**Community Forum – Feasibility Study/Consolidation Feedback**

August 11, 2026

***Prepared by***: Crystal Irdi, Board Secretary
***Approved by***: Dr. William Kerr, Court-Appointed Receiver
Dr. John Hansen, Chief Recovery Officer
Dr. Sue Mariani, Superintendent

Dr. John Hansen, Chief Recovery Officer and Liaison for the Duquesne City School District, introduced himself and read a prepared statement, including an update about the state-mandated Feasibility Study sanctioned by Act 47 of 2025 (see attached.)

***Questions / Comments / Feedback:***

SPEAKER 1: Lifelong resident, community advocate and Former Mayor of the City of Duquesne. The consolidation concerns go beyond educational issues. Significant safety concerns regarding students being educated outside of the community. If the community and District were provided with the equitable distribution of funding as promised to the Mon Valley, the financial outlook wouldn't be as concerning.

SPEAKER 2: Long time resident and have worked directly with the District at various times and for varying reasons. There is nothing wrong with this School District, its staff or the community. This school gives the community an identity which the community doesn't want to lose. Allegheny Co. has 43 school district's which is inefficient but it's too late to change now; each of these school district's provide their communities with their identities. Inquired if the consolidated school district will continue to use the school building.

DR. HANSEN: Yes. It will still be a public school.

SPEAKER 2: There are transportation concerns – students won't be able to walk to school. The District has had struggles with operational efficiency/capacity and consistency of educational programming; The other school district's do not offer good programs. This is being done despite what the School Board wants. The consolidation doesn't make sense and it needs fixed.

SPEAKER 3: Concerned with the student-to-teacher classroom ratio; how a consolidation would affect their ability to get into college; and, transportation concerns.

SPEAKER 4: Inquired about where Duquesne resident taxes will go.

DR. HANSEN: School taxes will go to McKeesport (or the consolidated school district); the funds follow the student.

SPEAKER 5: Concerned that if a consolidation occurs students will be discriminated against, have limited exposure to African American staff and culture, and disproportionate assessment of special education categorization.

SPEAKER 5: The District is running out of funding due to high tuition costs of secondary students.

SPEAKER 5: With all of the community banks and stores closed, the school is all the community has left. "We are Duquesne."

SPEAKER 6: Lifelong resident. The funding spent educating District students elsewhere should be spent to keep them in Duquesne. Money shouldn't be spent at other school districts to educate our students. The community already has next to nothing to look forward to. The School District shouldn't be closed – why not invest in us?

SPEAKER 7: This school has been under the state ruling for over 20 years. Testing scores haven't changed during this time. Who do we blame for the grades? Focus should be on increasing academics and alternative ways to teach. Instead of a Feasibility Study for Consolidation or funds spent on new technology, a study of how the District can increase proficiencies would have been time and money better spent.

SPEAKER 7: Like West Mifflin and East Allegheny, McKeesport only sees dollar signs – they are already planning on renovations.

SPEAKER 8: Alumni, past employee of 30 years and a past union president; has seen a lot of turn over in administration and curriculum over the years. Duquesne offers good teachers; administration needs to be consistent and accountable.

SPEAKER 9: Alumni and resident; inquired how does merging (2) academically struggling school district's help Duquesne students? Is this what is best for our students academically or is this decision being made because it's best financially for the state? Show us the numbers.

SPEAKER 10: Other districts have larger numbers to balance academic testing scales. Standardized testing isn't for everyone.

SPEAKER 10: These are our kids; will Duquesne be represented and by who?

SPEAKER 10: What grade levels will be moved? What happens to those grade level teachers?

DR. HANSEN: Yes, Duquesne will have representation. We want K-8 to stay here but some grade reconfiguration will most likely occur. For example, the school is reconfigured to a K-4, then staff who teach 5 – 8 will move with those grades.

SPEAKER 9: What happens if this plan fails in 5 years? What's the recourse?

DR. HANSEN: That's a consideration. We keep hearing that our parents want to have K-8 here.

SPEAKER 10: As a community how do we maintain a voice for our children?

DR. HANSEN: That is a consideration too.

SPEAKER 11: We do not receive input regarding students at West Mifflin now. Students can't learn where they are not wanted. Forced mergers make the students feel unwanted, parents / community members didn't get a vote as to which school district would be consolidated. What protects the students from adverse experiences?

SPEAKER 11: What stops the consolidated district from changing the grade configuration later? The 'would haves, should haves and I don't knows' are unacceptable.

SPEAKER 12: Staff member; disappointed that representation from the Department of Education is not present. Info is power even if there is not a lot right now. Encouraged the community to call / email / write local legislators to do what they can to make sure their (community) voice is heard.

SPEAKER 13: The legislation regarding this consolidation is predatory; it only affects (2) school districts in the state – Duquesne and Wilkinsburg. Both districts are traditionally economically poor and not doing well academically. The District has a positive fund balance. This law assumes the community can't bring business in nor continue to pay for a school district when closing the school district will hinder new businesses from forming. Additionally, if the cost of tuition is $16,000 per student now, it's still going to be $16,000 if they are being educated by McKeesport. If the community can't pay, then someone has to pay. We have to fight, even if we don't win.

DR. HANSEN: Would like to share that Reverand Eric Ewell, Sonya Gooden and Patricia Bluett are Duquesne representatives on the Feasibility Study Advisory Committee. The Committee will help keep information channels in the community open and will get us through this.

SPEAKER 14: White Oak resident. If secondary students are already being educated by West Mifflin and East Allegheny, what are they doing wrong that now the whole District may be moved to McKeesport? If you have 400-500 kids thriving in the elementary school, it doesn't make any sense to move those students. Why aren't you looking at a school district that is high scoring and financially secure? It doesn't appear that the state wants to keep the current Duquesne building.

DR. HANSEN: As it stands, all of the teachers and administrations will be here in the building with the students.

SPEAKER 15: Alumni of 1966, District spent $60 mil on renovations in the late 1990s; inquired if the financing is still affecting the District today; [***Admin Response***: No]. The community was given an opportunity to have input and approve the implementation of a special curriculum plan which ended up not being implemented.

SPEAKER 16: Alumni of 1989; non-resident; President/Founding CEO of Black Women's Policy. The Forum wouldn't have occurred if it wasn't for Black Women's Policy and other local community group involvement. How can the Department of Education assure the community that they can stay involved, have a voice and stay informed. This is not a done deal; encouraged expressing voice(s) to local legislators and Department representatives.

SPEAKER 17: Lifelong resident of Duquesne. Board Director; Disappointed that PA Department of Education representation was not present. Encouraged community attendance to Board meetings to stay informed. They occur consistently throughout the year. Hold people accountable.

SPEAKER 18: Board Director. Does not have confidence in the District's ability to raise test scores. Duquesne student test scores were last statewide. Told the community to think with their heads and not hearts.

SPEAKER 19: Board Director; asked the community to work with the District and to call upon local legislators. Through the Democratic party, collaboration began successfully a few years ago and then dropped off. Through efforts with another local school, and with her direct involvement, the Board of the Steel Center CTE was able to obtain over $4 mil in funding. Don't give up – don't give up on our children – don't give up on our town. We can do it if we work together.

SPEAKER 20: Staff member, union president and McKeesport resident. What is happening with the information being learning tonight and will it be shared with PDE. When is a public forum happening again. No one from PDE is here. What are building grade configurations going to be like.

DR. HANSEN: Somone is taking notes. The next meeting for the Feasibility study will be in early September and late September; dates and times are to be determined. We'll utilized the collected notes. Encouraged the community to use the provided QRC to submit statements / questions to PDE in response to any update provided. Updates will be posted on the District website.

SPEAKER 21: When secondary students were sent to West Mifflin, taxes surged. With the consolidation, more students in the classroom. Duquesne offers smaller class sizes, which is especially needed for special education students. We have students who are meeting expectations, the staff here make meaningful contributions in their lives. Special Education doesn't seem to be a consideration.

SPEAKER 22: Recent retired employee and District parent. A lot is being said about low test scores; can attest that own child was in the gifted program and excelled at Duquesne and currently excels within West Mifflin. Is there a time line / time frame on how long this process will be. As a community will there be a vote of a small group who votes for the whole.

DR. HANSEN: The project team will make a recommendation to the advisory committee. Any consolidation that has to be done will need to done through legislation. We have the opportunity and time now to do the right thing.

SPEAKER 23: Board Director and lifelong resident; encouraged community attendance at Board meetings and city council meetings – periods of public comments that could make a difference. Directors are always happy to see and hear from the community. Asked if there will be periodic meetings like this forum?

SPEAKER 24: Board Director; asked how the Board Directors and community make legislators come to Duquesne? How do we get their attention? They are already not listening to us. We voted for them and they don't do anything.

SPEAKER 25: Six children have attended the school. Grandchildren currently attend Duquesne. Legislators aren't present – they've already made their decision. We are voicing our opinions on deaf ears. No one attends school/district/city council meetings because nothing changes. It's frustrating for us and our children.

SPEAKER 25: We need dates, accountability and PDE / Legislators who can answer questions. Not a single question was answered tonight. These are our children on the line. Duquesne Dukes – amen.

DR. HANSEN: Closed the forum with a 'thank you' and encouraged attendance to future meetings.

The Forum concluded at 7:30 PM

# Duquesne City School District Journey

Since 2000, the Duquesne City School District has operated under fiscal distress or financial recovery oversight. Additionally, in 2007, Duquesne's high school program was curtailed, and its high school students began attending West Mifflin Area School District or East Allegheny School District on a tuition basis under Section 1607 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code. Since 2013, the district has been governed by a court-appointed Receiver, working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas in place of the elected school board. Most recently in 2025, the County Court of Common Pleas affirmed that the court-appointed Receiver shall continue in the place of the elected school board for at least another 3 years.

## Expanded Document Highlights

- **Duquesne's long recovery context:** Duquesne City School District has operated under fiscal distress or financial recovery oversight since 2000. In 2007, its high school program was curtailed, requiring high school students to attend West Mifflin Area School District or East Allegheny School District on a tuition basis under Section 1607 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code.
- **Governance remains under court oversight:** Since 2013, Duquesne has been governed by a court-appointed Receiver working with the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas instead of an elected school board. In 2025, the court affirmed that the Receiver will continue in place of the elected board for at least three more years.
- **Act 47 launched the feasibility review:** In 2025, Act 47 directed the Secretary of Education to form a project team to evaluate the educational, financial, administrative, and community impacts of a potential consolidation of Duquesne with nearby districts.
- **Four partner districts were reviewed:** The project team considered East Allegheny, McKeesport Area, Pittsburgh, and West Mifflin Area. The review included information requests to districts, meetings with district staff, analysis of publicly available Pennsylvania Department of Education data, and surveys of staff and community members.
- **The study is happening from a position of relative strength:** Duquesne is financially stronger than in recent years, having rebuilt its fund balance, paid obligations on time, reduced debt, repaid its PDE transition loan, and received clean recent audit results.
- **Long-term financial risks remain:** Despite recent progress, Duquesne's future remains uncertain because it depends heavily on revenues and cost drivers outside local control, including state funding, tuition payments, charter school costs, and a limited local tax base. Projections indicate that these pressures could eventually exhaust the district's fund balance without corrective action.
- **Planning now creates more options:** The document emphasizes that the feasibility study is not a response to an immediate crisis. Instead, planning now gives students, families, staff, and the community more opportunity to consider stable long-term solutions before financial and operational pressures become harder to manage.
- **The recommendation is not a final consolidation decision:** The document makes clear that the recommendation does not decide whether Duquesne will consolidate. It identifies the potential partner that appears to warrant the closest review in the next phase.
- **McKeesport is recommended for further consideration:** Based on the information reviewed, McKeesport appears to offer the strongest starting point for continued study because of its educational programs, operational capacity, transportation proximity, facilities planning, financial indicators, and potential taxpayer relief.
- **Program opportunities are a major factor:** McKeesport's on-site career and technology education courses and planned high school renovations could create expanded opportunities for Duquesne

students, especially if a potential consolidation is considered during the planning stages for those renovations.

- **Financial and operational factors favor additional review of McKeesport:** The project team found fewer potential issues associated with Duquesne joining McKeesport compared with other options. McKeesport has increased its fund balance over the five-year period reviewed, has lower tax rates than Duquesne, and has the lowest per-student spending among the reviewed districts, suggesting possible economies of scale.
- **Transportation is a practical consideration:** McKeesport Area Senior High School is identified as the second-closest high school to Duquesne Elementary School by mileage, making transportation feasibility an important positive attribute.
- **Significant concerns must be addressed:** The document notes that consolidation with McKeesport would require careful planning around safety, discipline, student supports, services for English Learners, special education capacity, and community trust.
- **Survey feedback raised safety and discipline issues:** Survey respondents identified concerns about safety and discipline among students currently enrolled in McKeesport, including concerns related to rival gang relationships between the two communities. McKeesport also acknowledged the need to focus on safety and discipline.
- **Student support needs would increase:** McKeesport already serves a high number of students identified with special needs, and additional supports would be needed to serve Duquesne students. Duquesne's students would also double McKeesport's English Learner population, requiring focused planning for language services.
- **State subsidy structure remains an ongoing issue:** Although Duquesne benefits from current subsidy formulas, annual increases do not keep pace with rising costs over time, reinforcing the need to evaluate long-term sustainability.
- **An advisory committee will guide the next phase:** The advisory committee will help identify factors that may affect the consolidation timeline, gather new information, and make determinations about structures, processes, and procedures.
- **Community input will be organized by topic:** With support from the project team, the advisory committee will schedule community input sessions focused on governance, implementation support, safety and security, programs, class sizes, staffing levels, staff contracts, and capital plans.
- **Committee participation will be broad:** Members are expected to include superintendents; curriculum, special education, school services, technology, business, buildings and grounds, and transportation leaders; high school and middle school principals; guidance counselors; and community representatives.
- **Overall takeaway:** The document frames McKeesport as the most appropriate district for deeper study, while emphasizing that any decision would require careful attention to educational quality, safety, student services, transportation, facilities, finances, governance, staff impacts, and community confidence.

## Action by the PA State Legislators:

In 2025, Act 47 directed the Secretary of Education to establish a project team to evaluate the educational, financial, administrative, and community impacts of a potential consolidation of Duquesne with nearby school districts. The project team reviewed four possible partner districts: East Allegheny, McKeesport Area, Pittsburgh, and West Mifflin Area.

The project team requested information from each district, met with district staff, reviewed publicly available Department data, and surveyed staff and community members. This update summarizes the information reviewed, identifies a recommended partner for further consideration, and presents recommendations and considerations for the next phase of the feasibility study.

**Why Now?**

Duquesne is in a stronger financial position than it has been in recent years. The district has rebuilt its fund balance, paid its obligations on time, reduced debt, repaid its PDE transition loan, and received clean recent audit results. Those accomplishments are important and should be recognized.

At the same time, Duquesne's long-term financial outlook remains uncertain. The District depends heavily on revenues and cost drivers that are largely outside its control, including state funding, tuition payments, charter school costs, and a limited local tax base. Recent projections show that, without corrective action, those pressures could eventually exhaust the district's fund balance.

For that reason, the feasibility study is being conducted now—not because Duquesne is in immediate crisis, but because planning from a position of relative strength gives the community more options. A potential consolidation could help address long-term fiscal pressures, expand opportunities for students, and restore local governance before conditions become more difficult to manage.

**The recommendation:**

Let's be clear about the recommendation. This is not a final decision to consolidate Duquesne with another district. Instead, it identifies the partner that appears to make the most sense for the next phase of review. Duquesne has made real progress in recent years, especially financially, and that should be recognized. At the same time, the district still faces long-term challenges that are outside of its control and will become harder to manage over time. That is why this work is happening now—not because there is an immediate crisis, but because planning ahead gives students, families, staff, and the community a better chance at a stable outcome.

**Why is McKeesport is recommended to be considered as a partner for Duquesne**

Based on the information reviewed, McKeesport appears to offer the best starting point for further consideration. It may provide more opportunities for students, including career and technology programs, planned improvements to the high school, a reasonable transportation distance, potential taxpayer relief, and the benefits that come from a larger school system. At the same time, there are real concerns that would need careful attention, including safety, discipline, student supports, services for English Learners, and community trust. The recommendation is to take a closer look at McKeesport—not to overlook those concerns, but to study whether they can be addressed in a responsible way.

From both a financial and operational perspective, the project team noted fewer instances of potential issues that would occur if Duquesne were to join McKeesport. McKeesport's on-site career and technology education courses, and its planned renovations at the high school would offer significant programmatic opportunities for Duquesne's students. A potential consolidation would not be without its challenges to overcome.

Survey results noted difficulties with safety and discipline among students currently enrolled in McKeesport, and several survey respondents cited rival gang relationships between the two communities. McKeesport noted the need to focus on safety and discipline. McKeesport has a high level of students identified with special needs, and additional support would need to be provided to serve Duquesne's students as well. Duquesne's student body would also double the population of English Learners in McKeesport. Although Duquesne is a major beneficiary of the structure of the subsidy formulas, the annual increases do not keep pace with the increases in costs over time, even with the amounts provided in recent fiscal years.

**Positive Attributes for McKeesport:**

- Finances
    - McKeesport has increased its fund balance over the five-year period reviewed
    - McKeesport's tax rates are lower than Duquesne's rates, which would provide relief to taxpayers
    - McKeesport's per student spending was the lowest among the group, which indicates that there may be additional economies of scale for Duquesne
- Transportation
    - McKeesport Area Senior High School is the second-closest high school from the Duquesne Elementary School by mileage
- Facilities
    - McKeesport is in the planning phases of renovations at the high school, and a potential consolidation with Duquesne would need to be factored into those plans

**Advisory Committee**

An advisory committee is being established to guide the next phase.

- The purpose of the advisory committee would include:
- Identifying any factors that may impact the timeline of the potential consolidation
- Gathering new information relevant to the consolidation
- Making determinations of structures, processes, and procedures

The advisory committee, with the facilitation support of the project team, will schedule sessions for community input focused on specific topics including, but not limited to:

- Governance
- Coordination and support for consolidation implementation
- Safety and security
- Programs, including class sizes and staffing levels
- Staff contracts
- Capital plans

The Members include, but not limited:

- Superintendents
- Directors / Supervisors of curriculum, special education, school services, technology,
- Business managers, buildings and grounds, and transportation
- High school and middle school principals
- Guidance counselors
- Community representatives