



## PLYMOUTH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

CENTRAL OFFICE  
27 NORTH HARWINTON AVENUE  
TERRYVILLE, CONNECTICUT 06786

### MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of Plymouth Public Schools is to challenge, inspire, and prepare all students for success in an ever-changing and complex world.

SPECIAL MEETING  
PLYMOUTH BOARD OF EDUCATION  
TERRYVILLE HIGH SCHOOL  
AUDITORIUM  
33 NORTH HARWINTON AVENUE  
TERRYVILLE, CT 06786

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2019

7 P.M.

### MINUTES

Present: Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Kulesa, Mrs. Lucian, Mr. Showers, Mr. Bourbonniere, Mr. Foote, Mr. Elsaghir, Mrs. Kremmel and Mrs. Candrea-Florenciani

Others Present: Dr. Semmel, Superintendent of Schools

1. Call to Order & Pledge to the Flag

Mrs. Johnson called the meeting to order at 7 p.m. and the group joined in the Pledge to the Flag.

2. Adoption of the Agenda

MOTION: To adopt the agenda. Motion Mr. Foote, seconded Mrs. Kremmel, all in favor, any opposed, any abstentions, so moved.

Dr. Semmel – Welcome, I appreciate everybody taking the time to come out this evening and participate in this public forum. Before, I go too far, please pay attention to the emergency exits and where they are located. In addition, everyone please silence your cell phone so as not to disturb the meeting tonight. In terms of how we arrived here this evening, the Board of Education has been very proactive and has been paying attention to the school enrollment and for the past couple of years we have been trying to do this facilities study. However, due to budgetary reasons, we ended up having to cut that particular study. This year we have been able to complete the study. We worked and contracted with the New England School Development Council (NESDEC) to do both a detailed demographic study and a facility study where they looked at each of our schools programs, spoke with the principals. What we are going to hear tonight is five of the options that NESDEC is putting forth as options that the Board can consider. These are not the only options the Board can consider, there are other options as well that can be brought to the table and discussed as we move forward. Currently, it is important that the Board simply listen and receive feedback on the options. Tonight is not about any type of decision. It is just about listening and hearing from the public. Since these are the Plymouth Schools, we want to make certain the public has an opportunity to share their thoughts with the Board.

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Mrs. Johnson, Board of Education Chair – Each option of the five the Superintendent spoke about will be given 10 minutes of comments and/or questions. There are two podiums, please sign in name and address. We are sticking to one minute per person because there are five options and the Board wants to make certain that we are watching the time and no one is getting home late. There is going to be time at the end if anyone has follow-up questions or if there are general questions that are not about the actual options. Everything will be recorded. The Board will review the questions and make comments later on. The public will receive something but it will not be tonight. This is not at all tonight a decision day. This is just hearing from the public, parents and taxpayers. This is important to everyone and the Board does not want to make any type of decision too quickly.

Dr. Semmel – Just to make certain if you did get all of the materials, there is a lengthy document, which is the presentation that will be reviewed tonight and there is a two sided document that has the times that we are trying to stick by and on the reverse side is a summary of all five options. All of this information is on our website as well.

Mrs. Johnson – Mrs. Kulesa will be the timekeeper so that everyone is kept on track.

3. Review of Enrollment and Building Capacity by Mr. John Kennedy, M.A., Consultant and Dr. Karen LeDuc, Ph.D., Consultant both from NESDEC

Mr. Kennedy, Consultant– A brief summary will be provided of the demographic analysis, enrollment history and projections, and capacity analysis. The presentation will move right into options one by one with a opportunity for the public to comment.

#### Introduction

The goal of the project was to provide a basis for decision-making regarding future grade level re-configurations, building renovations and/or construction and alternative facility use.

Scope – Three major components: (1) Enrollment Trend Analysis (analyzed District and municipal records and data provided by Town Officials and local realtors); (2) Instructional Program Review and Facility Best Use Analysis (primarily visited with each of the schools, while in session, and the building principal and discussed goals, curriculum and various upcoming possibilities with regard to program). This report did not include a capital asset assessment, however, included in the report was information that was received from the building principals throughout the district with regards to maintenance and capital improvement needs); and (3) Development of a set of options. When enrollment projections are taken and then tie them into the capacity analysis that enables one to review potential options.

IMPORTANT – The alternatives that are being presented include a bulleted outline description of each option as well as a listing of advantages and challenges. The options are designed to serve as a catalyst for further analysis and discussion. Therefore, this document should be considered not as an end product, but rather as a beginning point for future planning.

Key Points to Demographic Analysis – (a) Enrollment Trend Analysis (Residential Sales Outlook – Plymouth is likely to experience accelerated housing turnover during the course of the next decade. Factors include National and Regional Factors – “Baby Boomer Generation & the Millennial Generation”); (b) Residential Sales and Real Estate Information – (pricing for single family homes is below the \$220,000 range exceeds affordability for many Millennials); (c) Additional Residential and Realtor Information (Realtors have indicated that sales volume continues to be very high, days on the market, multiple bids, Boomers downsizing and Millennials buying under \$220,000)

Assumptions – (1) Existing single-family sales will continue at a strong rate within the community; (2) The realtor information (existing sales are still strong) and the Planning Department information indicating there are no major projects coming down the road and (3) A continued economic stability on the national and regional levels.

Enrollment History and Enrollment Projections – Over the past ten years, the enrollment declined by 431 students within the district, i.e., 141 at 9 – 12; 121 at 6 – 8 and 169 at K – 5. The future indicates a continued



decline in enrollment over the course of the next 10 years. However, the decline will be 177 K – 12 as opposed to the 431 that was seen in the past decade. The decline will be primarily occurring at the high school but also to a certain extent 7 – 8 and to a certain extent K – 6, it will be a less significant decline.

Dr. Karen LeDuc, Consultant – Capacity Analysis

(a) School Facilities Review

- Instructional Spaces
- Core Facilities
- Administrative Spaces
- Support Staff
- Instructional/Administrative Technology
- ADA/Handicapped Access
- Major Systems and Maintenance
- Site Information
- Storage

During this portion of the presentation, Dr. LeDuc will only highlight areas that were noted as needs improvement. A full accounting of the NESDEC findings can be found in the August 14, 2019 Plymouth, CT School presentation.

Highlights of Harry S. Fisher Elementary School, Plymouth Center School, Eli Terry Jr. Middle School and Terryville High School were presented.

Option 1

- Consider reconfiguring elementary schools to specific grade span schools, PK-2 and 3 – 5
- Grade level alignment
  - Grades PK-2 at Plymouth Center School
  - Grades 3 – 5 at Harry S. Fisher Elementary School
  - Remains the same - Eli Terry Jr. Middle School
  - Remains the Same – Terryville High School

Option 2

- Consider closure of an elementary school and reconfigure elementary to PK-3, moving Grades 4 and 5 to Eli Terry Jr. Middle School and Grades 7 and 8 to Terryville High School
- Grade Level alignment
  - Grades PK -3 at Harry S. Fisher Elementary School or PK – 3 at Plymouth Center School
  - Grades 4 – 6 at Eli Terry Jr. Middle School
  - Grades 7 – 12 at Terryville High School

Option 3

- Consider closure of an elementary school, moving Grades 4 and 5 to Eli Terry Jr. Middle School and Grade 8 to Terryville High School
- Grade level alignment
  - Grades PK-3 at Harry S. Fisher Elementary School or PK-3 at Plymouth Center School
  - Grades 4 -7 at Eli Terry Jr. Middle School
  - Grades 8 – 12 at Terryville High School

Option 4

- Consider closure of Eli Terry Jr. Middle School, moving Grades 7 – 8 to Terryville High School and Grade 6 to the neighborhood elementary school
- Grade level alignment
  - Grades K – 6 at Harry S. Fisher Elementary School
  - Grades PK – 6 at Plymouth Center School
  - Grades 7 – 12 at Terryville High School

Option 5

- Consider closure of Eli Terry Jr. Middle School, moving Grades 7 – 8 to Terryville High School and Grade 6 to the elementary school; consider reconfiguring elementary schools to grade spans PK – 2 and 3 – 6.
- Grade level alignment
  - Grades PK – 2 at Plymouth Center School
  - Grades 3 – 6 at Harry S. Fisher Elementary School
  - Grades 7 – 12 at Terryville High School

#### Public Questions/Comments

#### OPTION 1 – Consider reconfiguring elementary schools to specific grade span schools, PK-2 and 3 - 5

Candace Telke – 82 Ridge Road – This option is the only one I would consider staying in town for. She is not against regionalization. This option would allow for regionalization eventually. It is hard to speak about one option without speaking about the others. This is the only option that keeps kids with appropriate aged children. You have Option 2, 4 and 5 that put 12 year olds with 18 year olds. There is no way that my kids who are almost 11 and 12 years old are ready to be with seniors in the high school. It is not something that I would ever allow. Even Option 3, which is probably the only second best option, but I would still probably move. You have 8 – 12 year olds. I would not have allowed my 8-year-old son to hang around with 12 year olds. It is not something that I want for my kids. I moved back to this town because I wanted a small classroom. I did not want an 18-kid PreK classroom. I think that first option would be more beneficial to the town because it gets kids back together.

#### OPTION 2 – Consider closure of an elementary school and reconfigure elementary to PK-3, moving Grades 4 and 5 to the Eli Terry Jr. Middle School and Grades 7 and 8 to Terryville High School

Candace Telke – 82 Ridge Road – Ms. Telke asked if the Board is going to look at these questions. She wants the Board to think about these things. We would no longer have Ed Advance and Head Start preschool programs, if this option were to happen. We would have 4 to 6 graders, which are ages 8 – 12 year olds, in a space that was originally designed for high schoolers. We would still need to reconfigure (inaudible) to a high school that we just built. This does not sound economical to me.

Jacob Zappone – 29 Altair Avenue – Speaking from a student's perspective, how would the high school accommodate kids 12 – 18 because right now it seems a little unaccommodating for kids 14 – 18. It seems as if there is too big of a division. How does this fiscally make sense to do all of these renovations? Moving middle school sports to the high school would be a cost of building new fields because we already currently share fields with other sports during the year. How does that make sense for this question?

Dr. Semmel – As we listen to the public comment tonight, there will be more meetings the Board will need to have about these options. Therefore, those types of questions need to be discussed.

Jacob Zappone – Just seems that these questions are going to arise for every single option but Option 1.

Dr. Semmel – Could be. But bringing up some things that have already been considered but have not been fully discussed by the Board because that is not where we are at at this time. Those are things I have certainly thought about and I have heard others talk about seventh graders being in the high school and what would that actually look like. So, if we really start the planning, and you've heard NESDEC speak about this earlier, this is not a next year decision. All those questions need to be thoroughly vetted and it has to be clear to the Board when they make a decision, whatever that decision is, that they know what the plan is going to look like going forward. This is very detailed.

Jacob Zappone – Although it will not affect me, just wondering for future reference.

Dr. LeDuc – (NESDEC) Just to reiterate, these options are just a starting point. Any option that may be considered would take 1 to 2 years. (Inaudible).

#### OPTION 3



Consider closure of an elementary school, moving Grades 4 and 5 to Eli Terry Jr. Middle School and Grade 8 to Terryville High School.

Meredith Patel – 2 Fairview Avenue Ext. – If we are closing EdAdvance (inaudible) and the Head Start PreK programs – how would that effect our Board of Education PreK classes.

Regarding fourth graders mixed in with middle schoolers, if correct, the middle schoolers ride the busses with the high schoolers, so does that mean there will be fourth graders on the busses with eighth graders because that is incredibly concerning.

Mrs. Johnson (BOE Chair) – The bus question has come up a couple of times at PTA meetings. We have not quite gotten there yet. But, this is one of the biggest concerns we are hearing about. So, I asked Mr. Hendrickson, to start looking into this matter. We will have some type of answers about projections and how it might happen but that is probably step 50 versus step 2. However, it is a legitimate question that many have already asked. I appreciate you bringing this up because it is a big deal.

#### OPTION 4

Consider closure of Eli Terry Jr. Middle School, moving Grades 7 – 8 to Terryville High School and Grade 6 to the neighborhood elementary school.

Candace Telke – 82 Ridge Road – Grouping PreK with eleven year olds, a huge age gap. Grouping the high school (12 – 18 year olds) is an inappropriate integration of ages.

Increasing class sizes – At the high school level, possibly offering on-line courses, offering courses intermittently. What will this do to the appeal this town has?

What is going to happen to the Special Education that this town is known for if you are grouping these age groups together?

Aaron Witick – 10 Harwinton Avenue – How would the closure of Eli Terry Jr. Middle School affect other middle school students?

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – Are you talking about their ages?

Aaron Witick – Yes

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – They would be split. Some of them would go back down to the elementary schools. The older ones would go to the high school. How this would affect them, we actually do not know the answer.

Aaron Witick – The room for the nurse's office, library, special education (inaudible).

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – yes

#### OPTION 5

Consider closure of Eli Terry Jr. Middle School, moving Grades 7 – 8 to Terryville High School and Grade 6 to the elementary school; consider reconfiguring elementary schools to grade spans PK – 2 and 3 – 6.

Candace Telke – 82 Ridge Road – Reconfiguring the entire roadway, if the middle school were to close. How would the property be marketed? Interested to see the operational savings (vs) the cost associated to make these accommodations, i.e. to the fields, to the school. Huge cost to relocate fields, adding fields, adding stands. How far would the operational savings take us as far as the costs?

Mr. Kennedy – NESDEC – Something that would be developed utilizing an analysis of the budget and also an analysis based on the facilities study with regard to the middle school in terms of what could be needed over the course of the next several years in terms of upgrades and that would have to be factored in. This is typically what a district would do as they were exploring the possibilities.

Aaron Witick – 10 Harwinton Avenue – EdAdvance and Head Start (inaudible)

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – If we took out EdAdvance and Head Start out of our building, there is no plan at this point to put them anywhere.

Aaron Witick – 10 Harwinton Avenue – Art and Music (inaudible)

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – We do not know that yet. That is something that would be the next step for us, cost analysis. If you are asking about space for our Art and Music, we would have to look at everything, i.e. do we need to expand (possibly). But those are a lot of steps for later. But it is a good question. Those are some of the things we will talk about.

#### OPENED UP TO GENERAL COMMENTS REGARDING ANY OF THE OPTIONS

Kelly Accetura – 490 North Street – Ms. Accetura thanked the Board for explaining all of the options, writing them down for the public and giving the public a good idea of what the starting point is before the possibility of change. She would like to add an OPTION 6 – No changes at all. She is not in favor of changing anything. If the goal is to try and save money, she does not feel any of the changes really do that because there are so many costs associated with making these changes. If the decision were to close a school, what would happen with that savings i.e. go back to the Board of Education budget or would it be used in other ways in the town? She is concerned if there is an influx of families coming into town and we close a school and make all these changes, then we could be dealt with the situation years down the road, now we need the space back again and to try to obtain the funds and the money would be a very difficult task considering so much money has already been cut for the Board of Education Budget. There is no glaring evidence in any of these reports that say, “Yes, we should definitely do this”. There is nothing obvious to her that shows this is the right thing to do for our town and for our students. None of these options shows significant savings. She is concerned about large class sizes. She feels this does not make sense economically, as we have cut enough already. We are just taking away more from the kids in our town.

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – Option 6 is always an option. These are recommendations. Actually, the Board can make their own options, but that is always on the horizon. If the Board decided it was not in the best interest, the Board could also do that. Thank you.

Erica Lumbard – 28 Burnham Street – Option 2, Thomaston currently does this and it seems to be working for them. It is all the same grade level. Option 3 – Wouldn't it be better to keep grades 4 – 7 in the other elementary building, as opposed to Eli Terry. This would be more to their age level rather than the high school building. Eli Terry was originally built as a high school. Options 1, 4 & 5 – The situation currently with PreK at Plymouth Center School, Fisher parents scurrying back and forth to pick-up their PreK child to get to Fisher on time because dismissal for both are at the same time.

Jacob Zappone – Regarding students perspective, if these options were being considered further, how will a student's perspective be involved in the decision-making? He does not think any student in the high school would agree with Options 2 – 5. He does not think there would be student support. Where would the funds originate for the reconfigurations because this is almost a multi-million dollar project when it comes to athletic fields, a possible gym to accommodate students from other schools to keep the grades separate? Where would the funds originate from that and how would the student's perspective be taken into consideration if they were to be taken?

Dr. Semmel – Superintendent – Good point about student voices. Interestingly enough, the students who would probably be effected the most are young so they would have a more difficult time expressing their thoughts and really being able to think about it. So, we would really need folks, like yourself, i.e. Student



Council, Leo students, who may not be impacted, but they see how their town could be impacted in the future. Dr. Semmel thinks the Board would want to hear from students.

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – Since the decision is going to affect the younger kids, the Board does want the opinion of students. These children know what it is like to grow up in this town. She would also like to look to the middle school principal and indicate that there is leadership now, the students in leadership programs and the Board would like to hear from them, get their perspective and, of course, what it is like to be in this town. It is vitally important. The Board does not want to exclude them at all.

Dr. Semmel – Superintendent - One thing about sports, this does not mean the district will need to build new facilities. The question is, how do you insure that middle school students and high school students have a place to play?

Jacob Zappone – Student (inaudible) Additional charges to bus students to a different field for practice every day.

Dr. Semmel – There are schools that do it but it does not mean that this is necessarily right for our town. So it does not mean that we just have to build, build, build to get it done. It is looking at the situation creatively what is offered. If an option were explored deeply, this would need to be included. The Board wants to be sure there is plenty of access for the sports that we have, both boys and girls. There needs to be equal access, etc. This would all be included in the thought process.

Candace Telke – 82 Ridge Road – In summary, she would be interested to get the perspective of the Thomaston Board of Education to see how it is working out for their district. Just to clarify what Ms. Lumbard brought up regarding PreK will not affect Options 1, 4 & 5. Ms. Telke indicated would effect Options 1 & 5 but not Option 4.

Mrs. Johnson – BOE Chair – Questions to Ms. Lumbard, Did you indicate because there is not a PreK in both elementary schools, there is a difference because the Board does have the option there for a PreK but your point was you would like to see both schools have a PreK?

Erica Lumbard – 28 Burnham St – Even if there were only one PreK, there would need to be method where parents would not have to rush back and forth.

Dr. Semmel – Superintendent – When you consider a PreK 2, 3 & 5 Options, there would be more families. The Board would need to discuss the time when those schools would begin. The schools would not be able to begin at the same time because parents cannot be at two places at once.

Candace Telke – She thinks one would end up in a logistical situation about bussing students. Example, if a 4 year old would be bussed, but in the same family, the 5<sup>th</sup> grader would be dropped off, due to the proximity to the schools. It is also all a preference, if a parent chooses to bus or not bus their child. If there were an influx in the population and the Board chose any of the options mentioned and people decided to leave the town because of the Board's choice, there is already a projection of a decrease in enrollment. What if the Board then, in turn, (inaudible) by doing any of these options. On the record, Ms. Telke, thanked the Board for having this study prepared because it is very interesting. Transitioning a child from an elementary school to a middle school is difficult.

Catherine Kadrle - 186 Allen Street – Ms. Kadrle feels there is missing information, i.e. opinions and input from the child psychologist, school psychologist, how this (inaudible) would affect the community. She indicated she has heard input from administrators, who work closely with these children, to know how they feel it would affect the community. In terms of which schools to close, she assumes the Board has risk assessments from the police department as to the access to evacuation in an emergency (inaudible). Perhaps the Board may want to look for feedback from Farmington as to the advantages and disadvantages from the community, parents, and administration. Ms. Kadrle would strongly advocate for maintaining preschool options with the community. Some individuals are unable to send their child to a \$1,600 preschool. Having

this as an option is important. Ms. Kadrle appreciates the idea of 8<sup>th</sup> graders having access to high school level programming. (Inaudible) She would definitely not appreciate the advanced courses, AP Courses, taken on-line. She does not believe this is the best learning environment. (Inaudible). She assumes, if the projections are correct and over time the population does decrease to a certain amount to allow for that cushion that the loss (inaudible) reappropriate classrooms would then be allocated as perhaps they previously were or in a manner that is suited to that time (inaudible). She asked, why, specifically are only Options 1 and 3 appropriate for future regionalization. She is not discounting regionalization. She thinks if regionalization would provide further services and expand services to our students that would be great because there are surrounding communities that offer more AP and more services at the end of the student spectrum.

Dr. LeDuc – Consultant, NESDEC – If you look at the way excess capacity is allocated in Options 1 and 3 there is enough excess capacity should the District determine to regionalize. We are not saying how many students that could be. We would look at the excess capacity and determine if you could regionalize with another district. So when all 5 options were reviewed, we thought of Options 1 and 3 would be conducive to regionalization should the district decide to do that.

Catherine Kadrle – Would you not also have the schools that are currently in the other school districts utilize as well provided this loss of student population is not just within this town. Guesses it would depend on where you (inaudible).

Dr. LeDuc – Exactly it depends.

Dr. Semmel – Final Comments

Mr. Kennedy – NESDEC wanted to provide to the district an objective view in terms of what the capacity analysis vs. enrollments and what the strengths and challenges would be, tied to each of the options. They wanted to make certain that this was the objective approach. As stated, these are beginning points for further discussion with the district. Discussion begins, input from the public is very valuable. There are districts throughout New England that have pursued various aspects of these options. It ends up what the community thinks and also what the circumstances are within the district.

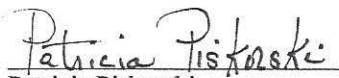
Dr. Semmel – In conclusion, thank you to John Kennedy and Dr. LeDuc for putting all of the work together along with their teams. This provides us a great deal of information looking forward. Closing a school is not an easy thing to do. There are other factors to consider. The Board wants to think about this judiciously and take all pieces into account. Cannot predict where this will go. Everyone's input is important. This is on Face Book Live and it will be placed on UTube. My secretary will try to prepare a transcript. The Board will work on the next step as to where to proceed.

5. Public Comment  
None

6. Adjournment

MOTION: Motion to adjourn at 8:42 p.m. Motion Mr. Showers, seconded Mrs. Kremmel, all in favor, any opposed, any abstentions. Thank you very much.

Respectfully Submitted



Patricia Piskorski  
Recording Secretary  
Plymouth Board of Education