

# In Pursuit of a Vision

In that thin ether of those who watch Board of Education meetings closely, the buzz that has been steady and growing centers around the possibility that elementary schools might be reorganized. This concept was first introduced by Superintendent of Schools, Patrick Fletcher, as part of a request that the Board provide guidance to the administration regarding the district's long range future. Reorganization, along with other alternatives, was presented as part of a non-exhaustive list of possible choices. In brief, reorganization of the elementary schools would mean moving away from the current model of neighborhood schools, each with near identical services and instead move to one hoping to maximize efficiency (one possible example: K-2 schools and 3-5 schools). It is important to note that **no recommendation was made** and many other possibilities exist. Mr. Fletcher subsequently announced that his recommendation to the Board would be made at its regular meeting on Monday, December 12<sup>th</sup>.

The Board and Administration believe that any discussion to reorganize schools requires significant public input. This was demonstrated by the creation of two committees of community volunteers. They were charged with exploring the facilities and curricular needs of the district. Those groups held multiple meetings and ultimately presented reports to the Board, which are available online at the district's web site <http://www.glenrocknj.org>.

But those committees will not be the end of public input. We announced that any plan to reorganize schools would include as part of the process a

special public hearing. On November 14<sup>th</sup> the Board announced its intent to hold two such hearings. The first will be Monday, December 19<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm. The second is scheduled for Thursday, January 12<sup>th</sup> at 7:30pm. Both will be held in the High School Media Center (or cafeteria if space requires). The purpose of both will be for the Board to hear the public's thoughts on the issues confronting the district.

However the debate in town over reorganization is tangential to the bigger question which should be debated. The crisis confronting the Board is not whether to reorganize schools or not, but rather whether to solve issues of space, enrollment, and the resulting costs by:

1. spending money
2. or by significantly changing the way we deliver educational services.

An overwhelming statement by the public to not reorganize schools does not provide the kind of feedback that is needed. What the Board will be seeking at these meetings is the community's sense of whether they want to continue to support the kind of educational system that the borough has historically wanted or rather to prioritize reduction of taxation, which will require finding as many efficiencies as possible and perhaps reducing services to the community and students.

Why has space become an issue when years ago larger classes inhabited our schools? In short, the rise of mandates both for Special Services as well as curricular imperatives, has consumed significant space. Our combined elemen-

tary schools are able to sustain a population approximately 300 students less than years ago. In the Middle School/High School approximately 375 less students can be accommodated.

As you can imagine, this is a question of great significance to all in town. Many related pieces of the puzzle are explored by the Board and Administration in our regular public meetings. As an example, at a recent public meeting, we discussed long range facilities needs, which is a recurring state requirement (every five years). Another week the Board was presented with a report on student population and anticipated trends. These reports along with many other seemingly disparate facts all will have to be considered for any recommendation to be made.

Although we agree that public hearings are required, the focus should not be limited to a discussion of reorganization of the elementary schools. If members of the community express the opinion that reorganization is not desirable, **AND** if the community at large supports the idea that spending money to resolve problems is something to which it is open, then the discussion will go in one direction. If, on the other hand, the clear message of the community is to prioritize the limiting of tax growth, then the Board can't have its hands tied by having promised to not exercise every form of efficiency possible.

Reorganization is only one of many possible devices that could be exercised to address problems. Reduction of course offerings which make our High School competitive with those

## In Pursuit of a Vision (continued)

around it, as well as increases in class size are among other measures that could be considered.

If you have not seen the steps you anticipated taking place, please understand that it is because the issues with which we are wrestling are numerous and interwoven. A premature debate on one myopic aspect of the bigger problem might politicize the process, slowing it down, and ultimately lead to less services to the children in a timely manner. We're all on the same team.

Most important at this point, though, is that the Board and Administration value your input. We strongly urge all concerned citizens to attend these hearings and express to the Board their vision of the district's future.

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### Don't Miss the Special Public Hearings.

**Monday, December 19th at 7:30 pm and again on Thursday, January 12th, the Board of Education will hold public hearings for the purpose of gathering public input on the various issues confronting the district. All are encouraged to attend & participate.**