

**TONAWANDA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
FACILITIES TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATION  
TO  
THE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
JANUARY, 2010**

**MEMBERSHIP:**

Augustine Beyer, Sue D'Angelo, Nancy Grosskopf, Joyce Hogenkamp, Dawn Holler, Kevin Kazmierczak, Todd Lachat, Renee Marciniak, John McKenna, Brian Mysliwy, James Newton, Carrie Oliver, Brian Opalinski, Mary Beth Scullion, Dennis Smilnich, Kelli Treichler, James Weber, Rita Zirnheld.

Dr. James Mills, Facilitator

(There were twenty-four appointed members. Several individuals were not able to attend meetings as scheduled and did not participate)

**BACKGROUND:**

The membership of the Task Force consists of community members, parents, administrators, teachers, and board members. The task force had our first general session meeting on September 24, 2009 followed by meetings on September 30, October 7, 22, and 29, November 5 and 16, December 7 and 21, January 5 and 14, 2010. Our meeting generally lasted between two and three hours in length.

**CHARGE:**

The charge by the Board of Education was to do the following:

- Review the Reconfiguration of the Elementary Schools
- Review the Student Enrollment trends in the District
- Review possible plans for future Elementary Building Configuration i.e.
  - Construct/renovate single site as Elementary Center similar to existing Middle/High School site
  - Develop two(2) elementary school sites designed as Primary (Grades Pre K-2 and Intermediate (Grades 3-5)
  - Maintain three (3) elementary facilities as per new configuration
- Develop timeframe for community input and Board of Education action

**STUDY METHODOLOGY:**

The initial work consisted of a review of available information related to enrollment and buildings. This included, but was not limited to:

1. District long range planning documents
2. District enrollment projections
3. Census data for 0-5
4. Floor plans
5. Class size data
6. Building condition surveys
7. Capital Debt and Amortization Schedule
8. Ramming staffing report
9. SMSI Report

(Note: The enrollment projections utilized by the Task Force were from the District's Long Range Plan. The Long Range Plan provides projections through 2009-2010. Cohort survival trend analysis demonstrates a steady decline in student enrollment. In 2002-2003 the enrollment was 2,242. The current enrollment is 1,919. At present the District has 121 Kindergartners and 159 12<sup>th</sup> graders. The enrollment entering the District's schools is not keeping pace with the student population exiting. At the elementary level K-5, current BEDS day data was reviewed. The 2009 BEDS Day (October) enrollment was 822. The projected enrollment for K-5 for 2010, 2011, and 2012 BEDS Day enrollment respectively is 792 (2010), 762 (2011), and 745 (2012) The Facilities Task Force notes a significant decline in student enrollment.

In addition, we heard verbal reports from the school's attorney related to state aid and land acquisitions; from the district's business administrator related to cost and state aid calculations; from the district's construction manager related to available land and land usage and we also engaged in discussion with city council representatives related to their future plans, and their land usage.

After a review of available data we created a listing of seven configurations and fully examined the positive and negative aspects of each configuration. The listing was beyond the scope as established by the Board of Education and noted above under "Review possible plans for future Elementary Building Configuration." However, by studying seven configurations we were able to gain greater perspective relative to positive and negative aspects of certain configurations. This was done through an exhaustive process of listing and then fully discussing each posted item.

Our review allowed us to explore similarities in various configurations as well as obstacles that would be difficult to overcome. The seven configurations were reduced to five for additional review.

The five configurations that were reviewed for study purposes were:

1. One Primary to Grade Five Building
2. Two Buildings: Primary to Grade Two and Grade Three to Grade Five
3. Two Buildings: Both Primary to Grade Five
4. Three Buildings as current exist
5. Three Buildings: Primary to Grade Five

After completing the positive and negative aspects of each configuration we reviewed the researched based characteristics of high performing schools as a measure to weigh the positive and negative aspects against.

The nine characteristics considered were: <sup>i</sup>

- Clear and shared focus
- High Standards and expectations for all students
- Effective school leadership
- High level of collaboration and communication
- Curriculum, instruction, and assessment aligned with standards
- Frequent monitoring of learning and teaching
- Focused professional development
- Supportive learning environment
- High level of family and community involvement.

The next step in our process after the review of the characteristics of high performing schools was for each task force member to rank each configuration using the following categories: <sup>ii</sup>

- Curriculum and Program
- Instructional Delivery
- Student Outcomes
- Financial Implications
- Parent and Community

(Definitions for each of the categories may be found in the endnotes)  
 (The scale utilized was: 6=best; 5=very good; 4= good; 3=acceptable; 2=marginal; 1= unacceptable)

The raw data was summarized to reveal a pattern among the Task Force members. The data provided an immediate consensus in terms of best configuration. It also allowed us to focus our attention on exactly why the selected configuration offered the best alternative.

**DATA RESULT**

	Program/Curr	Inst.	Performance	Cost	Comm/Parents	Score
A: One P-5	5.42	5.42	5.35	5.46	5.35	5.40
C: Two P-2 & 3-5	4.42	4.07	3.92	3.54	3.78	3.95
D: Two P-5	4.07	3.92	4	3.90	4.07	3.99
F: Three as is	3.84	3.76	3.84	3.18	3.38	3.60
G: Three P-5	3.61	3.61	3.76	3.00	3.92	3.58

This data was reviewed to determine specific areas of strength.

**Ranking of Results**

Overall in all Categories

		<u>By Instruction</u>	
A: One P-5	5.4	A: One P-5	5.42
D: Two P-5	3.99	C: Two P-2 & 3-5	4.07
C: Two P-2 & 3-5	3.95	D: Two P-5	3.92
F: Three as is	3.60	F: Three as is	3.76
G: Three P-5	3.58	G: Three P-5	3.61

By Program and Curriculum

		<u>By Performance</u>	
A: One P-5	5.42	A: One P-5	5.4
C: Two P-2 & 3-5	4.42	D: Two P-5	4
D: Two P-5	4.07	C: Two P-2 & 3-5	3.9
F: Three as is	3.86	G: Three P-5	3.8
G: Three P-5	3.61	F: Three as is	3.8

By Cost

		<u>By Comm/Parents</u>	
A: One P-5	5.46	A: One P-5	5.35
D: Two P-5	3.90	D: Two P-5	4.7
C: Two P-2 & 3-5	3.54	G: Three P-5	3.92
F: Three as is	3.18	C: Two P-2 & 3-5	3.78
G: Three P-5	3.00	F: Three as is	3.38

**DATA ANALYSIS:**

The data provided an average score for each configuration. Based upon the ranking of the average scores "Configuration A: One P-5" scores highest with "Configuration G: Three P-5" scoring the lowest.

The data also shows that "Configuration A: One P-5" scores highest in each category under consideration.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:**

The Facilities Task Force recommends the following:

That the Tonawanda City School District Board of Education

1. Construct/renovate a single site elementary school housing Grades PK-Grade Five.
2. Begin the process of implementing this recommendation immediately with appropriate notification to the New York State Education Department relative to a potential building process.
3. Move forward with appropriate due diligence in meeting its fiduciary responsibilities related to cost and the communities ability to pay.
4. Exercise due diligence to avoid any transitioning of elementary students from building to building during the interim period while this recommendation is being implemented.
5. Update and confirm the District's enrollment projects and continue to monitor trends.
6. Make community input and information regarding progress a high priority during all phases of the implementation of item one above. This includes, but is not limited to regular updates at Board of Education Meeting and PTSA Meeting; frequent and informative information bulletins on the district website; public forums where and when appropriate; and Board appointed ad hoc committees to assist in planning and development as may be deemed necessary by the Board of Education.

**RECOMMENDATION RELATED COMMENTS:**

This recommendation is provided so that the Board of Education may move forward with the recommended reconfiguration of the district's elementary schools in a timely and appropriate manner given the challenges the district is currently facing related to declining enrollment and capital repairs to existing elementary school building. It must be understood that the Facilities Task Force was not authorized to, nor positioned to do cost analysis related to the various options considered or to do enrollment projections for the next ten-year period. We believe this recommendation provides the Board of Education with an informed recommendation on what would be the best configuration from the perspective of curriculum and instruction, student achievement, parental involvement, and overall quality. It will be the Board of Education's responsibility to do a comprehensive cost analysis related to the implementation of this recommendation. The Facilities Task Force is fully aware that after careful cost analysis by financial experts that it may be determined that the above recommendation is not within the means of the Tonawanda community in

which case alternative configurations evaluated by this task force, and documented in this report, should be considered.

However, our recommendation should be fully considered and implemented if it is deemed to be affordable by the Board of Education. This would include a voter referendum as may be necessary.

The Task Force recommendation does not address the potential location of the single site elementary school that it is recommending. The Task Force believes that the location decision best follows a review of potential sites in relation to desired construction or renovation.

The Task Force has concerns over the transitioning of elementary students, feeling that frequent moving from one school building to another is difficult on students and parents, and can be a factor in student learning. Therefore, the Task Force would like the Board of Education to avoid such transitions while implementing the recommendation. More specifically, the Task Force recommends that until our current recommendation is implemented, or until such time as there is an alternative solution implemented, that the current configuration shall remain in place.

The Task Force believes that community support is essential as the Board of Education moves forward with this recommendation. The Task Force believes that transparency of the decision making process and frequent opportunities for the parents and community to be involved are important components in building community support.

#### **RECOMMENDATION RATIONALE:**

Below is a listing of various reasons that support the Facilities Task Force's recommendation. This is not meant to be an all inclusive listing of the supporting rational, but provides the general themes that formed the foundation for our recommendation.

One building complex housing all elementary grades:

1. Provides the best opportunity for clear and shared focus for the elementary program. The focus will be formed around a common set of beliefs and values, creating a consistent direction for all elementary children in the district.
2. Provides the best opportunity for sharing both curriculum and instructional resources.
3. Provides the best opportunity for the alignment of curriculum both horizontally across a grade level and vertically between grade levels. Alignment of curriculum is essential to assuring that classroom instruction is focused on the learning standards.
4. Provides the best opportunity for grade level collaboration and communication. Greater grade level teaming increases the potential for sharing and professional development among the professional teaching staff.
5. Provides the most overall flexibility in adjusting for educational needs of students. This includes, but is not limited to, special education program options, early literacy interventions, and title one program availability.

6. Provides the greatest flexibility for maintaining consistent class sizes when grade level student populations are disproportional.
7. Has the greatest potential for having state of the art technology and related software and provides the easiest platform for continued updates and maintenance of the technology.
8. Provides the greatest potential for consistent extended-day programming.
9. Eliminates attendance zones and the shifting of attendance zone lines.
10. Reduces the amount of transitions from school to school at the elementary level and provides the best funnel into the middle school.
11. Helps reduce the potential socio-economic stigma associated with geographically based neighborhoods.
12. Provides the greatest potential to be a totally up-to-date educational environment that is environmentally friendly and provides the best overall learning environment.
13. Provides the best opportunity for a united Tonawanda community focused around parental participation at one centralized elementary complex over an extended period of time.

**APPRECIATION:**

We would like to extend our appreciation to the Tonawanda City School District Board of Education and to its Superintendent for providing us this opportunity to serve the school district and to provide thoughtful input into an issue confronting the school district.

We would like to thank all those persons that provided us with valuable information to help us formulate our thoughts: Paul Maziarz, Joseph Giarrizzo, Joseph Tripi, Chris Trapp, Carl Zeisz, Ron Pillozzi, Jim Kossow, and Collen Perkins.

ENDNOTES  
REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> OSPI State of Washington. OSPI reviewed 20 recent research studies that have examined the common characteristics of high performing schools. Some of the studies were reviews of other research that has taken place over many year on the same topic, while others examined these schools in specific settings and locations, such as high performing elementary schools in a large urban setting. This body of research represents findings from both Washington state and around the nation.

<sup>ii</sup> Definitions used for each category were as follows:

**PROGRAM/CURRICULUM:**

All the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school.

- A strong and viable curriculum at each grade level
- Alignment of the curriculum at each grade level that consistently and logically flows to the next grade level
- Availability of curriculum related resources for all grades at all levels (Assemblies/Field Experiences)
- Program options available to all students on a consistent and equitable basis (i.e. Reading Programs; Special Education Programs including physical, occupational, and speech therapy; Program for Advanced Students; Students at Risk; Art, Music, P.E, Library, Foreign Language; Social Services, Physiological Services)
- Adequate technology hardware at each grade level with grade level appropriate software

**INSTRUCTION:**

The act of instructing, teaching, or furnishing with knowledge

- Instruction at each grade level is at a high quality level and consistent from class to class and grade level to grade level.
- Teachers know what to teach and how to teach at each grade level.
- There is sufficient supervision of instruction to assure that students receive the expected high level of instruction.
- Class size and balance
- Professional development opportunities for continual improvement

**STUDENT PERFORMANCE:**

- High level of student performance on state test and preparation for the next grade level.

**FINANCIAL/COST:**

- Current cost vs. future cost
- Cost of repair vs. cost to construct
- Short-term expenses vs. long term expenses
- Communities ability to pay

**COMMUNITY AND PARENTS:**

- Parent participation in the life of the school
- High level of parent expectations
- Supportive learning environment