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Frequently Asked Questions Related to the Reshaping Plan

I am concerned that 7th and 8th graders would be losing the opportunity to develop and grow in an age-appropriate space. How would you ensure that they would have this opportunity in the high school building?

If the Reshaping Plan is implemented, all district staff members will be aware of the need to support our 7th and 8th grade students as they transition to the high school building. We understand the importance of providing these students with an age-appropriate space to develop which is why these students would have separate classes, as well as a separate lunch period, from students in grades 9-12. Their core classes would be housed in separate wings/hallways. Our counseling staff – as well as our teaching and support staff – would continue to develop and foster relationships with students. They would check in with students who appear to be struggling, and they would establish an environment in which students feel comfortable sharing their concerns. We would provide targeted supervision of students to ensure interactions are appropriate. We would continue to intentionally plan for and support the social and emotional growth of our students. 7th and 8th graders would continue to have access to age-appropriate extracurricular activities that provide them with leadership opportunities. We are also leveraging our neighboring districts who have also combined these grades to learn what best practices they have identified in supporting students during transition and preserving the experience of these grades/ages. We completely understand the value of the strong community we have in Sauquoit Valley, and we absolutely would preserve that through this transition.

I am concerned that the BOCES program that would be housed in the middle school building would present a safety or security threat to others in the building. What specific BOCES programs would be housed in the middle school, and how would you ensure the safety and security of those in the middle school building?

The safety and security of our students and staff is our top priority. We have and would continue to collaborate with our partners from BOCES to ensure that any rented space remains safe and secure for all. This would include a requirement for BOCES to provide sufficient staff and resources to establish and maintain a safe, appropriate environment for learning. BOCES would likely be placing a special education program in the middle school. They will not place a behavior-based or alternative education program in the middle school.

Why can't you share all of the specifics of the proposal prior to the Board of Education making a final decision on whether to proceed with the Reshaping Plan?

Budget projections cannot be confirmed until the state budget passes which will not occur until April. Scheduling and space specifics cannot be completely determined until all students have completed the course request process for next school year; this process typically ends in the spring, but it is being accelerated this year given the circumstances. We cannot wait until the spring to make a decision on whether to proceed with the Reshaping Plan since considerable work would need to occur prior to that if we are going to proceed. With that said, we can confirm that the plan would have a considerably positive impact on district finances (between \$300,000 and \$500,000 of revenue/savings in the first year), and we can confirm that we have the space and scheduling capacity to make the plan work and improve program offerings for students.

I am concerned that this decision is all about money and not about students' best interests.

Any decision that is based on the need to preserve funding is made so that we can have sufficient funds to preserve and hopefully expand the programs and services that directly benefit students. In other words, financial decisions are student decisions; we want to maximize our revenues so that we can continue to offer our students an outstanding educational experience.

Is the district in immediate financial jeopardy, or is this purely preventative?

The district has not been contacted by any agency or department of New York State regarding the need to merge or consolidate. With that said, the district is projecting a budget deficit of approximately \$1,000,000 for the coming school year. Our 2025-26 budget projects \$27,187,654 in expenditures; next year's projected budget, maintaining current programming, includes \$28,541,079 in expenditures (a 4.98% increase). The Governor is proposing a 1% increase in our Foundation Aid which would equate to \$96,217. To put this into perspective, this figure would pay for approximately 15% of our health insurance cost increase. The Reshaping Plan is a preventative attempt to remodel our district configuration in a way that will strengthen our district's programs and strengthen our financial standing and long-term viability. If we do not proceed with the Reshaping plan, the district will still need to address the existing financial gap, and the most effective option available would involve reductions in staff.

Will this plan actually reduce property taxes, or will it simply slow down future increases?

Our state and federal aid sources are projected to remain largely stagnant or possibly even decline over the next few years. Costs are expected to rise at a rate higher than our aid increases. As stated above, our projected increase in Foundation Aid next year is 1% which is approximately one-third the rate of inflation, and many of our costs are increasing at a rate higher than inflation. We already operate on a comparatively lean budget; we spend approximately \$2,000 less per student per year than the average Oneida County district, and we spend approximately \$7,000 less per student per year than the average district in New York State. We want to maintain a high-quality education for our students and recognize the need to balance educational quality with taxpayer impact. Our goal with the Reshaping Plan is to slow future tax increases. If we proceed with the plan, we anticipate proposing continued modest annual tax increases in order to provide our students with the educational program that they deserve.

Would this reorganization lead to layoffs, or would positions be eliminated through attrition?

No one would lose their job as a result of the Reshaping. The plan would afford more opportunities for reduction through attrition over time. Each possible instance of reduction through attrition will be analyzed to ensure that we maintain a high-quality program for our students.

What alternative revenue strategies were evaluated before proposing the Reshaping Plan?

We are always seeking to maximize our revenues. Some strategies for doing so include the following. Certain expenditures for goods and services generate state aid, typically through shared agreements with our local BOCES. We are always looking to maximize our aidable expenditures. We have increased our pursuit of grants in recent years (examples: a grant to support our partnership with the School and Business Alliance, a grant to support our wellness series, and a grant to support an expansion of the elementary playground), and we have also proceeded with difficult program reductions. Specifically, we have eliminated the following positions over the last three years: elementary teacher, middle school social studies teacher, teaching assistant, and a reading teacher. Additionally, we have pursued unique opportunities to raise revenues including hosting regional summer school programs, and we are currently researching the possibility of hosting a special education program in our district that would reduce costs and increase revenues.

Instead of vacating the middle school, could the district lease out specific "wings" or unused classrooms across all three buildings to BOCES?

The advantages of transitioning to two buildings include fewer teachers traveling between buildings and more scheduling flexibility (which increases instructional sections and time for students), greater opportunity for savings through attrition, greater opportunity for teacher/staff collaboration, and increased student access to librarians and counselors. Additionally, a single-site lease is more attractive to BOCES because it allows them to keep their program contained in one location. By vacating the middle school, there would be greater potential for us to realize more revenue from the lease.

Why can't you move the 5th and 6th graders back to the elementary school first and then move the 7th and 8th graders in phase 2?

Transitioning the 7th and 8th graders to the high school building next year would afford the district more immediate benefits, including several of the benefits identified above (more scheduling flexibility leading to more opportunities for students, greater opportunity for savings through attrition, increased student access to a librarian). Also, this option would not require us to modify transportation routes next year.

Why don't you just move all the students at once?

We understand the gravity of this proposed move and want to be intentionally strategic with our use of resources. Our first goal would be to successfully transition the 7th and 8th graders to the high school building. We would then shift to transitioning the 5th and 6th graders. We don't want to try to do too much all at once and spread our resources too thin. Transitioning grade levels in phases would reduce the costs related to the transition (example: moving costs). The timeline of when we would transition the 5th and 6th graders to the elementary school would depend on the perceived readiness of our community (students, staff, parents, and community members) for that transition as well as the availability of an expanded lease of the middle school building.

Why was this proposal introduced after the Capital Project vote?

The work being done as part of the Capital Project addresses foundational infrastructure needs that were identified through our ongoing consultation with our architects. The vast majority of the work being done is not related to the Reshaping Plan. There is a portion of funds associated with the Capital Project that could be used for building modifications to account for the Reshaping, if necessary. As logistics are worked out through ongoing collaboration with stakeholders (including room needs, scheduling, etc.), decisions regarding those funds will be finalized. Ultimately, community input will factor into the decision of whether to proceed with the Reshaping Plan.

How can a single principal manage the logistics and safety of two separate buildings or a significantly larger 7-12 population?

We would maintain the same level of building administration if we were to proceed with the Reshaping Plan. Mr. Madden would continue to serve as the supervisor of 5-8 staff and as the principal of 5-8 students. He would maintain a regular presence in both buildings and would collaborate with other administrators as well as other staff, as necessary, to ensure that each student is appropriately supported.

How would the workload of teachers and support staff be affected by the transition?

The Reshaping would have positive effects on teacher/staff scheduling such as: fewer teachers having to travel between buildings, more opportunities for teacher/staff collaboration, and opportunities for additional sections, courses, and/or support periods. The idea is to align staff more efficiently with our enrollment and to give more students access to more staff members, thereby providing a more supportive educational experience.

Would the Middle School gym remain available for Sauquoit sports?

Yes, we would maintain the ability to utilize the middle school gymnasium and athletic fields.

Will the community vote on whether to proceed with the Reshaping Plan?

There are particular decisions that require the community's approval in the form of a referendum (examples: annual budget, capital projects, bus purchases). Other decisions are under the authority of the elected Board of Education members. This is a decision that will rest with the Board of Education.

We certainly value the input of all stakeholders, including all members of our community. We thank you for providing your feedback, and please trust that it will factor into the Board's decision. Please note that a second community survey is now available [by clicking here](#), and we encourage members of the public to complete it. Thank you again for serving as a partner in education!