

IT IS THE MISSION OF THE SCHODACK CENTRAL SCHOOLS
to develop our students to become "...active, reflective, creative learners. In our schools, they will engage in rewarding work and practice behaviors that are intelligent in both an academic and a practical sense. Students will develop the attitudes, skills and understandings that will allow them to fulfill their potential and to function successfully in their individual and social roles."

SCHODACK CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
1216 Maple Hill Road, Castleton, New York 12033-1699

February 2, 2012

Maple Hill High School Library

Present: J. Andrew Fleck, Michael Hiser, Paul Puccio, Bruce Romanchak, Michael Charsky, George Warner, Mary Yurista and Lisa Lafferty (arrived 7:43 pm).

Also present: Robert Horan, Monica Kim, Michael Bennett, Janis Clarke, Donna Watson, Michele Reickert, and Ron Agostinoni (arrived 7:28 pm).

BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES – WORKSHOP

1. Meeting called to order by Board President, J. Andrew Fleck at 6:33 p.m.
2. Mary Yurista moved for approval of present agenda. Michael Hiser seconded. All present in favor.
3. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.
4. Approval of minutes: None.
5. Reports/Presentations:
 - a. Merger Feasibility Study Update, Board of Education Feedback, where do we go from here? – Monica Kim and Robert Horan gave an update on where the Merger Feasibility Study has been, where we are at and where we are going from here. Mr. Horan mentioned a link on the school website for the study, which includes a summary of the meetings and some documents. The study began September 2009, the two Superintendents at the time decided they wanted to do a "Functional Consolidation study". The Department of State had two groups of money out there, one for school districts to apply for a grant to do a Functional Consolidation Study and another to do a Merger Feasibility Study. The difference between the two is: Functional Consolidation Study is to look at how two districts or municipalities, not just school districts, can share services, a school could share services with a town or village, it doesn't have to be another school district; and a Merger Feasibility Study is a study to look at merging completely. The two districts decided on a Functional Consolidation Study and applied for the grant. The state transferred the Functional Consolidation Study money into Merger Feasibility Study grant, basically saying we had to do a full merger feasibility study. The two boards decided to move forward to see what was available. The grant was awarded in the amount of \$49,500.00; each district contributed \$2,500.00 towards the study. A lot of time has been spent by Administration and Clerical Staff getting the information together. The meetings were about specific topics, one meeting on elementary, one on middle

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school, athletics, etc. The deadline to finish the study was originally (6) six months. That is not enough time to do a Merger Feasibility Study; we are coming up on the 1 year mark. At this point the consultant team will take the information, prepare a plan, review it with the district and communities, send a draft to State Ed., and wait for a reply. It should take a few weeks to hear back from State Ed. with suggestions.

The goal two goals / objectives of a study are:

- To seek reductions in the ongoing cost of school operations while maintaining or enhancing the educational opportunities for students by assessing the current instructional and non-instructional programs of each school district to determine the specific economic efficiencies to be achieved.
- To report to the members of the two school boards, the school staffs, and the residents of the communities on specific actions that should be considered as they move to implement consolidation of the two school districts.

There are two options that were presented at the last merger meeting, they are on the website; State Ed. will only take one report, there really is not an option two. The study team will give a presentation to the two Boards, the faculty and staff of both districts and the residents. At that point, the two boards will decide if we should move forward or not. If they decide to move forward, there will be a series of community forums educating the communities, it would then go to a straw vote and if that passed, it would go to a referendum vote.

Schodack is currently researching sharing services with Ichabod, and other districts as well.

6. Board Discussion.

Michael Charsky spoke about the process and how much he and others learned about the districts that they did not know. Paul Puccio expressed concern about the final numbers for tax levies for both districts. An example he gave was: the combined tax levies for Ichabod and Schodack equal approximately 31 million, not the 36 million shown in the tables presented at the meeting. Mr. Horan expressed there was fine tuning that needs to be done before the report can be taken to the public, and that this process is something that should not be rushed. If the two boards say no, the report will be put on a "shelf" for one year. Nothing can be done for that year, but it could be revisited by the boards and fine-tuned. Andrew Fleck asked if a fine-tuned report would have to go back to State Ed., Mr. Horan replied yes. He also expressed that the original intent was to do a functional consolidation study. Bruce Romanchak expressed concern about the study whether the study was worthwhile if it did not address the real issues like what is going to happen when the state money goes away. Paul Puccio and Michael Charsky expressed that they felt the study fell apart at the end and it seemed like a bomb had been dropped as the final numbers were shared. Mr. Charsky expressed he felt the last three meetings were where the study fell apart. The framework to build the building use was that there would be no construction, use the buildings we have, adjust the bus lines, and work within those parameters. That was where it all seemed to change. There

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was talk about Option 1 and Option 2, Mr. Horan expressed that he felt there should not have been an Option 2; Option 1 satisfied the task they were charged to do. Mr. Horan informed the board of a meeting he will be having with the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner to talk about Mergers, and why they are unsuccessful and the situation we are in right now. Michael Hiser expressed that if we cannot get to a point that the study can be fine-tuned to show enhancement to program and a savings, the process is flawed. He talked about the upcoming 2012-13 budget and the 1.5 million deficit the district faces and questioned if there would be a similar deficit for the 2013-14 budget, and whether there will be a similar deficit. Monica Kim answered that it would most likely be a different amount, but we may be forced to use fund balance and eventually fund balance is going to run out. Bruce Romanchak expressed concern that the public will think the boards produced the report not the study team and committee and the board will look foolish. Paul Puccio and Michael Charsky asked if the two school boards have the option to create their own Option to present to the communities and present for a vote. Robert Horan explained that he has not gotten a straight answer on that and when he meets with the commissioner, that is one of the many questions he will be asking. Paul Puccio expressed that the merger process is premised on an old fashioned model, Schodack has worked hard to move forward from that old model school with different ways of doing things, more collaborations with colleges, more distance learning, much more collaboration with existing schools, different kinds of curriculum. The merger study was premised on none of that. It takes the old model school and takes two districts and slaps them together. The new ways of doing business never entered into this picture. Bruce Romanchak expressed that the process is not what he originally thought it was going to be. He did not realize that the board would not be able to modify or look over the report before it went to State Ed. Robert Horan expressed that he did not feel that the State knows what they want to do with merger studies when 9 out of 10 studies don't even get past a board vote. The Governor of NYS and the commissioner have made it clear that mergers were designed for downstate, Long Island school districts. We are 10.2 miles from downtown Albany, we have had twelve 3 hour meetings that were published on our website and in newspapers and not one representative has come to ask what is going on, and it is frustrating. Everyone went into this study looking at shared services, we are going into 2012-13 sharing services, Ron is looking into shared services, Donna Watson and Mike Bennett are working hard on Special Education Services, and reducing costs, Monica Kim is looking at a shared business office. I'd be the first to volunteer to share a Superintendent, but you cannot share a Superintendent unless both districts are under 1,000 students. There was a merger study between Oppenheim School and St. Johnsville where one board decided not to take it to the community, they received pressure from the community so they took it to vote and it got voted down. There was also a merger study of 4 districts out by Utica and 3 of the 4 districts voted yes. Robert Horan expressed that he was surprised that 3 passed since the districts had the report for only two weeks before taking it to a vote. George Warner expressed that the original consolidation of the one room school houses back in the 1930's is not what we need now and that the board needs to come up with challenges for Robert Horan to bring to State Ed. Donna Watson expressed that Schodack School District has a long history of innovative thinkers, creative problem solvers, and people who are thoughtful and deliberate about really important decisions and none of that has changed. Jason Chevrier expressed that it has been hard to sit back as an administrative group with history in the district knowing the communities and values and watch the study run its course. He also felt it was a starting point that would allow creativity to offer opportunities that we may not be able to offer. There is a lot more

work to be done but why invest time if people do not want to move forwards. He stated that as a resident, a parent, and a principal, he thought it is an exciting opportunity to look at things that we might not be able to look at because of the financial realities. Bruce Romanchak expressed that he was proud of the way the Schodack Administration presented the material; he felt they were much more creative and spoke with much more knowledge. The Ichabod administration seemed like they were in a fear mode. He also expressed that the fact that the board would be an open election concerns him given the number of voters within the individual districts. Michael Hiser questioned that since there isn't going to be any additional money, is there must something the state could take away to make things easier? Lisa Lafferty asked if the district could go to State Ed. and convince them that we are looking at a virtual merger and not a physical merger. Couldn't we go to them and convince them that the efficiencies we are looking at will be good for our kids and save money possibly even more than a physical merger would save. Both programs have unique personalities and opportunities and linking them virtually seems the thing to do. George Warner talked about Mr. King, the Commissioner of State Ed., encouraging schools to merger. Why would it be in the best interest of the State to invest money in a failed model; build a new model that is in the best interest of the student's future? Let us be the model. Mary Yurista talked about virtual labs and a demonstration from HVCC showing it is possible to do. George Warner talked about David Brook's recent interview where he expressed "the islands of success in this century versus the dark matter of failure" he went on to say that in this country right now education has a lot of those areas of dark matter. Schodack is an island of success. State Ed. needs to see that the way they are structuring the fiscal element, they are going to kill one of those islands of success. Paul Puccio asked Robert Horan if he had heard from HVCC with the number of students from Schodack who require remediation. Mr. Horan answered that he has left a message with his contact and he has meeting scheduled with the president next week to talk about Green Technology and what the process would be to find out how many of our students are involved in remediation. Paul Puccio talked about a test students can take to see if they are college ready; Ron Agostinoni expressed that we have begun testing CTE students and they do very well. Paul Puccio also asked the board to nominate him to the Questar Board.

Motion:

Michael Charsky made a motion to nominate Paul Puccio to serve as a member of the Questar III – Board of Cooperative Education Services for Rensselaer, Columbia, and Greene Counties for a term of July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2015. George Warner seconded. All present in favor.

Andrew Fleck thanked Paul Puccio for everything he does for the district.

7. Meeting open for public discussion.

A resident (name not given) thanked the board members for what they do and recognized the difficulties they face. He also questioned "Why not a consolidation of school districts as opposed to a merger of school districts?" If one can create a charter school with a whole new set of rules, why isn't there a way for the boards of these two school districts to come up with whatever common structure they need to make the state happy and then do the things that actually create a savings for

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a consolidated school district? Why can't two school districts over 1,000 students each share a Superintendent, the state should be able to step outside the box. Maybe Ichabod and Schodack are the ones to set the model for all the others. Andrew Fleck thanked him for his comments and support. Pat Wood, who was on the study committee, talked about the merger study and how the mission was taken personally, being residents and having children who have gone through the system, are going through the system or have grandchildren going through the committee took their responsibility serious. Our board has, for years, had a very tight budget. She had concern as to the number of personnel that would be lost. Three guidance counselors for 900 students is asking too much. Schodack has never been about money but has been about preparing our students. She said she saw the cost savings but did not see the education opportunity. Andrew Fleck thanked her for her help and that Schodack, unlike Option 2 of the study, would never go straight to FTE, he said that Schodack would find other savings like through efficiencies. Cutting staff is always the last resort. Mrs. Wood stated that there were times the study proved to be disheartening. They would leave a meeting only to go to the next and the rules changed. Another resident (name not given) spoke up that she loved the Schodack School District and was afraid of it changing. She understands that on paper a merger looks like a good solution but she doesn't trust the state and she doesn't trust that there is going to be state aid. She stated that she comes from Long Island and stated that large schools have lots problems and as many fiscal problems. She did state that she felt more comfortable after hearing everyone talk about other solutions. She supports distance learning and virtual learning. If the merger were to go out to vote today, she would vote no and that it is not about the money for her. Ed Daley (name given at meeting), a graduate and current resident of Schodack spoke; he requested that the board not let the state "dwindle this star". The state is still trying to put conformities on us and we need to push back. He stated that he works with the state first hand with projects, and the state is broken. Do we have to consolidate, or will we eventually be sucked up by some other district. He recognized it will be a painful few years. He stated that there are a large number of parents that do not have the right information. He offered to assist the school through community groups to get the information out. An additional resident (name not given) spoke about virtual learning. He said it works, technology is becoming very involved in his job, and it has changed how things are done. He also mentioned he felt better about the merger study after hearing the passion and concern that was expressed by the board. He realized that the board is looking to do what is best for students. He did say that the community does see the merger report as a product of the board. They see it as an end. Mr. Daley again spoke and said when he came to the meeting, he thought it was a done deal and now understands that it is not. Pam Timmons asked for clarification of what happens after the state reviews the report. Robert Horan explained the process and expressed that he will be meeting with some state officials with the intention of getting approval to extend and change process allowing the report to be sent back allowing the district to be involved in making changes. He wants the state to realize the study team does not know the communities and how they operate, and that the districts need to be more involved in the process. Paul Puccio asked Bob Horan to bring the following questions, requests and/or suggestions to his meeting with State Ed.:

- a. Virtual merger, talk with them about giving us a grant to hire a merger consultant who would help us with the tasks.

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- b. Request a waiver with regard to the single superintendent.
 - c. Request a waiver with regard to a collaborative board without forcing the boards to consolidate into one could we not have a waiver that allows the boards to function together for a year in a collaborative fashion.
 - d. Ask them about allowing us to maintain current tax effort and then gradually equalize the tax along the lines of what is in place; what they put here is an all or nothing game. Why not a gradual change over time so you maintain tax effort for each individual district and gradually bring them into sync. As this is done, can we get partial of that 3.6 million as we go along?
 - e. Request Tax Cap relief.
 - f. When you talk about the report, we don't want the public to think that is our report. If they believe that is coming from the boards, we are fighting to influx change and structure but change in attitude that has already been formed, and that is unfair to the boards.
 - g. Maybe they can give us money for the enhancement of the communication vehicles. What we talked about here is not just a one way communication like it is envisioned by the consultants, but we are talking about an ongoing collaborative effort between our publics, the boards and administrations as we build a new model. Do we or can we have pilot money for communication structure that allows us to have an ongoing collaborative effort with the community?
8. Policies: None.
9. Consent agenda: None.
10. Resignations/Appointments
- a. Bruce Romanchak moved for approval of the temporary appointment of Kelly Travers-Main as temporary School Bus Driver, for 4.25 hours / day at a rate of \$20.51, effective February 13, 2012 through June 22, 2012. Paul Puccio seconded. All present in favor.
 - b. Bruce Romanchak moved for approval of the temporary appointment of Kandee Goodall as temporary School Bus Driver, for 4.50 hours / day at a rate of \$20.51, effective February 13, 2012 through June 22, 2012. Paul Puccio seconded. All present in favor.
 - c. Bruce Romanchak moved for approval of the temporary appointment of Deborah Pfeffer as temporary School Bus Driver, for 3.75 hours / day at a rate of \$20.51, effective February 13, 2012 through June 22, 2012. Paul Puccio seconded. All present in favor.
 - d. Approval of coach/Advisor(es): None.

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- e. Approval of volunteer assistant coach(es): None.
 - f. Approval of non- instructional substitute(s): None.
 - g. Approval of substitute teacher(s): None.
11. Meeting open for public discussion. None
 12. Action items. Look into virtual merger options and available grants.
 13. Adjournment. Having no further business before the board, Michael Hiser moved to adjourn. Michael Charsky seconded. Meeting adjourned at 9:25 pm.