construction. Sections of Bennett could be closed to students and construction could occur year-round with less disruption of students and learning. It would on the short term, perhaps require some children to be transported to another building temporarily. This building use flexibility helps reduce learning disruption during any capital work, as well as expedites the time of construction and reduce overall costs.

Children impacted in the implementation (other than during any construction) include the grade K-3 in both primary schools that would attend the K-5 at Bennett in September of implementation. Grades 4 at Bennett would remain and become the grade 5 cohort. Grades 5-6 would move to the middle school to form the grades 6 and 7 in the middle school in the implementation year.

Fiscal Redirection Potential

Similar to alternative scenarios other than the present configuration, cost savings likely would result and could be redirected to other needs based upon a change in grade level configuration. The savings on transportation of $630,000 gross savings translates into the local tax levy after state aid of approximately $579,600. This cost reduction could likely be coupled with staff savings in the areas of nursing, supervision, classroom staffing and custodial due to the centralized campus. When a campus is centralized, all grades contain the entire district wide student cohort. This permits an equitable often balanced student class size and reduces the "breaks" in smaller individual schools where student numbers can vary from 12-24 students in a class requiring some teachers to teach half the number of students taught by a colleague teacher at the same grade in the same school. It is estimated that from year to year, the reduction would be 1-2 teachers at a minimum while still meeting the Board of Education Class Size Policy for mid-range class size. Declining enrollment and closure of two K-3 buildings would likely provide opportunity to realize savings in supervision and nursing. The estimated cost savings from the centralizing of the campus could be in the $400,000 range – likely addressed through retirements and/or attrition. The combination of funds that could be redirected would be approximately $979,600. This estimated calculation does not factor in capital construction costs.

Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated to address key district educational and children's needs discussed earlier in Section 11 under *Fiscal Redirection Potential.*

Building Repurpose Potential for Phoenicia and Woodstock

Under grade level configurations scenarios D and E – where Bennett serves as a districtwide grade K-4 or K-5 school – the district would have a "central campus". This scenario includes closing both the Phoenicia and Woodstock K-3 buildings.

The possible sale of the Woodstock school is restricted to limited purposes by the original deed according to an interpretation by the school attorney in August, 2019. Although requiring further legal investigation, any commercial use would be prohibited. Residential use would be limited to either single, or multi-family dwellings or possible apartments. Woodstock could function as a community center, rental of space to the Ulster BOCES, possible Ulster BOCES Adult Education, a performing arts center, or serve as a satellite site for possible evening classes for Ulster Community College or SUNY New Paltz. There would also be the possibility of renting space to the Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) in the buildings if the program requires space. Regarding future possible use of the Phoenicia building, the Town of Shandaken may need a new town hall/community center. Phoenicia is also the largest hamlet in the town.

The Phoenicia building, in addition to the non-commercial uses listed above, could also be sold and used commercially depending upon zoning variances and restrictions. The school district attorneys could best interpret and advise on this issue. One possible use might include conversion of the building into a technology park for start-up businesses.

** Estimated requirements for classroom and other modifications based upon consultation with building principals and other district officials and the experience of the consultant. The Board of Education may wish to engage an outside school architect in identifying needed school re-design to accommodate one or more of the study grade configuration scenarios and establish a cost estimate that would help the Board of Education in finalizing the comparisons of the different grade level configurations.*

Section 16:

Grade Configuration Scenario E

Central Campus

1. Close both Phoenicia & Woodstock schools
2. Bennett becomes grade K-4 elementary school
3. Onteora Middle School becomes grade 5-8 school
4. High School remains grades 9-12

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Positives and Concerns About Grade Level Configuration Scenario E

Scenario E: Close Phoenicia & Woodstock schools, Bennett is grades K-4, Middle 5-8, HS 9-12

Positives of Scenario E
• Less student transitions between buildings increases academic performance (per research). • Opportunity to pair older with younger children and siblings. • More grade levels in a K-4 district wide building ensures greater consistency of curriculum and early literacy approach. • Middle school 5-8 configuration part of a larger system-wide plan, not merely a single action. • Information sharing and interaction between elementary grade levels increases. • Possibility of beginning world languages earlier than grade 7. • Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated (for example) to a fourth year of world languages, program acceleration options, expansion of electives, adding additional staffing to meet the AIS and RtI remediation requirements, or to focus on increasing graduation rate through additional supports for struggling students. • Consolidating into one K-5 building allows offering full continuum of special education services in Bennett building. • Could offer ENL (*English as a New Language*) services and MAP services (*special behavioral needs*) in one location avoiding unnecessary transportation and re-location of these students. • Elementary class sizes more equitable, classified students more easily integrated into regular classrooms (full continuum services). • Opportunity to fully integrate K-4 instructional technology system-wide (connectivity, training, implementation, single system) as well as full connectivity on central campus. • Greater flexibility in Middle School scheduling (access to additional curricular opportunities by spreading out credit attainment) through adding grade 6. • This model would offer a centralized campus, consistency in curricular alignment, and instructional pedagogy. Perhaps dividing the Bennett building into grade K-2 and 3-4 "clusters) would better support learning and address developmental needs of learners. • Staff could be utilized across grade levels to best support student needs, class sizes, and grade-level configurations. • Reduction in transportation runs and costs compared to the current grade configuration saves $630,000 annually, lowers pollution, increases safety with fewer runs. Student ride times equal to or potentially shorter than present configuration. • Able to adhere to Board of Education Class size policy with elementary children clustered into grade levels in a single location. • Eliminates "elementary attendance borders" which constantly are shifting, confusing, and parents sometimes unsure where children will attend the following year. More predictable. • Most efficient use of financial and human resources, offers long term district solutions. Future enrollment declines/changes can be easily adapted to with a central campus.
Concerns of Scenario E
• Impact on community use of two closed school facilities for boosters, town recreation, clinics, performance arts, literacy, conservancy, community garden, fire department, etc. • Closing school should be open, transparent process engaging community. Closing may alienate students, parents and community. • Closing two schools while still managing disposition of West Hurley from a closure in 2004. • Shifting of staff to different buildings can change the work and learning environment. • Scenario requires capital construction project to add classrooms and other spaces including addition of physical education space at Bennett and at middle school. Approximate local levy impact of 69% of total costs spread out over 15-20 years. • Some people perceive that fifth graders are not developmentally ready to deal with older children at middle school although 22% of the 55 NYS similar enrollment districts used the middle school grade 5-8 configuration. • The middle school will require some structural modification to ensure creation of a true middle school identity and separation from the high school. Grades 5-6 may also need some segregation from 7-8. • NYS Learning Standards are divided by K-2, 3-5, 6-8 – not fully aligned with proposed configuration. • Removes community/village schools. The community schools help bond each of the communities, even more so for Phoenicia where it served as a hub providing an important identity for its local community. • Students would be exposed to their graduating cohort beginning in Kindergarten and spend next 13 years with relatively same group (versus other options including current where it begins in grade 4). • Current Bennett program provides teachers who are content experts, specializing in teaching certain subjects. The subject specialization and student exposure to a series of teachers prepares grades 4-6 for secondary education experience. • NYS Learning Standards (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) are not congruent with this grade configuration so multiple sets of standards must be followed in buildings in grades K-8.

Note: Since Scenario D and E are very similar, several areas below are redundant and text is not repeated, referenced from the previous section.

Scenario E Description

(Centralized Campus) The Phoenicia and Woodstock buildings would be closed and repurposed. Bennett would be the district grades K-4 elementary building, the middle school would become grades 5-8, and the high school would remain grades 9-12.

*Enrollment Implications on Bennett and the Middle School**

Table 16.1 below projects the enrollment of this scenario. The Bennett school cannot accommodate the children as a districtwide K-4 building without adding space because the projected highest enrollment through the end of school year 2029 of 406 children is 163 more children than the highest actual number enrolled in the building over the past five years. This translates into approximately 4-6 new classrooms. An additional gymnasium would also be needed to address the increased enrollment and to meet state required physical education requirements. This would require a capital construction project including new space and renovation to the existing school building footprint.

The middle school, by adding an additional grade 5 and 6, approximately doubles its recent enrollment to 319 students (highest predicted through 2028-29), 8-10 classrooms. It is unclear without involvement of a school architect if there is sufficient space to accommodate this configuration. It is important to note that space will be tightest in 2022-23 (assuming implementation) when combined grade 5-12 enrollment will be 710. However, middle/high school enrollment will continue to decline through 2028-29, when grade 5-12 enrollment is projected at 613. As a perspective, the grade 7-12 middle/high school in 2018-19 totaled 601 students. The middle school should also require some physical reconfiguration of existing space and the design should ensure more segregation of space between the middle and high school students and a clear middle and high school identity as discussed in more detail in Section 18. High school students indicate that the schedule and strategic utilization of current classrooms could help the segregation. The segregation may also be a greater challenge due to the number of grade levels in the building. This requires further study by a school architect.

Table 16.1: Enrollment Scenario E

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Bennett Elementary K-4	*Transitional Planning Phase Changes Take Place 2022-23*			397	395	392	397	405	407	406
Middle School 5-8				314	308	309	318	314	309	306
High School 9-12				397	386	377	312	308	304	306
In District	**1,193**	**1,168**	**1,129**	**1,107**	**1,089**	**1,079**	**1,027**	**1,027**	**1,020**	**1,018**

Transportation Implications

SEE Scenario D – "Transportation Implications" described in previous section. The implications are estimated to be similar for both Central Campus Scenarios D and E.

Table 16.2 – Transportation Scenario E

	Bus Runs	Total Runs	Annual Miles	CO^2 Annual Emissions	Annual Cost
Bennett Elementary K-4 Middle 5-8, High School 9-12	14 runs 29 runs	43 runs, 2 tier	200,200	700,000	$1,505,000

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Transition/Roll Out

The planning, approvals, design and any construction would likely require 3-4 years from a district decision. A likely implementation target at the earliest could be September, school year 2022-23 or later. Both the Phoenicia and Woodstock buildings would be slated to close but could be used during the construction phases of the Bennett building to accommodate students displaced from sections of Bennett under construction. Sections of Bennett could be closed to students and construction could occur year-round with less disruption of students and learning. It would on the short term, perhaps require some children to be transported to another building temporarily. This building use flexibility helps reduce learning disruption during any capital work, as well as expedites the time of construction and reduce overall costs.

Children impacted in the implementation (other than during any construction) include the grade K-3 in both primary schools that would attend the K-5 at Bennett in September of implementation. Grades 4 -6 at Bennett would become the grades 5, 6 and 7 at the middle school in September of the implementation. It should be noted that this roll out may be the most complex of the various scenarios included in the study. The amount of capital construction work to be completed at the middle and high school building would potentially be significant and the work staging challenging in order to minimize student learning disruptions. The district may also consider engaging a construction manager to help in the planning and organization of the work.

Fiscal Redirection Potential

SEE Scenario D – "Fiscal Redirection Potential" described in the previous section D. The Fiscal redirection implications are estimated to be similar for both Central Campus Scenarios D and E.

Building Repurpose Potential for Phoenicia and Woodstock

SEE Scenario D – "Building Repurpose Potential for Phoenicia and Woodstock" described in the previous section D. The potential building repurpose use is estimated to be similar for both Central Campus Scenarios D and E.

** Estimated requirements for classroom and other modifications based upon consultation with building principals and other district officials and the experience of the consultant. The Board of Education may wish to engage an outside school architect in identifying needed school re-design to accommodate one or more of the study grade configuration scenarios and establish a cost estimate that would help the Board of Education in finalizing the comparisons of the different grade level configurations.*

Section 17:

Grade Configuration Scenario F

1. Close Phoenicia or Woodstock school
2. Remaining school and Bennett become grade K-5 schools (two total)
3. Onteora Middle School becomes grade 6-8 school
4. High School remains grades 9-12

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Positives and Concerns About Grade Level Configuration Scenario F

Scenario F: Close Phoenicia or Woodstock, Remaining and Bennett become K-5, Middle 6-8, HS 9-12

Positives of Scenario F
• Less student transitions between buildings increases academic performance (per research). • Opportunity to pair older with younger children and siblings. • Middle school 6-8 configuration part of larger system-wide plan, not merely a single action. • More grade levels in building K-5 ensures greater consistency of curriculum and early literacy approach. • Information sharing and interaction between elementary grade levels increases. • Maintains two K-5 community area schools in the district. • Possibility of beginning world languages earlier than grade 7 • Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated (for example) to a fourth year of world languages, expansion of electives, adding additional staffing to meet the AIS and RtI remediation requirements, or to focus on increasing graduation rate through additional supports for struggling students. • Consolidating into two K-5 buildings with more children *possibly permits* offering full continuum of special education services in both K-5 buildings. • May be possible to offer ENL (*English as a New Language*) and MAP *(special behavioral needs*) services in both locations possibly avoiding unnecessary transportation and re-location of students. • Opportunity to fully integrate K-5 instructional technology system-wide (connectivity, training, implementation) • Increased opportunity for K-5 Curricular alignment • Increased opportunity for K-5 Instructional/Pedagogical Alignment • Greater flexibility in Middle School scheduling (more curricular opportunities by spreading out credit attainment) adding grade 6. • NYS Learning Standards are divided by K-2, 3-5, 6-8 aligned with proposed configuration • Reduction in transportation runs and costs compared with current configuration saves $455,000 annually, lowers pollution, increases safety with fewer runs. Student ride times equal to or potentially shorter than present configuration. • Depending upon which school closed, overall capital construction costs relatively low.
Concerns of Scenario F
• Impact on community use of a closed school facility for boosters, town recreation, clinics, performance arts, literacy, conservancy, community garden, fire department, etc. • Closing a school building should be an open and transparent process engaging the community. The closing may alienate students, parents and community. • The community schools help bond each of the communities, even more so for Phoenicia where it served as a hub providing an important identity for its local community. • Without a community/village school, the local free public library in that community may not be as frequently accessed. • Deliberations on which school to close will create a win/lose situation in district potentially pitting two communities against each other and the district unintentionally fostering acrimony and distrust with students, parents and the community. • Closing another school while still managing disposition of West Hurley building from a closure in 2004. • Shifting of staff to different buildings can change the work and learning environment. • The middle school will require some structural modification to ensure creation of a true middle school identity and separation from the high school. Bennett may require some modification and possible space expansion. • Grades 4-5 when at Bennett taught by specialists, not subject generalists under K-5 scenario. • (If Phoenicia remains open) Students outside of the current Phoenicia catchment area may be required to attend Phoenicia in order to have enough students per grade level. • Scenario not long-term solution due to projected continuing enrollment decline. • Scenario likely results in frequent redistricting to balance K-5 enrollment between two schools. • NYS Learning Standards are divided by K-2, 3-5, 6-8 – not fully aligned with proposed configuration requiring following multiple standards within each building at grades K-8. • Current Bennett program provides teachers who are content experts, specializing in teaching certain subjects. Some contend that subject specialization and student exposure to a series of teachers prepares grades 4-6 children for secondary education experience. • Elementary class sizes between two schools less likely to be equitable. • Continues practice of “elementary attendance borders” which constantly are shifting, confusing, and parents sometimes unsure where children will attend the following year creating less predictability.

Scenario F Description

The school district would close and repurpose either the Phoenicia or Woodstock building. The remaining building and Bennett would become grades K-5 elementary schools, the middle school would become grades 6-8, and the high school would remain grades 9-12.

*Enrollment Implications on Phoenicia, Woodstock, Bennett and Middle School**

Table 17.1 below projects the enrollment of this scenario. Woodstock is 13,900 square feet larger than the Phoenicia building. Woodstock could accommodate 4 additional sections required for a K-5. However, there would be little flexibility to accommodate any "bubble", and the K-5 scenario could jeopardize the science room and other spaces.

Phoenicia could not accommodate a K-5 enrollment of 236-243 without adding classrooms and possibly increasing space for physical education and the cafeteria. With approximately 7-9 acres, there is sufficient land for expansion. Phoenicia's highest student population over the past five years was about 156 students. Even with space restructuring, an estimated 3-5 additional classrooms would be needed to accommodate the projected enrollment through 2029. In either building, space will be at a premium with part time teachers or shared teachers needing to share open periods in available classrooms with other staff and classrooms would not always be available to serve as storage. Bennett could accommodate a grade K-5 enrollment of 236-243. In the previous five years, the grade 4-6 enrollment was between 288 and 325 in the Bennett building.

The middle school, by adding an additional grade 6, adds between 80-100 students, 5-6 classrooms. Although there is sufficient space in the current middle-high school building, it will require some physical reconfiguration of space and the design should ensure more segregation of space between the middle and high school students and a clear middle and high school identity as discussed in more detail in Section 18. High school students indicate that the schedule and strategic utilization of current classrooms could help the segregation. High school students frequently use one or more middle school hallways as a "cut through" to get to certain classes on time. This requires study by a school architect in collaboration with the building principals and staff.

Table17.1: Enrollment Projection Scenario F

	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Bennett Elementary K-5				236	238	237	236	238	242	243
(Either Woodstock or Phoenicia) K-5	*Transitional Planning Phase*			236	238	237	236	238	242	243
Middle School 6-8	*Changes Take Place 2022-23*			238	226	228	244	243	232	227
High School 9-12				397	386	377	312	308	304	306
In District	**1,193**	**1,168**	**1,129**	**1,107**	**1,089**	**1,079**	**1,027**	**1,027**	**1,020**	**1,018**

Transportation Implications

All grade configuration scenario transportation costs are compared to the current Scenario C configuration and building use. Table 17.2 below summarizes the transportation costs of Scenario F. Scenario F has 13 bus runs less, with 98,280 fewer miles driven. The reduction in student miles driven (when children are on the bus) reduces the carbon CO^2 emissions by 550,000. The Scenario F estimated gross cost savings when comparing to the current configuration is $455,000 annually, and after state aid, the local tax levy cost impact would be reduced by $414,050 per year.

Table 17.2 – Transportation Scenario F

	Bus Runs	Total Runs	Annual Miles	CO^2 Annual Emissions	Annual Cost
Phoenicia or Woodstock K-5 Bennett Elementary K-5 Middle 6-8, High School 9-12	9 or 11 runs 11 or 9 runs 28 runs	48 runs, 2 tier	263,900	950,000	$1,680,000

Transition/Roll Out

The planning, approvals, design and any construction would likely require 3-4 years from a district decision. Either the Phoenicia or Woodstock building would be slated to close, but could be used during construction/renovation of either or both of the K-5 buildings. This helps reduce learning disruption during any capital work, as well as expedites the time of construction and reduce overall costs. Children primarily impacted would be in grades 4-6, currently at Bennett. Grade 5 and 6 would form part of the new grade 6-8 middle school the following September when the new grade configuration is implemented. Grade 4 would return to one the two elementary schools depending upon the new K-5 attendance boundary guideline as they become grade 5 students in the September of the implementation.

Fiscal Redirection Potential

Similar to all study scenarios other than the present configuration, there could be redirection of cost savings resulting from a change in grade level configuration – although primarily through transportation. The net savings on transportation after factoring in any state aid translates into a district costs reduction of approximately $418,600. This cost reduction could not be coupled with any significant savings in staff. If two K-5 schools are created under this scenario, children from a centralized grade 4-6 are returning to a K-5 building. When a district's grade level students are distributed to multiple schools, it is difficult to avoid unusual "breaks" in grade enrollment and class sizes will widely vary, requiring more classroom staff. The funds that could be redirected would be approximately $418,600. This estimated calculation does not factor in capital construction costs if any required. Cost redirection from this scenario could be reallocated to address key district educational and children's needs discussed earlier in Section 11 under *Fiscal Redirection Potential.*

Building Repurpose Potential for Phoenicia and Woodstock

The possible sale of the Woodstock school is restricted to limited purposes by the original deed according to an interpretation by the school attorney in August, 2019. Although requiring further legal investigation, any commercial use would be prohibited. Residential use would be limited to either single, or multi-family dwellings or possible apartments. Woodstock could function as a community center, rental of space to the Ulster BOCES, possible Ulster BOCES Adult Education, a performing arts center, or serve as a satellite site for possible evening classes for Ulster Community College or SUNY New Paltz. There would also be the possibility of renting space to the Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) in the buildings if the program requires space. Regarding future possible use of the Phoenicia building, the Town of Shandaken may need a new town hall/community center. Phoenicia is also the largest hamlet in the town. One possible use might include conversion of the building into a technology park for start-up businesses.

** Estimated requirements for classroom and other modifications based upon consultation with building principals and other district officials and the experience of the consultant. The Board of Education may wish to engage an outside school architect in identifying needed school re-design to accommodate one or more of the study grade configuration scenarios and establish a cost estimate that would help the Board of Education in finalizing the comparisons of the different grade level configurations.*

18. The Question of Onteora Middle School and High School

Driven by necessity and convenience, the current Onteora Middle School and High School share many things. The recent survey indicated some respondents, including some teachers, consider the high school a grade 7-12 Junior-Senior High School, or Middle-Senior High School – but with either label, perceiving it a middle school inside the high school. This perception is understandable, more so because the current middle school contains older children in only grades 7-8, not the grade 5-8 or 6-8 configurations more commonly used in middle schools. This perception is further bolstered by only 192 students in grade 7-8 (2018-19) forming the middle school student body. *Given the current and projected student enrollment, two grades of students are insufficient to form a separate school identity and function as a school effectively.* The question that the district needs to consider is whether or not Onteora wants a separate middle school and high school, or have a middle school that is part of a high school. The distinction will drive future planning and decisions.

Conceptually, the middle school years are intended to be a transition between elementary and secondary, from a dependent to independent learner. Without a unique and separate identity in the middle school different from high school, middle school proponents argue it is difficult to create an appropriate supportive learning and social environment for the emerging adolescent. The research strongly suggests that the physical and psychological changes that take place in grades 5-8 differ from those in grades 9-12. Children need to learn, play and socially interact with similar age peers. A school district displaying separate signage designating a middle or high school is insufficient to create separate, unique schools.

The middle/high school identity issue is exacerbated by a series of variables. The current middle and high school schedules are the same, a 9 period, 42-minute, A/B day. There is lack of structural identification when entering the middle school. A person walking through the high school would never know when they are in the middle school. Most hallways, bathrooms and common spaces are shared spaces with the high school, including sharing about 19 staff. Middle school lockers are interspersed where older students attend high school classes and interact, and the middle and high school principal offices are both located adjacent to a single main office. Clearly the current layout does not help establish any middle school identity and younger students are fully immersed in much older student behaviors, values and experiences.

Adding one or more grade levels – grade 6, or grades 5 and 6 – would help to build identity simply in sheer numbers of students leading to a reduction in need for shared staff. Relocation of the middle school principal's office to a location centralized in the middle school would also be beneficial. Possible rerouting of the high school students walking through the middle school could also be explored as well as designated entrances to both schools. Some of these modifications will need to be structural renovations including middle school designated bathrooms.

The physical restructure will help to more clearly establish a separate identity for the middle school. Simply moving another grade into the building without some physical restructure will not address the underlying middle school needs and fails to recognize the developmental and pedagogical differences between middle and high school. Finally, there should still remain many synergies between the two schools in one location, promoting collegiality, harmony, shared resources, and cooperation among students and staff.

19. **Summary Comparison of All Grade Level Configurations**

Table 19.1: Comparison Summary of the Six Grade Level Configurations

Comparisons	12. **Scenario A:** Phoenicia & Woodstock K-5, close Bennett, MS 6-8, HS 9-12	13. **Scenario B:** Phoenicia & Woodstock K-4, close Bennett, MS 5-8, HS 9-12	14. **Scenario C:** (Present) Phoenicia & Woodstock K-3, Bennett 4-6, MS 7-8, HS 9-12	15. **Scenario D:** (Central Campus) Close Phoenicia & Woodstock, Bennett K-5, MS 6-8, HS 9-12	16. **Scenario E:** (Central Campus) Close Phoenicia & Woodstock, Bennett K-4, MS 5-8, HS 9-12	17. **Scenario F:** Close Phoenicia or Woodstock, (two) K-5 with Bennett, MS 6-8, HS 9-12
Number of student transitions between buildings (affects academic performance per research):	2	2	3	2	2	2
*Requires capital project(s) of building modification and/or additions? **	3-5 rooms @Phoenicia Modification @MS	8-10 rooms @MS Modifications @MS	None	8-10rooms @Bennett Gym @ Bennett Modifications to MS	4-6 rooms @Bennett Modifications to MS	3-5 rooms Phoenicia Modification @MS
What are the estimated annual combined savings from this scenario that could be redirected to other district needs?	$534,000	$534,000	$0	$979,000	$979,000	$414,000
Maintains two community/village elementary schools?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
What school buildings would be closed?	Bennett	Bennett	None	Phoenicia & Woodstock	Phoenicia & Woodstock	Phoenicia or Woodstock
Can future enrollment declines/changes be easily adapted to with this configuration? (Flexible, adaptable, long term)	Somewhat Flexible	Somewhat Flexible	Somewhat Flexible	Very Flexible	Very Flexible	Somewhat Flexible
Configuration provides full continuum of special education services in each school building?	Likely	Likely	No	Yes	Yes	Likely
Configuration require constantly shifting "elementary attendance borders" to balance enrollment?	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Increased opportunity for district wide K-4 or K-5 Instructional/Pedagogical alignment and consistency?	More than present	More than present	No	Yes	Yes	More than present
Flexibility in MS scheduling (access to more curricular opportunities by spreading out credit attainment)	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
*General sentiment from the 2019 Community Survey regarding Positive comments and Concerns***	More Positives than Concerns	More Concerns than Positives	Generally Equal Positives & Concerns	Slightly more Concerns than Positives	More Concerns than Positives	More Concerns than Positives
Environmental Impact of Regular and Diesel Bus Routes and CO^2 released into environment (est.)	1,050,625	1,050,625	1,500,000	700,000	700,000	950,000

** Estimated requirements for classroom and other modifications based upon consultation with building principals and other district officials and the experience of the consultant. The Board of Education may wish to engage an outside school architect in identifying needed school re-design to accommodate one or more of the study grade configuration scenarios and establish a cost estimate that would help the Board of Education in finalizing the comparisons of the different grade level configurations.*

** The data for this category was collected with noted limitations described elsewhere and therefore, has limits on its reliability to make inferences from the survey results.

PART IV: Key Findings, Final Thoughts & Appendix

20. Key Findings of the Study

Below are the Key Findings of the study. To avoid redundancy in the study text, detailed comments or discussion for these findings appears elsewhere in the written study and specific page numbers are referenced for each finding for further review.

1. A projected declining enrollment over next ten years challenges the use of the current grade level configuration and use of all five schools *due to a need for:* a) equity of class sizes between schools; b) providing a continuum of services for children with special needs; c) improved communication and consistency of practice; d) use of content and common vocabulary among staff; and e) long term availability of resources. *(See pp. 38, 46-47, 50, 55, 59, 63)*

2. Long term, the current grade configuration requires the most bus runs, provides the least educational advantages, and *generates greatest recurring costs* of all scenarios studied. *(See pp. 46, 63)*

3. The student enrollment loss over the past ten years (2009-10 to 2018-19) was 430 students, with the enrollment declining every single year. The next ten-year period is projected to decline approximately another 195 students, or a total of 38% decline in enrollment over the 20-year period. *(See p. 6 for more discussion.)*

4. For the different grade configuration scenarios presented in this study, all routing schemes were based on an average of 45-50-minute bus rides for grades K-5, and 40-45 minutes for grades 6-12. These student bus ride times are equal to what they are now and may be potentially a little shorter due to less required bus runs freeing more staff creating more flexibility to shorten runs. *(See pp. 13-14 for more discussion.)*

5. Despite the limitation of a one-year comparative examination of student achievement data, when comparing against "similar" school districts and districts in the surrounding area, Onteora outperformed the majority of school districts in analysis across English Language Arts and math (grades 3-8), and the New York State Regents examinations. *(See pp. 16-18)*

6. Student achievement is adversely affected when children make transitions to new schools, so school districts should minimize unnecessary school transitions if possible. The current grade configuration has the greatest number of transitions (three) of those examined in the study. *(See pp. 20-21)*

7. Community survey indicated two most important factors to consider in grade level configuration and school use were 1) the *Learning needs*; and 2*) Social/emotional needs* of children (71% and 60% of respondents). Only 35% rated maintaining neighborhood schools as an important factor. *(See pp. 27-28)*

8. Survey most positive about a grade 6-8 middle school configuration. *(See p. 29)*

9. Survey results, despite being limited by lack of information and background, indicated more positive comments than negative comments for Scenario A (Make both Woodstock and Phoenicia grade K-5, close Bennett, make Middle School grades 6-8, and keep the High School 9-12), while one other, Scenario C (present configuration) exhibited approximate equal concerns and positives. *(See pp. 29-31)*

10. Every grade configuration scenario, when compared to the present configuration, provides costs savings and program redirection opportunity conservatively ranging from $414,000 to $979,000 not including any capital costs that need to be later calculated. *(See p. 57)*

11. The central campus in Scenario D and E provides the greatest opportunity for cost savings, addresses the middle school separation and grade levels, offers greatest redirection of funding to program enhancement, and most equitable distribution of resources and staffing, but closes two K-3 buildings. *(See pp. 47-48 & 51-52)*

12. Despite the high property wealth, the district educates a growing student base that is economically disadvantaged with approximately 46% receiving free/reduced student lunches. *(See p. 10)*

13. The Onteora Central School district has continued to monitor declining enrollment since the early 2000's, leading to the creation of multiple study committees, architectural master plans, one or more grade level configuration changes, and closure of a school. *(See p. 9)*

14. The impact of grade level configurations on student learning is generally inconclusive. What a teacher does in a classroom far greater impact on student achievement than a specific grade configuration. *(See p. 19)*

15. Study of fifty-five similar New York school districts, most prevalent grade configuration was grades K-5, 6-8, and 9-12 (35% of districts) followed by grade K-4, 5-8, and 9-12 (22% of districts). Most frequent middle school configuration was grades 6-8 (42%) followed by a grade 5-8 middle school (24%). *(See pp. 23-25)*

16. Given the current and projected enrollment, two grades of students are insufficient to form a separate middle school identity and function effectively as a school. Physical restructure and adding one or more grades to the middle school will help create an appropriate supportive learning and social environment for the emerging adolescent. *(See p. 56)*

17. Adding at least one grade level to the middle school (e.g. grade 6), provides greater flexibility in middle school scheduling and spreading out credit attainment requirements of New York State. *(See p. 56)*

18. Survey comments from respondents indicated the major questions about grade configuration scenarios included separation of the youngest from the older children, the potential length of a bus ride, overcrowding, impact on communities, long term enrollment, and cost reduction. *(See Section 10 – Survey Results, pp. 27-34)*

19. With the high property wealth of the district, a large portion of the school budget is absorbed locally with the average annual school budget tax levy increase over the last ten years of 1.87% with 4 years of 0%. *(See p. 10 for more discussion)*

20. Without a more long-term strategy for acknowledging and managing declining enrollment, leadership and staff find it difficult to engage in long term planning. *(See p. 9)*

21. Final Consultant Thoughts ...

Over the nearly 70-year history of the Onteora Central School district, the Board of Education and district officials have faced many challenges caused by changes in student enrollment. In the early 1950's, the costs of educating small numbers of children in 20-25 local towns and hamlets made it necessary to combine small village schools into a centralized school district. At the time, Supervising Principal Reginald Bennett and the Board of Education courageously faced a suspicious public that was concerned about losing local control of its children's schooling. Over the next 50 years faced with many baby boomers, school officials proposed numerous capital projects to build new schools and repair aging ones, frequently changing the grade level configurations. Since the early 2000's, student enrollment has continued a downward decline, and once again calling on school officials and the Board of Education to make hard, difficult decisions. As recently as 2012, the district officials and Board once again demonstrated courage by reconfiguring the schools in an attempt to balance enrollment, maintain community schools, and address community concerns.

I raise several questions that require comment:

a) Do things need to change? What is the tipping point for making a decision?
There are clear instructional advantages and cost benefits by moving to one of the other scenarios reviewed in this study. However, it needs to be determined what the building renovation and/or additions may cost. Further, Onteora benefits from an unusually large tax base, strong fiscal reserves, and low tax increases over the past decade – several at 0%. Despite underutilized buildings and higher than average per student costs, I do not anticipate an immediate threat to major program or service elimination. Longer term however, the continued declining enrollment will inevitably need to be addressed. The tipping point may be very tight budgets, program and staff reductions, declining reserves, or lack of public support for the school budget.

b) How should that decision be made?
A Board is made up of different individuals with diverse values. Many decisions are difficult, and few decisions ensure everyone will benefit. No public decision is made in a vacuum nor driven by one driving force. Decisions are often impacted by the learning, fiscal, and political environments. Often, the best decisions are balanced decisions. A Board of Education is wise to make decisions that are long term, rather than short term. Long term requires thorough study, examination of the alternatives, input from others, and anticipation of future trends and opportunities. Short term decisions are often quick, with less study, less cost, and a desire for quick solution.

c) If a building is in good condition, should you close it?
Perhaps. A building's condition is a short-term condition, always changing, usually deteriorating. Keeping a building open only because it is in good condition is a short-term type decision.

d) Could grade 6 simply be moved to the middle school and the district take no other action?
It would be ill-advised to move grade 6 to the middle school until the two schools are re-organized, and structural separation occurs so that there is significantly less interactions between the youngest and oldest students in the building. Offices need relocation and hallways and student routing need to be studied. Once completed, only moving grade 6 from Bennett provides limited benefit. There is little to no savings in transportation. Bennett would become a smaller grade 4-5 school with excess and underutilized space. The challenges of declining enrollment are not addressed. Grade 6 relocation should be part of a larger, long term plan.

e) Should Bennett become the new grade 6-8 middle school?

Moving the middle school to Bennett would leave the high school in the current 185,000 square foot building, with between 300-400 students. Some sections of the high school would need to be closed off. The challenges of declining enrollment are not addressed. Bus pickup would be very complex, and safety could be a concern.

f) What's missing from this school district?

There are many positives about the Onteora School district that have been previously shared throughout the study final report. Long term planning is made difficult by the lack of an apparent Strategic Plan – a somewhat detailed list of needs and aspirations with accompanying strategies and a timeline, to create better learning experience and outcomes for students. A strategic plan helps make long term decisions easier because resources and energies can be targeted to specific goals and strategies.

22. Appendix

Note: This version of the Community Survey is intended for use by people manually responding to the survey. The online version may appear slightly different in format. The survey should be completed between October 15 and November 6, 2019.

Onteora Central School District Community Survey: School Building Use & Grade Configuration

Introduction to the School Community Survey on Grade Level Configuration

Survey Background

The Onteora Central School District has experienced a steady decline in student enrollment. Between the 2008-09 and 2018-19 school years, district student enrollment declined by approximately 525 students, a 30% reduction. Long term enrollment projections suggest a possible further decline over the next ten years.

The Onteora Central School District requested an outside consultant identify and examine several scenarios for grade level configuration and school building utilization. Dr. Kevin Baughman began work on the study this past summer. His study will assess instructional and operational advantages and disadvantages of each identified scenario. This study will provide the district with important information for long term future planning and decision making. It is important to note that the school district has no immediate plans to make any changes to grade configuration or school building use.

The study requires the consultant to collect and analyze key information about the school district including reviewing numerous district documents, tours of each school, interviews, review of applicable research, and collect school staff and community input through this online survey.

It is important that the school staff and community have an opportunity to provide important input about school building utilization and grade level configuration. Your responses are confidential and anonymous. The survey is seven questions with comment sections. Please complete the survey no later than Wednesday, November 6, 2019. If you have access to the internet, feel free to go online to complete this survey at: **https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/6KHS9P2** .

Thank you for your support of the children of the Onteora Central School District and providing important information for the school district. A summary of the survey feedback will be included in the final study provided to the Board of Education at a future board meeting.

Survey Questions Begin Here

Q1: Prior to completing the survey, please select the choice below that most closely describes you. *Choose only one*.

□ Current student in the school district
□ Current parent/guardian
□ Community member or other
□ Teacher in Grade K-3
□ Teacher in Grade 4-6
□ Teacher in Grade 7-12
□ District staff other than teachers

Q2: What factors should be considered in determining grade level configuration and how school buildings are utilized? *The factors are listed in alphabetical order. Check all those that should be considered by the school district.*

- O Additional opportunities for student enrichment/acceleration
- O Community use of school buildings after school hours
- O Consistency of instruction and curriculum
- O Decline or Increase in student enrollment
- O Ensuring schools are fairly distributed geographically across the district
- O Impact on costs/effective use of public funds
- O Learning needs of children
- O Length of time on bus/number of bus runs
- O Maintaining neighborhood schools
- O Number of student transitions between school buildings K-12
- O Research on grade level configuration
- O Social/emotional needs of children
- O Space availability in each building/condition of building

Q3: The current Middle School is grades 7-8. Prior studies and committees suggested changing the grade configuration to either grades 5-8 or 6-8. Please feel free to comment in the text box below regarding the *advantages or disadvantages* of changing the Middle School grade configuration.

Q4: The six grade and building configurations listed below were selected by the consultant for the study. Please feel free to comment and provide your perspective on each one.

SCENARIO A: Make both Woodstock and Phoenicia grade K-5, *close Bennett*, make Middle School grades 6-8, and keep the High School 9-12.

SCENARIO B: Make both Woodstock and Phoenicia grade K-4, *close Bennett*, make Middle School grades 5-8, and keep High School 9-12

SCENARIO C: Maintain the present grade configuration in each school, grades K-3 at both Phoenicia and Woodstock, grades 4-6 at Bennett, grades 7-8 at the Middle School, and keep the high school 9-12.

SCENARIO D: Close both Woodstock and Phoenicia (grades K-3), *make Bennett elementary school K-5*, and make the Middle School grades 6-8, and keep High School 9-12.

SCENARIO E: Close both Woodstock and Phoenicia (K-3), *make Bennett grade K-4*, make Middle School 5-8, keep High School 9-12.

SCENARIO F: Close either Woodstock or Phoenicia (grades K-3), *maintain two elementary schools as grade K-5* with one being Bennett, make Middle School grades 6-8, keep High School grades 9-12

Q5: Please feel free to share any other thoughts regarding school building utilization and grade configurations.

Done - Click here when finished. Thank you for completing the survey. Please return this to the location where you took it or to the Onteora Central School District Central Office. Thank you!