

Survey on the future of the Unatego Facilities.

The District recently completed a Facilities study which recommends closing Otego Elementary and moving all K-5 students to Unadilla, with a long-range goal of building a new K-5 Elementary School in Wells Bridge adjacent to the Jr Sr High School, and closing Unadilla when the new building was ready.

Although the final decision rests with the board, we are trying to gauge public opinion to assist in our planning.

203 out of 235 voters completed all or parts of this survey. Note that not all percentages add up to 100%. Some is due to rounding, others due to the fact that not all respondents answered all questions. In order to maintain consistency, I used the 203 as the number of surveys returned for calculating percentages.

1. Have you read the Facilities Report or read information about the report?
152 yes 75%
49 no 24%
2. Do you agree with the recommendation to close Otego and move all K-5 students to Unadilla Elementary?
86 yes 42%
112_ no 55%
3. Do you agree with the recommendation to eventually close Unadilla Elementary and build a new elementary school on the Jr-Sr High School campus in Wells Bridge?
82 yes 40%
105 no 52%
4. If you don't agree with either two or three above, would you support a capital project to perform necessary repairs in Unadilla and Otego?
103 yes 51%
52 no 26%
5. Do you have another idea which wasn't included above?

Comments from the Survey: **District Responses (if possible or appropriate) in red.**

Question 2: “Only if the building is beyond a reasonable financial repair”
“how is the projected enrollment?” and for question 3: “Same as for question 2.” For question 4, “within reason.” **R: Enrollment figures are as follows: Enrollment was 1,363 in 1994 and currently is at 886 a decrease of 35%. Projected enrollment is expected to decline to 772 by 2023, a 13% decrease.**

For Question 3: “Close Otego at the same time” [as Unadilla]

For Question 5: “Pray!”

For Question 5: “Close both schools. Build a brand-new K-12 Building. Why build a K-6 brand new then put our kids in an old run down high school. Think Big!”

“I don’t think closing Otego is going to save all that much in the long run. If one school closes, then both should close. Just closing Otego will cause dissension and will be a travesty for Otego. Build one big school on the main campus, while keeping both school (elem) open.” **R: The projected annual savings by closing an elementary school are approximately \$400,000, or about 6% of the District tax levy. This savings comes largely from decreases in staff size as well as lowered utility and maintenance costs.**

“Take in Franklin.” **R: A school consolidation**

“Close Unadilla as it is in the flood zone. Otego has the bus garage, more land, and ball fields. Build a new elementary school at the high school parcel.”

“Keep both buildings open until a new building is built.”

Close Unadilla, build addition if needed at Otego. Have more land. Bring taxes up in Unadilla to compare to what is levied in Otego.”

Question 4: Responder circled “Unadilla” regarding a capital repair project.

“I don’t believe the Unatego Middle/High campus has enough room to include outside activities for the elementary kids.”

“Magnet School. Farm to Table initiative. More fundraisers.”

Question 4: “Otego only.” Question 5: Close Unadilla. Otego has more room for addition with all of its land plus Otego has the bus garage which could be renovated.”

“Spend tax dollars wisely.”

“Reduction in administration personnel and/or their salaries to generate more money for the students’ supplies and activities.” **R: All public school districts in NY State are required to have a Superintendent (or share one with another district), a Committee on Special Education Chairperson or Director, and each school building is required by law to have a building principal. Administrative salaries are contractual and cannot be lowered without negotiating with their bargaining unit and require their consent.**

“Otego-go to Oneonta. Unadilla-go to Sidney. No more Unatego.”

“Move 4th and 5th to the Jr. Sr. High School and close Unadilla school. Or Repair the Jr. Sr. High School moving classes and fixing one wing at a time and gradually (as the population declines) move all the grades to the Jr. Sr. High School and close both Otego and Unadilla at the same time.” **R: At this time, based on current enrollment and projections, it doesn’t appear there would be enough space in the Jr-Sr. High School for grades K-12 without an addition in the foreseeable future. Another consideration is that the Jr. Sr. High School was designed for teenagers and many things would need to be remodeled or retrofitted to be appropriate for K-5 graders.**

Question 4: “? Cost would be considered.”

Question 4: answered yes but wrote “reluctantly”.

“Cut existing funding to pay for needed repairs and establish a regional administration structure to do away with individual administrative positions.”

R: As noted above, NYS Educational Law requires all the administrative positions we currently have unless we reorganized to have fewer buildings. The law also requires Principals to do multiple, time-consuming observations of classroom teachers, as well as supervise students and other staff.

“Save extra money by eliminating some of the administrators. Establish one central administrator of all schools through BOCES.” **R: See above. There has been some talk of reorganizing school districts along county or BOCES lines, but the legislature has failed to embrace any of them.**

“Use the extra state money that you receive for capital projects. Taxes are to [sic] high now. There comes a breaking point as far as resident can do.” **R: State Building aid covers about 85% of any capital project. The remainder must be raised locally. We are trying to coordinate expiring debt and have established a capital reserve fund so that future projects would have little to no impact on local taxes.**

“All students on one campus.”

“I do not understand why we have so many repairs to these “renovated” bldgs. As in the past Unatego gets what they pay for.” **R: Some of these repairs are routine maintenance, such as replacing roofs that are twenty years old and out of warranty. Other items include replacing 80 year old septic systems or repointing windows and doors that haven’t been done since the buildings were completed in the 1930s.**

“Bring all students to the high school campus.”

Question 2: “yes but only after a new building is built. Question 3: same comment applies. Question 4: I prefer a new building if that is not to be, fix both buildings.” **R: Closing a school should save approximately \$400,000 per year to put into a capital reserve fund which would be used to defray local costs**

of future capital projects including, if approved by the voters, a new elementary school. Failing to close a building would mean foregoing those savings and would make it more difficult to complete any future projects without having some impact on the local tax levy.

“Question 2: Yes but only when the new elementary building is approved.
Question 3: the word school is underlined and the words “or wing on” added.

“How much longer can we sink money?? Let get moving the right direction be ONE !! school”

“Continue outreach to the community so they fully understand the situation.”

R: We continue to post on the district web page, district face book page, and distribute press releases to local newspapers. We also plan on having public meetings in the near future to get community input. We will be mailing a survey to all taxpayers in the district to get their insight as well as placing a survey online. And we hope to create a building committee in the near future comprised of community members, faculty, and staff to help guide the board in their decision making going forward.

“question 2: only as part of an approved bond issue for a new building and
question 4: yes, if bond issue isn’t approved/feasible for new bldg.”

“Close both schools buy Greenies and put kids there.” R: Greenies is for sale and a desirable property. At the current time, the asking price is \$2.9 million. The District is not in a financial position to make that kind of purchase at this time.

“Close both elementary schools. Use the Jr. Sr. high school. Use \$ to fix and expand as needed.” R: The concept provided by the District’s architects was to build an addition to the Jr. Sr. High School, rather than a stand-alone building, in order to make use of existing infrastructure, such as the auditorium, gymnasium, and kitchen, thus saving costs.

“We need to repair Unadilla and Otego keep them open for now-and once in 5 years when enrollment goes down then have K-5 at the high school. This gives

you 5 years to repair both buildings for sale value and clean up your discipline problems at the high school.”

“Keep both buildings open until new school is built, then close both Unadilla and Otego!”

“What about consolidation with another school?” R: The District has explored the possibility of consolidating with another school and at this time, there are no neighboring districts interested.

“Question 3: yes but build new 9-12 grades school.” R: The 9-12 building needs significant renovation and maintenance items but is not old enough or in poor enough condition to consider replacement at this time.

“Should have been done years ago. Not put all that money in two sick old buildings.”

“You better ask the voters what they want to do. Don’t think by closing a school a proposition would pass to build new.” R: This survey is only one step to getting voter input. The Facilities Study Committee was made up of representatives from the school, parents, community members and local elected officials. We will continue to seek public input via special meetings, more surveys, both via mail and online, and via newsletter, as well as public comment sessions at school board meetings.

“Do what is necessary.”

“Begin a building project for a new elem. At Otego site.” R: The Wells Bridge site is under consideration as the location for a new elementary school due to its location midway between the two communities which provide the bulk of the district’s students. Also, tentative plans for a new building are for an addition to the existing building, which would provide economies in areas such as sharing HVAC systems, an existing gymnasium, the auditorium, and potentially a kitchen.

“Decrease the amount of money being spent on transportation and Special Ed/services and re allocate it into education classes that will draw more families

to the area.” **R: Transportation costs are negligible as we receive significant reimbursement for these expenses from the state in the form of transportation aid. Special Education programs are mandated and controlled by specific state and federal laws. School district are required, under NYS law, to provide a free and appropriate education for all students, regardless of whether a student suffers from learning or physical disabilities.**

“I would opt for the most feasible option long-term. New building most likely. Would like to see something positive done with both elem buildings.” **R: In the event that the District does decide to close one or both elementary schools, we would work with our architects, attorneys, and developers to repurpose the buildings. In the event they were left vacant for a period of time, the school district would maintain the properties and grounds.**

“Question 4: Definitely would pay to see them both stay open. If you build a central campus at current high school you could utilize Otego Elem for sports fields. Maybe make a pre-k in the kindergarten wing. Keep in mind that Unadilla Elementary floods and there is no space to add on. There is at Otego Elem.”

“If possible remain how the school system is now.”

“Let’s do what makes fiscal sense.”

“Question 2: no, absolutely not. Question 3: no (if needed, have 2 buildings already-waste of space. Will lead to empty buildings, loss of students, in town pride, problems btw 2 towns, etc. (a good problem to have))

“Central Campus is the way to go.”

“Do not close elementary schools.”

“If Otego becomes a senior housing or Springbrook—not a homeless shelter. Both schools should be shut at the same time.” **R: See above—in the event one or both buildings were closed the District would do everything possible to ensure that they were repurposed in an appropriate manner and with the input of the community involved.**

“Repurpose both elementary buildings.” R: See previous questions.

“Question 2: Yes, if it’s cheaper. If not “No”. Question 3: yes, if it’s cheaper. If not “no.” Combine school district with others—Unadilla Valley, Franklin, and Oneonta. Especially if that’s the cheapest solution.” R: Consolidation requires school board as well as voter approval. There are very specific state guidelines that govern the process. There is a significant financial incentive for mergers that continues for fifteen years. Most importantly, there are currently no local districts interested in a merger with Unatego, although the school board will continue to explore all option available, including consolidation with other districts.

Question 2: “Only if the school were sold first. Question 3: Only if the school were sold first.” R: It is difficult to market the building(s) until a decision is made about closure.

“If Otego Elementary is closed, and it is not sold or utilized in an appropriate manner which would include maintenance and updating, after a specified time, it will be razed.” This is an option that has been and will continue to be discussed as the board works on making a well-informed decision.

“Fix Otego school and utilize it.”

“Repair Otego and use that school.”