

Community Advisory Committee Insights Regarding Potential Consolidation of the Elmira Heights and Horseheads Central School Districts

As a culminating activity at the May 4, 2015 meeting, the consultants asked CAC members to respond to the following prompt:

Given all the information you have received and the discussions you have been a part of over the last several months, what insights might you provide the Boards of Education upon their receipt of the Feasibility Study?

CAC verbatim responses are as follows:

- My feelings are that there are more advantages than disadvantages for the EH school district to merge as shown in the attached summary sheet. There are advantages for the HH school district also. The school boards must provide a simple summary of advantages for district residents.
Advantages:
 - ✓ Overall reduction in operating costs for the combined school district.
 - ✓ Operating incentive aid of \$60,945,236 spread over 14 years which can be used to reduce property taxes, reduce debts, upgrade buildings and equipment, hire staffing as may be needed.
 - ✓ Reduction in property taxes. Example: \$4.05 per \$1000 full value initially.
 - ✓ Expanded tax base for future growth which helps to lower per student cost.
 - ✓ More educational and special courses available to all students. Examples: business, math, technology, instrumental lessons, orchestra, band, chorus and art.
 - ✓ More college level courses offered to high school students. Examples: physics, chemistry, math French, Spanish, English.
 - ✓ Replacement of instructional programs previously eliminated due to lack of funds.
 - ✓ More extra-curricular activities available to all students.
 - ✓ More varsity and junior varsity sports programs available. Examples: soccer, swimming, JV football, boys' volleyball, girls' tennis, lacrosse, indoor track. 1% of total budget.
 - ✓ More intra-mural sports available.
 - ✓ An advantage in college application/acceptance process for students attending larger schools with more extensive offerings, more advanced level courses and a highly competitive high school environment.
 - ✓ Greater diversity as students meet and form friendships with (Horseheads) students.
 - ✓ Layoffs would be less for combined district.
- Disadvantages:**
 - ✓ Possible longer bus travel for some students.
 - ✓ Loss of Elmira Heights as an independent school district although its name will be retained as either: "Elmira Heights – Horseheads School District" or "Horseheads – Elmira Heights School District" as will be determined by the new school board.

- ✓ Reduction of number of students participating in some varsity/JV sports with combined teams although more varsity/JV programs will be available for participation.
Doug Bauer

- I am for consolidation of both districts. I see many advantages for the students of Elmira Heights and for the residents of the district. I also believe we should use TA Edison as a middle school along with Sing Sing Road. Sing Sing Road should also be used as an elementary school and Gardner Road and Center Street should be closed.
I don't see any industry or large business coming into NY State as the state is not competitive. Therefore, we need to look at the monetary advantages of consolidation. I also think the bump in extra state aid is short term and we
Thanks for all the hard work.
Frank Cicci.

- I chose to apply for a seat on the EH study committee because I wanted to know first hand how a consolidation/merger would work if possible. I appreciate the information provided, however, I don't feel all questions were answered & in turn the group was not able to make a satisfactory feasible solution (?) for a merger. I would therefore have to vote against a merger for the two districts. No solution for Edison high school is a big factor also in my decision.

- I started this study for one very important reason and that was to obtain a quality education for all children. Will our children gain or lose from a merger? There are no studies to show they will or they won't. Will our districts survive if there is no merger? And what else will be cut? I think if the schools do merge, we will need strong leadership at the top to ensure that the money offered from the State is spent wisely. This will be a tough job, to do what is best and not always what is popular. One barrier for the Heights will be the closing of Edison. Need to re-think this. I am not originally from the Heights, but from a large district, so I'm not tied to the school itself.
Thank you.
Mary Moore

- Horseheads: I am in favor of a merger. We should be looking into the future of our community and children.

- I feel that the problems discussed (facilities, staff, differences in time of schools starting, etc. can all be solved.) The main issue is that the consolidation is best for students. It provides better programming for the three "As": Academics, athletics, arts. It gives the students a better chance of succeeding in their future. I'm in favor of consolidation.

- I vote yes for consolidation.

- I am not in favor of a merger despite the potential financial advantages; or in spite of them. I think there are too many unknowns to make a reliable decision. By unknowns I mean...I think it is going to cost us more as a consolidated district...things we haven't discussed...common curriculum materials, training, etc. It's not as cut and dried as the study organizers led us to believe and I don't feel confident about the numbers to say it would be a worthwhile endeavor.
- FAVOR. It is important to look at the big picture and look at all factors involved. There is an opportunity for improved facilities & more vast opportunities for students by consolidation. It's a win-win for the students and their educational offerings (ACE college credits, various courses, nicer building, newer technology, etc.)
- ADVANTAGES: The State is willing to give us incentive aid (\$60 million) - we should take it and use it to create programs, services. I am in favor of this merger mainly because through this extensive research process the advantages totally outweigh the disadvantages.
- The finances all sound wonderful, however I feel there are too many factors that can be manipulated to look better than they are. There would certainly be expenses that have not been factored into the figures.
- When you look at the feasibility study, please consider:
 - ✓ Is this a plan that benefits students' educational future?
 - ✓ Will this plan be an asset to the community?
 - ✓ Will this be an improvement from what is currently in place?

At this time I am still undecided as to the best course of action even after weighing the pros and cons. I am hesitant to be overly optimistic about the financial gains proposed. However, I do not want any more reductions in programming at either district.

- My number 1 problem is that the new school board will most likely be all Horseheads represented. I don't know how an EH person will get voted in with small amount of voters EH v. HH, so all decisions will be made by HHSD. If EH conscientiously scaled back, cut programs & staffing year after year to be better off right now, why do we need to 'save' HHDS when they chose not to help themselves.
Transportation will have to bring after school sports to their fields farther away (Edison/Cohen fields). [Right now, HHSD students are bussed to field after school.)
What happens when incentive aid is gone?
So much incentive to TAXES, not programs.
- Undecided. I feel the amount of detail does not allow me to say for sure things will be better for students though they will be better for district funds.

- No Comment! Thank you!
 - Merger is a good thing!! Merge yes Consolidation is good – we need to save money! If we need to cut jobs to save money do it!!
 - Financially a merger makes a lot of sense. However, the Horseheads district will need to see more non-financial benefits in order for things to be accepted. There are clearly many advantages for Elmira Heights (program, athletics, taxes) but not an obvious advantage for HH students. I am also very concerned about the aggressive timeline. How can a new district be developed from January to July? I am more in favor of moving forward with the HH consolidation plans.
 - Focus has to be on programs/benefits to the children as well as the taxpayers in the community – there has been way too much focus on Buildings and emotional ties to community. As a parent of a young child in the EH district, I am in favor of consolidation as I welcome the new opportunities it will bring. I would love a tax reduction and I recognize the risks currently facing the district – I would hate to see additional program cuts or even higher taxes.
 - The most critical consideration going forward with this merger – is what is best for students? How will this impact future generations of students? Personal considerations, loyalty to community should not trump what is best for students – improved opportunities and an expanded curriculum will benefit students (more) than a legacy. Decisions about consolidation and restructuring must include the opinions and voices of those who know each district: teachers, admin., students, parents – NOT outside consultants or “paid experts.”
 - Sports teams can’t be increased in # of students on each team.
TONS of updates needed at HHDS high
Edison needs to close to make sense
Edison students need a better education through higher standards and increased access to college classes.
 - Combined districts offer chance for larger school is required.
Better competitive advantages for all students academically.
More course offerings.
Better academic opportunities for all students.
Improved and additional extra-curricular activities and academic participation
- Potential loss of long term staff positions
Increased transportation casts initially and future
Potential staff upheaval due to re-negotiate contracts
Student adaptation to class length changes and differences

- This process has been interesting and frustrating at the same time. I do not have full faith in the findings of the study as I feel there are still a lot of unanswered questions, specifically concerning the internal structure and daily runnings of the buildings, specifically the elementary buildings. Some would like to gloss over and give the general findings of potential savings and “student” advantages with a combined district. Knowing what really goes on in schools, as a teacher, is vital information that has not made it into the reports on staffing as that was not part of our committees process, but that of superintendents and consultants. A lot of our discussions were rushed at some meetings and a lot of time was spent giving us information but not asking or putting our thoughts into the final report. I do not believe the proposal takes into consideration any “added” benefits to the Horseheads students and doing so with the incentive money will only result in it being taken away in the end (once the money has run out). I have had many conversations with many students’ parents and they are in no way in favor of a merger. They chose our district for a reason when they could have chosen another district. If someone wants the advantage of either district they can choose to move there and not be forced to merge. Money does not buy happiness. Happiness comes in many forms.