

**Horseheads Central School District  
Special Board Meeting of the Board of Education  
Thomas A. Edison High School – Community Room  
June 9, 2014**

**Present:** Apgar, Boulas, Brinthaup, Conklin, Jacobus, Johnson, Lynch, Sadler, Strollo

**Also Present:** Coghlan, Marino, Patterson, Scaptura

**Absent:**

**Call to Order:** Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish called the Elmira Heights Board of Education Meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Horseheads Board President Brian Lynch called the Special Board Meeting of the Horseheads Central School District Board of Education to order at 6:02 PM.

**Call To Order:**

Moved by Brewer, seconded by Callas.

RESOLVED, that the Elmira Heights Central School District Board of Education brought the recommendation to approve the Agenda of the June 9, 2014 Joint Meeting with the Elmira Heights Central School District Board of Education and the Horseheads Central School District Board of Education to the Board for Board Action.

<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstained</u>	<u>Absent</u>
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Benedict

Blish

Brewer

Callas

Harris

Sullivan

Willard

MOTION CARRIED

Elmira Heights Board President Harry Blish welcomed the Horseheads Board of Education and the public to tonight's meeting and stated the purpose of tonight's meeting is hear Consolidation Feasibility Study Community Presentations from Western New York Educational Service Council from 6:00 PM – 6:30 PM with a follow-up of Questions and Answers from 6:30 PM – 6:45 PM and SES Study Team, LLC from 6:50 PM – 7:20 PM with a follow-up of Questions and Answers from 7:20 PM – 7:35 PM. Board President Blish stated there are two separate Three Questions Surveys that are for the Community to fill out so that both Boards of Educations will have their input regarding tonight's presentations.

Horseheads Board President Brian Lynch apologized in advance that he will need to leave at 6:35 PM to attend a concert that his daughter is in, however, Board Vice-President Pam Strollo will chair the meeting in his absence.

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**2. Joint Meeting with the Elmira Heights Board of Education:****2.1 Interview with Western New York Educational Service Council Regarding A Reorganizational Feasibility Study**

Executive Director Robert Christmann opened his presentation stating that he really appreciates the opportunity to present to the two Boards and the public this evening regarding the possibility of merging these two Districts. Mr. Christmann gave a summary of the background of Western New York Educational Service Council, reviewed the Districts' RFP Objectives, Scope of Work and Expectations and Outcomes. Mr. Christmann presented the Boards with the Proposed Study Calendar(RFP), the Specific Reorganizational Content, Summer Joint Board Session, Focus Group Sessions consisting of Perceptions of the Districts, Consultant Understandings, Possible Individual/Groups and Questions, the Community Advisory Committee role and ended the presentation with a Summary of Why the Districts should select Western New York Educational Service Council.

Mr. Christmann presented the Board with a list of major projects from other Districts that the Council has been involved in during the most recent 10-year period including Superintendent Searches, Special Projects involving Food Services, Transportation and Ithaca High School Guidance Department. Mr. Christmann stated that the Council is very diverse and consists of consultants who specialize in their own field such as Finance/Facilities, Community, Culture, Support Services, Curriculum and Instruction, Students and Programs, Human Resources and Proposed Staffing Organization, which makes our Council very unique. He reviewed the Four Areas of Essential Function Areas, Contents of Study, Timeline and Organizational Structure, the Elmira Heights-Horseheads Proposed Timetable and the Summer 2014 Timetable. Mr. Christmann stated that the recommendation of key findings will be a reflection of our data which consists of data from the staff, the community and the Community Advisory Committee. He stated there are eleven areas that will establish the findings and a month after the recommendation is presented another meeting will be held so that we are all clear as to what our expectations are.

Overall, Mr. Christmann stated that Western New York Educational Service Council should be selected because of their experience with Consolidation Studies, Expertise with Consultants, Thoroughness: No More than a 1-Year Study, They work collaboratively with Boards/Superintendents to Create a Process that works, Understanding of Study Requirements, Familiarity with Both Districts, especially with Horseheads, Frequency of Being Asked by Boards to Complete Second Reports, Ability to Listen-Create Study Results Based on what We Hear and See, We have No Preconceived Outcome, Commitment to High Quality Work and Results: Pride, We have a Reputation with Suzanne Spear/SED and we Learn from Each Study How to be Better.

**Questions/Comments from Board Members**

Elmira Heights Board Member Chris Callas thanked Mr. Christmann for taking the time to attend tonight's Special Joint Board Meeting and inquired as to how many are on his team? Mr. Christmann stated there are three or maybe four other people at the most who participate in the Study. He stated that everyone on the team has expertise in their area of consolidation studies and there will not be anyone who is coming on board and learning for the first time. He stated that we make sure that when we put our team together we take the strength of retired Superintendents. Chris also inquired as to how far east has your Council gone? Mr. Christmann stated that they have traveled approximately 190 miles(Rockland County) and the only place they have not gone is to Long Island.

Horseheads Board Member Karen Boulas inquired as to what is the method your team has to ensure the quality of the data and to be able to work within the allotted time frame if you do not receive data that you requested in a timely manner? Mr. Christmann stated that this is not a concern because Elmira Heights and Horseheads has two of the best Superintendents in New York State and stated that he knows without hesitation that when he requests data from them he knows it will be accurate.

Horseheads Board Member Doug Johnson inquired if his team normally requests feedback from the Board and the various committees as part of the process. Mr. Christmann stated that once the Team gets together they will discuss what the process will be, will discuss ideas that both Districts have and use them to form a game plan. Doug inquired if there is an evaluation process at the end of the project. Mr. Christmann stated that yes; there will be one which will consist of many emails, debriefing and a visitation with both districts. Doug also inquired as to how many studies a year does your Council do and will you respond to other RFPs when you are involved in a Study. Mr. Christmann stated that his Council has no other Studies at this point.

Horseheads Board Member David Sadler commented regarding the articulation of the Council's role and stated he has never heard it presented in such a manner and inquired as to how did you, Mr. Christmann, come to your understanding of this Study in the manner you presented it. Mr. Christmann stated that there are many dysfunctional Board of Educations in which we have been involved in and from these Studies learned that individual Board members, Districts and communities all may have their own ideas that will be presented to us. We want to clarify with the Boards to make sure we can talk about what our roles are because there may be a Board member who may say we have not heard that. Mr. Christmann stated that he realizes that this will not occur in Elmira Heights or the Horseheads Districts.

**Questions/Comments from the Public**

David Crowley, 53 Stonecroft Drive, Horseheads, stated that he is concerned with the profile of the community members and questioned the process that was used. Mr. Christmann stated that this process was used because you would not want 10 administrators, 10 teachers on the Committee. You want to have a mixture of categories, a balance that will make the discussions that much better and informative.

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## **2.2 Interview with SES Study Team, LLC Regarding A Reorganizational Feasibility Study**

On behalf of the SES Study Team, Paul Seversky stated it is great to be back and that Samuel Shevat will participate via telephone due to having to be out of town. Paul stated that he appreciates the extra effort for the telephone interview as Douglas Exley, Samuel Shevat and himself worked very closely together on these projects. He stated in all the studies that they have done over the years there has only been two times when the three of them have not been together. He stated the three of them will attend every meeting, every presentation and present a summary of what they have accomplished as a review of our response to the ideas of the preparer. It is extremely important that the community has an idea of what is going on with the Study. When we finish the report and present to the Board, we publish the work so that it is available to everyone. He stated that it is very important that the Board members and the community are presented with all the same information as it is very vital to transparency.

Mr. Seversky presented the Goals and Objectives of the Two School Districts, Introduced the Research Study Team, the Study Methodology, the Steering Committee of the Boards, the Joint Community Advisory Committee, the Charge to the Committee by both Boards of Education, the Composition of the Joint Community Advisory Committee, the Suggested Process for Selection of Advisory Committee Members, the Collection of Baseline Data, Work of the Joint Community Advisory Committee and the SES Study Team, the Public Transparency of Data, Study Resource Documents and Work of the Joint Community Advisory Committee, A Sample Timeline for the Study, Professional Services Fee—Preparations of the Feasibility Study as Outlines in the RFP Response and Optional Professional Services Fee.

Mr. Seversky stated that the central focus of the Study has to be what is best for the students, staff, resources and programs, what the cost savings would be and the potential impact on the tax rate. All of these are very important to the overall success of the Study including looking at the finances of both districts both short and long-term. Mr. Seversky stated that his team will work with both Boards and the Community Advisory Committee to ensure there is a long-term plan in place so that when we get to the end of the Incentive Aid no one knows it has run out.

Mr. Samuel Shevat presented the Tax Impact with a \$4.5 million difference between the two school districts and stated the first year the Incentive Aid could be as high as \$4.5 million. Mr. Shevat stated that new legislation has just passed through this past year which means that school districts that merge could take up to ten years to build their tax rate together which will enable us to address the tax rate differential. Mr. Seversky stated that recently they worked with two districts involved in a Consolidation Study which could have a very good influence on how this law would be implemented. This situation will help SED implement the guidelines which would be a benefit to both districts. Mr. Doug Exley stated this

will give us the opportunity to recognize what the potential of a tax cap could be. If you want the Districts to organize you don't want to handcuff them and put them in dire straits. Mr. Seversky stated this could take up to ten years to ultimately come up with one tax rate. Mr. Exley stated that our Team will talk to both Districts about our process and how it is important to note that the work we do is extremely important as there are strong community involvement and it is critical to the process that we provide as much data as possible for both Boards to look at as well as the community.

Mr. Seversky reviewed the Elements of the Process and stated it is not just enough to include people but it has to also include sensitivity and respectfully be inclusive of opinions and clear documentation of them. It needs to be complete so that people can weigh it themselves. We work with the Districts to gather the data, review major findings, share perceptions and itemize what reorganization may look like. Mr. Seversky stated that the opportunities and challenges are all there. There is nothing left out. We believe strongly in Public Transparency with the public that we serve. We try to create a Study that is an on-going role.

Mr. Seversky identified the Steps of the Study stating that we could not be successful if we do the Study in a vacuum. We start out planning for the future by listening to the stakeholders, the community, we create a blueprint that gives us the information that we need to really look at our objective/goal as we begin to learn the points of views of the Superintendents and the Boards as well as the community. Mr. Seversky stated that the Steering Committee will ask for Board Members to attend those meetings whenever possible. We ask for District participation from the two Boards regularly throughout the process to provide updates and receive feedback as it is extremely important to make sure the public knows what is going on and the Board has a good handle from the start. Mr. Seversky stated that the children are really the heart and soul of the process as we put this together. It really helps people to gain insight which could really spread the ideas throughout the community so that people are involved as the process goes on as emotions become involved as there is a lot of information to process.

Mr. Seversky stated that there might be a series of meetings(5 to 8) depending on what the Community Advisory Committee decides. These meetings will provided organized data from which the Boards can deliberate, discuss, analyze and share information. We start at 6:00 PM and end at 9:00 PM with the agenda being very clear as what discussions will take place. Mr. Seversky stated that within 30 days of the meeting, RFPs will be provided to the Superintendents within 72 hours the full community can see the information. This process will be followed throughout the full Study. Mr. Seversky described steps that both Boards will need to take in order to proceed with the Study.

**Questions/Comments from Board Members**

Horseheads Board Member Karen Boulas inquired if SES sees any issues with the two school districts being different sizes. Mr. Seversky stated that as a Team they recommend 15 each as equity is important because of the culture. We do not choose just anybody. There are definite guidelines that need to be met to serve on the CAC such as having to be residents of the Districts, taxpayers, etc. We do see equity regardless of the number of students because the equity is very important. Mr. Shevat stated that it is our belief that these are two school districts and everything needs to be treated equally; being fair and balanced is the right approach to use. Mr. Shevat stated that our Team has experience in this area and do not want to see the sensitivity of the district sizes get in the way so that the people of the communities know that this is a real Study. He stated that the role for us is to perform the Study and we really need to have the community involvement to help us move in the right direction.

Elmira Heights Board Member Lisa Benedict stated that we know that the incentive money rate is a huge but what will you look at that the others did not look at to prepare us for when it is gone. Mr. Seversky stated that what we have seen in other districts is this exact thing happened with the leadership of the Board and Superintendent to understand that when you reorganize you are looking at everything and you have not had money but now you have. You need to look down the road at what the long-term impact will be. We will actually work with the CAC and with the Boards to develop a plan that we will submit to you which you may alter and use it as you want. We will look at the debt, long-term incentive aid and how it is customized for the two districts, the best gains down the road, money that is in the Reserves, staff patterns, etc. Mr. Seversky stated the mere act of making a new district from two districts requires a whole new set of funds that can be used differently. The incentive helps us level out program growth, enhancement, staffing, etc. We look at everything but it is important to remember that we will make sure that we get the most money for the buck and the best programs possible guided by the best decisions possible.

Horseheads Board Vice-President Pam Strollo stated that given the number of years of experience how many of these studies have you undertaken. Mr. Seversky stated eight; our Team has been in the North County, upstate, Western and even Long Island. We have been all over have a good feel of the different cultures. We have learned from every Study that we have done as every Study is uniquely different which has led us to be able to hone our abilities to help districts even better.

Horseheads Board Member Rose Apgar inquired if this is the only Study that SES would be doing, would Horseheads be your Primary Study or would you be working on other projects at the same time. Mr. Seversky stated that this would be our Primary Study, however, if we receive requests to perform other studies, we could entertain the requests and judge for ourselves if we want to move forward. We pick and choose what we want to do.

**Questions/Comments from the Public**

David Crowley, 53 Stonecroft Drive, Horseheads, commended SES on recognizing the importance of transparency and the children's education as being above the financial impact as it shows that their Team views the education as the children as a top priority which is what he was waiting to hear.

**Adjournment**

Moved by Brinhaupt, seconded by Jacobus.

RESOLVED, that the Horseheads Central School District Board of Education adjourn from its Special Business Meeting of the Board of Education at 7:40 PM.

<u>Ayes</u>	<u>Noes</u>	<u>Abstained</u>	<u>Absent</u>
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Apgar

Boulas

Brinhaupt

Conklin

Jacobus

Johnson

Lynch

Sadler

Strollo

MOTION CARRIED

Respectfully Submitted By:

*Candy L. Maine*

Candy L. Maine, District Clerk