

**Eastchester Union Free School District Community Focus Groups
Facility Needs and Community Views**

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Executive Summary

The Eastchester Board of Education retained a consultant to conduct a series of public “focus-group” type meetings with a full range of constituent groups comprising the Eastchester Union Free School District, including parents; civic and community leaders; residents without children in the public schools; teaching faculty; custodial staff; and students. The purpose of these meetings was to determine participants’ views about the adequacy of space in the Eastchester schools, particularly at the middle and high school levels. Although each meeting took on its own direction and focus based on the nature of the participants and what they wanted to discuss, the goal was to discern answers to the following general questions:

1. Why did the last two major bond referenda (in November 2006 and March 2008) fail?
2. What might the Board of Education have done differently to elicit a positive vote?
3. How does the current state of the economy affect the community’s willingness to support a bond referendum now?
4. Would a project that limits construction to a single site have a better chance of passage than the previous plans?
5. Do people within the school community accept that there truly is a space issue at the middle and high school levels?

With the assistance of the Board of Education, Dr. Marilyn Terranova, Mary Ellen Byrne, the building principals and other district staff, I conducted ten separate meetings over the course of three days. On Tuesday, January 13, 2009, I met with the Anne Hutchinson faculty and staff at 3:15 p.m.; with Civic Association representatives and members of the community at 7 p.m.; and with PTA leaders, Eagle Sports Club members, and the Education Foundation at 8 p.m. On Thursday, January 15, 2009, I met with the Greenvale Faculty at 7:30 a.m.; with Middle and High School custodians at 9:15 a.m.; with community members and parents at 11 a.m.; and with Waverly faculty and staff at 3 p.m. On Thursday, January 22, 2009, I met with middle and high school students at 1:45 p.m.; with middle and high school faculty and staff at 2:30 p.m.; and in a final session open to all members of the community, parents, staff, and others at 7 p.m. In total, over 340 people participated in these ten individual sessions, and I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to each of them for their active involvement. Discussions were freewheeling and lively. Those present were assured that no specific individual would be quoted directly. District officials, including the superintendent and members of the Board of Education, deliberately absented themselves from these sessions so that participants would feel no constraint to speak freely. It is truly a tribute to the Eastchester schools and community that these meetings engendered such a high level of participation and

such rich discussions. It should be pointed out that there were many points of agreement and topics on which individuals seriously differed. The last section of this report shows the detailed notes and specific comments made by all who participated in these sessions.

Let me summarize the responses I received to each of the key questions noted above.

1. Why did the last two major bond referenda (in November 2006 and March 2008) fail?

Generally speaking, there was substantial agreement on the reasons for the failure of the last two major bonds. Rising taxes, steadily increasing budgets, and taxpayer fatigue were cited by each of the groups as among the reasons for the bonds' failure. Additionally, many within the community were dissatisfied with the results of prior bonds and disappointed in the District's ability to properly manage those projects. Some failed to understand why new bonds were needed every few years. "If you were building for the future five years ago, why now again," one resident exclaimed. Many pointed out that work done on previous bonds often failed to correct deficiencies or problems. Roofs still leaked after roofing repairs were made. Asbestos issues emerged in one school. Heat is still uneven in many classrooms and space issues still exist. Some believe the District has failed to address the full range of its needs in a thoughtful and planned way. Lack of credibility and trust were also reported as reasons for the bond defeats. Among at least some voters, a "no" vote was their means of conveying to the Board that they felt inadequately engaged and communicated with.

2. What might the Board of Education have done differently to elicit a positive vote?

Better long range planning; improved management of prior construction projects; stronger engagement, especially of residents with professional expertise in construction and architecture; improved communication; and an increased effort to reach out to parents, especially of younger students were all identified as ways in which the outcome of prior bond referenda might have been altered.

3. How does the current state of the economy affect the community's willingness to support a bond referendum now?

Almost without exception, each of the groups and virtually every participant within the groups felt that a referendum this spring would sustain no chance of passage. First, such a quick turnaround would not allow the planning and communication to occur that so many cited as key issues. Second, the current state of the global economy, the level of unemployment, an upcoming school budget whose cost-consciousness has yet to be demonstrated, and even the impact of the economy on home sales and student enrollment all leave too many unanswered questions that cannot be resolved in a matter of a few weeks or months. It should also be mentioned that a number of people indicated how important it is that the next referendum the District puts up passes with strong support. Many are concerned that the momentum gained by another defeat would bode poorly for subsequent school referenda and even budgets.

4. Would a project that limits construction to a single site have a better chance of passage than the previous plans?

Overwhelmingly, the answer to this question seems to be “yes.” The only caveat expressed by a few individuals is that in order to fully engage elementary parents, a referendum that included improvements at the elementary level might sustain a better chance of passing. Overall, however, those who attended these focus group sessions seem to feel that work ought to be limited to what is truly needed—no frills no bells and whistles.

5. Do people within the school community accept that there truly is a space issue at the middle and high school levels?

Those residents most likely to question the need for more space did not have children currently attending district schools and often grew up in Eastchester themselves when the student population was actually larger than now and the current space seemed adequate. That said, the majority of those with children in school generally feel the need for more space at the middle and high schools is credible and accurate. What is less clear to them is what the real consequences are if the District does not build? A common theme expressed was what are the options and costs of the full range of possibilities for addressing space needs?

Recommendations

Based on the various meetings I conducted and my own professional experience and with full recognition that District officials have a much more sophisticated understanding of the community than I, given my limited time in Eastchester, I offer the Board of Education and superintendent the following recommendations for their review and consideration:

1. Defer a vote on a referendum to increase instructional and other space for the immediate future and address current capacity issues short-term through other means.
2. Immediately begin to solicit broad-based public involvement in a thoughtful and structured planning process to take a larger view of District facilities and their needs. Most importantly, reach out to residents in the construction and building trades; architects, and other related professionals to serve on such a committee along with District officials and professionals hired by the school system. Such a planning process will likely take 12-18 months.
3. Reexamine the District’s current communication strategies and identify ways in which it can be improved.
4. Create a concise, readable, and highly communicative means of sharing relevant information on bond-related topics with all district residents. The District needs to draw on a consistent set of facts and develop a set of talking points that are accurate, data driven, and responsive to the full range of questions that have emerged from residents. In addition to some sort of brochure or written document, the District should utilize other media, including cable television, as a means of educating the public about the relevant facts concerning budgets, spending, and space.

5. Clarify the cost structure of supporting in-district special education programs, including the net financial impact such programs have on district finances and the budget. To accomplish this, the Board will need to show what it would cost if the District placed its own students in tuition-based programs outside of Eastchester, and compare those costs to the potential gains of classroom space and the extent to which acquiring that space might affect construction needs.
6. Consider strategies to make Board of Education meetings even more interactive, both as a means of increasing participation and building trust.
7. Increase awareness of middle and high school facility needs by identifying opportunities to bring elementary school faculty, parents, and children to the middle and high schools.

Detailed Notes from Individual Meetings

Anne Hutchinson Faculty
Tuesday, January 13, 2009
3:15 p.m.
30+ present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- We added on to the high school a couple of years ago
- Those additions still look new
- People don't see the need
- Taxes increase every time we add on
- Cosmetically, the buildings look pretty good
- Taxes are high
- Residents don't see the overcrowding on a daily basis
- The individual elementary parents see adequate space in their elementary schools, especially since the first grades moved to Waverly
- Some elementary faculty themselves are unaware; they've never been in the middle and high schools
- Many of those who vote "no" don't understand the mandates and requirements
- People don't understand that we lose instructional time when teachers have to keep moving rooms; they are less creative in their teaching
- We've done reconstruction at the high school; if these things needed to be done, they should have been done at that time
- There have been problems with prior construction; costs exceeded what the community approved and more money was needed

What could the Board of Education and Administration have done differently that might have resulted in a positive outcome to these last two bond referenda?

- Community considers split sessions, longer days, etc. as empty threats
- Not sure the board or administration have done a good job of explaining the changes in education that have occurred since parents were in school themselves

- Limiting work to one site improves its chances; less resentment will occur if the work is done at the middle school only, since work has been done at the high school
- Current state of the economy; lots of unemployed; recession is just at the beginning
- Cafeterias are perceived to be an issue; first lunch in the high school is at 10 a.m.
- Psychologically, the community needs to be concerned about another bond failing
- If another bond goes down, the budget could go down

What advice would you give the Board of Education?

- People are untrusting; our taxes are going up
- Longer term, we need to educate the population
- Small talk erodes trust
- Kids in the high school are living with this situation; can they be the spokespersons?
- We need to talk more to senior citizen groups
- Coffees, with teachers attending; give their point of view; we used to do this but it hasn't happened in years
- Parents feel they've been lied to; they've been told about previous referenda, "If you pass this, we won't come back again;" but the second they passed the referenda on the high school, the district was out of space
- If you were building for the future five years ago, why now again? People need to hear a good answer; teachers don't feel they have these answers
- Waverly is now hurting for space
- Put out more information about what Eastchester offers educationally; number of APs; college placement results; revenue from special education programs
- We need to go to "Plan B" now; implement the needed adjustments to the schedule so that the community understands the impact (i.e. extended day, etc.)

Civic Associations/Community-High School Library Media Center
Tuesday, January 13, 2009
7 p.m.
15 present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- Too much money
- Taxes are too high
- Dissatisfaction with previous construction projects (cost overruns; asbestos at Waverly; roof repaired, then it leaked; "one issue after another")
- Community doesn't want to give the Board "carte blanche"

- District doesn't want real feedback; "if you know about construction, they put you on a computer committee"
- When one construction professional wanted to bring in his own people to help, the district "acted as if it had something to hide"
- \$28M bond wasn't fully thought out; \$1M was for temporary parking; costs were not all related to the goal; the net gain was small; we destroyed 22 classrooms and had a net gain of only 11
- People were told there would be 16 more classrooms but there was only a net gain of 6
- Pretty pervasive mistrust
- When you look at Waverly, why is the front entrance on the side of the building?
- Consistent questions about need; have enough steps been taken to assess real need?
- Number of course offerings and size of classes is a matter of concern; some concern about electives that lack substance; do we need these courses?
- Could you increase some class sizes? no straight answers given to this question
- Pretty expensive special needs program; does the revenue this brings in net out to pay for the costs?
- 20+ students of teachers who live outside the district attend district schools; not a contractual right, but a courtesy; why?
- Has everything been done to eliminate space constraints prior to adding on new rooms?
- The Board says, "We want to build this building. How can we get you to say 'yes.'?"
- Can the district office be used to house classes and moved to rental space in town?
- Do we need such a gigantic middle/high school library?
- Community gave a great many recommendations; people did not feel they were actually being listened to
- Upkeep of district facilities has historically been lacking. Is building more space the responsible choice when we're not taking care of what we have?
- Putting up modulars wasn't even acknowledged; "Listen to our plan or we're not going to listen to what you have to say."
- We've had this size population (or larger) before; why do we need more space now?
- Ratio of adults to students has substantially increased with lots of tenured teaching assistants
- \$600,000 settlement on the fields was not returned to taxpayers, but spent by board
- Draconian threats are made if the bond fails: "life will end as we know it"
- The board always goes after the things that will hurt kids; "We're grown ups; we don't want to be treated like children."
- Threats don't engender trust

Do you believe there is a legitimate space issue in the District?

- Yes; in the high school
- Someone suggested the purchase of the Leewood Golf Course (?) and putting all the schools there; “They looked at me like I was crazy.”
- “Dr. Terranova has been much more open”
- “It’s gotten so bad they can take all my money and I’ll just keep my taxes.”
- Is all of the space used to the maximum effect?
- What about a 2-6 grade option to better use the lower level schools?
- What are the most up-to-date enrollment projections?
- Need for reeducation of the community on these issues
- “The cafeteria never comes up as a complaint from kids”
- “I don’t see why the cafeteria is an issue; these cafeterias worked for bigger student populations.”
- Catholic schools have very large classes; why not make ours bigger?
- “I wouldn’t be happy with a 27-1 ratio.”
- We need a real analysis of what’s going on in the schools; a facilities utilization study
- Anything we do in the schools is never cheap; why not modulars?
- “Modular classrooms are a band aid on a major cut”
- “People are being turned off; we’ll shoot down any spending proposition”

What advice would you give the Board of Education?

- In bad times, you don’t raise prices; you seek concessions from suppliers in business; we need to get some concessions back (from teachers’ union)
- Renegotiate contracts
- It’s time we got something back as a community
- “We don’t want to limit what our kids get; I’ve always supported the schools; but we need something back.”
- You can’t cut services in this economy; we have to deliver services
- I want to see all the options before we go to something like split sessions; can an increase in class size defer it?
- What would you have to do not to have split sessions? What are the alternatives?
- Why do we have 16 security guards in the parking lot directing traffic?
- We’re in a deflationary cycle for real estate; where is the space crunch?
- Life has changed post October 2008
- Relief from the unions
- Downsizing
- Personnel reductions
- Renegotiate contracts
- “An unaffordable excellent school system is no good to anybody.”

**PTA Leaders/Eagle Sports Club/Foundation-High School Library Media Center
Tuesday, January 13, 2009
8 p.m.**

28 present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- First one failed because of the issue with the fields; more a vote against Siebert; the community took a stand
- Money was being mismanaged, so why give them more?
- District wasn't maintaining what they had
- First bond was a bad plan; the more recent bond was just too expensive
- First bond didn't realize there was a space issue; disbelief in the need for more space
- Second bond combined things
- District budgets have been coming in "middle high"
- "Our schools are not performing as they should; but the costs are very high"
- "There has been a great improvement in scores; especially on state tests"
- Debate about the ranking of Eastchester High School; some suggesting its scores are lower than the elementary schools; others suggesting that more people are now keeping their children in the high school
- Previous high school addition; science room additions ran into problems; ran out of money
- Can't open windows in science labs; counter heights are too high; completion problems at Waverly; windows started leaking there

What could the Board of Education and Administration have done differently that might have resulted in a positive outcome to these last two bond referenda?

- Get a construction management firm
- Referenda not adequately publicized
- Not a failure to communicate or get the message out; there was an organized group of older voters
- People voted "no" because of affordability
- Some parents stayed home because they didn't want to vote "no"
- Now it's even worse; there is a sizeable drop in the number of people who will vote "yes" because of the economy
- Communications were wonderful; documentation; financials
- District was a victim of its own success; people who moved into the district didn't vote
- Until people are affected directly, they don't go out

Do you believe there is a legitimate space issue in the District?

- General agreement that there is a space issue
- Kids are sitting in each other's laps
- Middle school was two grades at one time; sixth grade was in the elementary schools
- "People have a rosy view of the past"
- Education has changed; space is now used by computer labs; special education; special programs

- Cafeterias and hallways were always congested
- Students were allowed to leave campus for lunch; now it's only seniors who can leave
- Regarding staggered schedules....this would affect students' ability to get extra help
- Waverly parents need to be focused on
- Get a better plan; the second plan was better than the first
- The basic plan would have passed; Part I alone would have passed; Someone else: "I thought the cafeteria was the best part of the plan"
- We need low cost and no cost solutions; an aggressive look at registration and residences; students who are attending the district who don't live here
- "It would be irresponsible to go to the community with a bond vote now."
- What will staggered schedules add to the costs?
- "The next time a bond goes up, it has to pass; no bond can pass now."
- Trust is now better than it was
- Special education classes create revenue; this needs to be thoroughly explained

What advice would you give the Board of Education?

- Don't spite the kids; just do what we need to do
- What is the additional incremental cost of staggered sessions?
- Teachers need to give back too
- Need to make cuts at the elementary schools so those parents "feel the pain"
- Would the Princeton plan help?
- Seeing Dr. Terranova's 2009-10 budget is an important next step

Greenvale Faculty-Cafeteria

Thursday, January 15, 2009

7:30 a.m.

16 present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- Funds were misspent in previous bonds
- Money didn't go where people thought it would
- Group that opposed the bond was very vocal; they swayed others (converted those who were "wishy washy") because they were strong and well organized; buses to get "no" voters to the polls; a website; their communication was a lot stronger than the district's
- Incredible lack of trust; where \$1M went when Pellicone was here?

What could the Board of Education and Administration have done differently that might have resulted in a positive outcome to these last two bond referenda?

- Board was restricted in what it could do; whereas others could do anything
- Many people were not involved; not active voters
- PTA doesn't attract a large following

- Community wants the best but wasn't fully committed to paying for it; they want to be like Bronxville and Scarsdale, but won't pay for it
- BOCES came to the district ten years ago with an offer to put in 10 new classrooms on the middle school; town rejected it.
- Town is insulated; only care about sports and its own well being
- Lots of taxes subsidize the Lake Isle Country Club

Do you believe there is a legitimate space issue in the District?

- Yes; middle and high schools are tight; shared rooms; teachers have no access to a computer; nowhere for them to go and work when not teaching
- People think extended day, etc. are empty threats
- Parents are so overextended
- Bathrooms, lockers in the high school are terrible

Middle and High School Custodians-Principal's Conference Room

Thursday, January 15, 2009

9:15 a.m.

11 present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- People don't trust the board after the field issue
- Tired of taxes going up
- Board never consulted the people in the town
- Board should have left the fields alone; it was a beautiful stadium with lots of memories; people worked during the depression to build that field
- Cafeteria is too small; kids can't even breathe
- Four classrooms in the cafeteria with one sub when teachers are out sick
- Roof bond comes; 80% gets done and there are still problems
- High school is almost 100 years old
- Middle school cafeteria has steam issues; middle school locker rooms and shower areas have become storage; in need of repair
- Dire need for new doors and hardware
- A bond for one building has a better chance of passing
- Perception among custodians that there are empty classrooms every period
- Suggest putting some of the middle and high school special education classes in elementary schools
- No chance for a bond passing now
- Buildings are inadequately staffed by custodians; full time people are replaced by part-timers when someone leaves to reduce benefits; too much reliance on sub cleaners

Community/Parent Meeting-Board Conference Room
Thursday, January 15, 2009
11 a.m.
60+ present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- “Referenda failed because the school community didn’t come out to vote. The opposition came out but the school people did not” (from a 56-year resident)
- A lot of misinformation was presented; people who lied were believed and people telling the truth were not
- Overall, taxes in the town are so high, if you don’t have kids you don’t vote “yes”
- Our kids are suffering from overall tax hikes
- The 2006 bond failed because of anti-Siebert sentiment; the “field fiasco”
- Mismanagement and lack of trust after Waverly delays and prior construction project issues
- 2008 bond had more support; but people were tapped out, expense-wise
- Asbestos found at Ann Hutch decreased faith in the district’s ability to handle construction
- Lack of communication in dealing with the Ann Hutch asbestos problem
- People in town heard about the asbestos issue through the grapevine, rather than from the school board (this point was disputed by others)
- Over the past 2-3 years, the Board has done a lot of fence mending and improved communication
- The town has weak zoning laws that have encouraged a lot of building, affecting the schools
- School bonds and budgets are the only things that people can vote down
- Everyone is pro-education, but some are just tapped out

What could the Board of Education and Administration have done differently that might have resulted in a positive outcome to these last two bond referenda?

- Put out a one-page memo that says, “This is how we’re going to grow; this is what we need to do.”
- Tax certioraris; perception that new construction taxes are going down; individual tax on homes is going up.
- Communication could be tremendously improved
- Mamaroneck is doing a reevaluation
- Need to more equitably distribute town taxes
- In the last 53 years, average income is up 7 times and taxes up 20 times
- Condos and Co-Ops pay 40% of taxes; they need to pay their fair share
- Put up only one proposal

Do you believe there is a legitimate space issue in the District?

- Education people received ten years ago won’t get them a job in the future
- That mentality is a tough one to get out of people’s heads, especially in this economy

- Parents in the district and teachers in the middle school know it's crowded; ridiculous how many kids have to sit at a table; kids have to be allowed to leave the lunch room early so the room can be safely evacuated
- Too much waste in the district; why don't we e-mail the *Waverly Whisper* instead of wasting all that colored paper
- Disagreement about some of the instructional practices that lead to small classes; explore Princeton Plan; other options to utilize space
- Need to hear alternatives; split sessions; Princeton Plan; what other options?
- Former board member: "huge number of parents not voting;" unless district can get consensus of elementary parents that they would support a middle school/high school bond, it's futile to put it out
- Current kindergarten is 260; each class is bigger
- Need to really hear from elementary parents
- "If you don't have people with children solidly behind you, you're spitting in the wind."
- Perception in town that school uses a lot of special education classrooms that are unnecessary; this needs to be clarified
- Extended day/split sessions—teachers might not want to work under these conditions that affect extra curricular activities and extra help
- If that happened and people moved here, you'd have a hard time selling your house
- Kids shouldn't have to choose between extra help and clubs; that would be affected; would the elementary schools be under split session too?

What advice would you give the Board of Education?

- Need more information from the district
- Why was the parking lot paved? Why not just classrooms?
- Worth considering internet learning for 20% of a student's education; have kids spend one day per week at home learning on line
- Increase class size before you go to split session
- Put up cameras in the hallways in the middle school and show the video to parents of younger kids
- Put up one bond and do everything we need to do; make it comprehensive
- We need a long-term capital plan tied to demographics
- People will live with it if they don't vote
- Explore online learning; AP; especially for seniors
- We have excellent teachers and excellent principals; it's very helpful to hear from the teachers; have teachers participate in the conversations about space
- Do a focus group with students
- Options and costs—both tangible and intangible costs need to be shown; how long for staggered schedules?
- How much will each individual family have to pay?
- We need to find a smart way to communicate with the whole town
- Town and schools need to communicate better

- Influx of parochial school children to public schools could make space issues worse
- Are all employees allowed to have their children attend Eastchester schools?
- Is anyone verifying registration and residency?
- Are multiple family dwellings all legal?
- Educate elementary kids one day a year at the high school

Waverly Faculty-Cafeteria
Thursday, January 15, 2009
3 p.m.
26 present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- Taxes are going up
- Large senior citizen population in district
- Very vocal opposition
- Large pre-school parent population who don't realize space issues will affect their kids
- Construction issues that emerged when Waverly was built
- Big ESL population

What advice would you give the Board of Education?

- Board and town could have been more creative to make money go further
- Fields problem
- Waverly is getting crowded
- When the district built this school, they did the bare minimum and it's outgrowing the space
- We don't think about subsequent needs
- Roach issue
- Expectations have changed in district; more kids are going to better colleges
- Older buildings don't accommodate current technology
- Residents are going to want to see how the new budget looks
- Middle and high school parents understand there is a space issue
- "My daughter eats lunch at 10:06 a.m." (teacher who lives in the district)
- Kids are standing on line for most of their lunch period
- Dr. Terranova should do a "Spotlight" program with middle and high school kids to talk about space issues

Middle and High School Students-High School Auditorium
Thursday, January 22, 2009
1:45 p.m.
10 present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- Large number of senior citizens don't want to pay for it
- High cost; the economy is bad, especially now
- Parents of seniors don't have kindergartners who will replace them
- Parents don't realize how crowded it is and lots of them don't go out to vote

Do you believe there is a legitimate space issue in the District?

- The hallways are packed
- Classes are held in the old gym; no doors to separate the spaces; we can hear what's going on in the other classes; very distracting; study hall, two math classes, health classes going on simultaneously
- There's never an empty room
- Kids are not served lunch until half-way through the period; lines go out the door
- Library is often crowded
- Kids use vending machines instead of purchasing lunch to avoid lines
- Gymnasium is crowded
- Senior hallway is jammed

What advice would you give the Board of Education?

- Give tours of the middle and high schools; show pictures of how crowded the hallways and classrooms are
- Putting out a bond now wouldn't pass
- Have students talk about space needs at a board meeting
- Use the *Review Press*; get articles and pictures out
- Extended day would affect extracurricular activities
- Kids don't want split schedules; it would also be hard for teachers who live far away

Middle and High School Faculty/Clerks/Monitors Meeting-High School Auditorium

Thursday, January 22, 2009

2:30 p.m.

70+ present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- Anger and disgruntlement about Dr. Siebert and the fields
- Quality of life issues in the school: uneven heat; air issues at Waverly
- People in the community feel that what they've asked for hasn't been done
- Feedback on the middle/high school library from faculty was ignored; community concerns not addressed; architect and committee did what they wanted
- People don't understand self-contained special ed classrooms

- Strong feeling that tuition kids are not “our kids”
- Feeling that bonds wouldn’t adequately address the problem; the net gain wouldn’t be enough

What could the Board of Education and Administration have done differently that might have resulted in a positive outcome to these last two bond referenda?

- Better follow-through; do what is promised
- Explain the net gain in square footage
- Retired, fixed-income families have a very difficult time
- Very vocal minority of people who are very anti spending; even employees
- Board needs to “make peace” with those who are alienated
- Still anger over former superintendent

Do you believe there is a legitimate space issue in the District?

- We’re conducting classes in hallways
- 100 kids in a gym at once for physical education in the high school
- 8th grade lunch is jammed
- The mass of humanity in hallways connecting the schools
- Need to change the schedule to increase movement
- Only one teacher’s lounge; inadequate space for teachers to work when they are not in class
- High school classrooms are used nine periods a day
- There are no available or empty classrooms for meetings or collaboration
- Some high school teachers teach in four different classrooms; extremely stressful
- Middle school teachers lounge is also their cafeteria; only two phones for teachers to use

What advice would you give the Board of Education?

- Highlight the aid the school receives; make it moiré transparent
- Say what you need to say and be truthful
- Need to segregate middle and high school kids
- No bond now; the community was tapped out before the economic crisis
- Put trailers (portables) in front and back of the building; the community will find this aesthetically unacceptable
- Alternative options are being presented incorrectly; portables and split sessions are perceived as a threat
- Show different costs and options: portables; split sessions; high school students in middle school classrooms; not a scare tactic; just the facts
- High school schedule is not flexible
- The faculty itself doesn’t understand what a split session would actually mean
- What is the long-term cost of split session? When would it kick in?
- New construction and building repairs were lumped together; need to be separated more clearly
- Teachers helped to fund “vote yes” initiatives
- Information needs to be presented graphically

- Full disclosure; honesty
- Half the people weren't even here when mistakes were made
- Give the community choices
- Consider multiple voting sites for school initiatives
- Maintenance and quality of construction have gone down; we have rooms that are 80 degrees and others that are freezing; some windows need to remain open all day even in the winter
- Don't forget the impact on the nurse's office and health care

Open Meeting: Community, Parents, Staff, and Others-High School Library Media Center

Thursday, January 22, 2009

7 p.m.

80+ present

Why did the last two bond referenda fail?

- The Board didn't listen; they put up two referenda: one for space and one for everything else;
- A confidence thing; residents didn't believe they would manage the projects correctly
- Prior projects went over budget
- The field fiasco
- Concern if projects would be run correctly
- Increase in frequency of bonds; one almost every year
- 2006 bond-field issue was very prevalent; there was a monolithic "take it or leave it" approach
- Construction committee voiced its concerns; issues related to the fields
- Waverly school leaks; why had the district signed off on jobs that were not done properly?
- "I would never vote for a bond brought forward by those people" (BOE)
- Dr. Siebert lost control of a meeting on Waverly School
- Communication gap; people unaware of the issues
- Need for a much better grass roots organization
- More work to get the message out
- Lots of people not bothering to vote
- Modulars were promised at Ann Hutch—where did the money go?
- Lack of communication and miscommunication

What could the Board of Education and Administration have done differently that might have resulted in a positive outcome to these last two bond referenda?

- Class size guidelines are not well known
- Why do we have small class sizes? Needs to be explained to community

- Board keeps reappointing the same people to school committees; needs to reach out more and bring in new people, new ideas
- Harrison school bond passed recently; community residents who were architects and professionals invited into process
- Use the civic associations to transmit information
- Getting the message out more effectively
- Fuel engagement in the community by everyone working together
- Huge gym at Waverly still not well utilized
- Is everything being done to use the space we have? Is there space in the town that could be leased and used for so students could use the administration building?
- What is the space problem—and at what class size levels? Need to define the problem more fully
- Put out bulleted information; be concise
- Explain the consequences of the last defeat; people don't see any real impact of the defeat
- Put trailers up on school property; people will then come to you and tell you to build
- Board needs to be good stewards of the money they have now; show how they are trying to cut back in the budget they present
- Do a district census; compel people to re-register; should be done annually; “they do it for Lake Isle”
- Deal with ineligible students; those who don't reside within district; what about children of faculty and staff?
- Cull out courses with low enrollments and less substantive courses
- Community asks the same questions and doesn't get answers
- Show updated demographic data
- Explain how scores on standardized tests have gone up and costs per student down
- Need for trust and better engagement; awareness, understanding, and support
- One person stated, “People get the information; some just don't want to hear it.”
- Another stated he went to Catholic schools in the Bronx with 35 kids in a class; but the used to beat the kids silly”; we can't do that in public school
- Discussion about very low attendance at parent meetings
- Need for new voices on advisory committees
- Conduct a true program study; what do we really need now and what will we need ten years from now; then do a space utilization study and then propose a bracketed plan, with prices
- Improve access to school information for those without children, especially parents of pre-schoolers
- Consider using realtors to transmit information about schools to new families, especially those with pre-school age children
- Demonstrate accountability in order to regain trust
- Board has to get out of their seats and do more PR
- Eastchester schools need to communicate with the town and village boards

- Even though bonds have gone down twice, there still isn't a plan for September 2009; where are my children going to be?
- Need more dialogue back and forth at Board of Education meetings; board listens but doesn't respond; needs to engage with community members more
- Learn more about the model bond passed in Pelham; under budget; call the former Board of Ed president, who works in Amy Paulin's office
- Strong general agreement among this group, largely made up of district parents, that there is a real space issue at the middle and high schools